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## THE AESTHETIC FUNCTION IN ORAL LITERATURE

The intention of this paper is to observe the aesthetic function within oral literature, particularly in the context of the literary structuralism of the Prague School and the work of Jan Mukařovský. What it is most important to notice in his work overall is the fact that the aesthetic function can be more prominent in certain literary works, while its presence can be almost impossible to prove in others.

The aesthetic function in oral literature is the promoter of structuring, but it surrenders its place to certain other cultural and social functions. The aesthetic function is not dominant, nor should it be, because that would disrupt the very essence of oral literature, and that is the collective preservation and transmission of knowledge from generation to generation.

Key words: aesthetic function, oral literature, structuralism, Jan Mukařovský

*That was a narrative forest in which I would have preferred to stay forever. But since such a life is cruel, towards you, and towards me, here I am.*

Umberto Eco (Ecco 2005:171)

European literature began with Greek literature – Homer, the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey* – while Aristotle was the first to start dealing with the issue that we today call the theory of literature. As the first theoretician, he pronounced *mimesis* to be the basis concept of art in general, comprehending it as *poesis*, and not as *têknê*, which means that he did not see imitation as a mechanical transmission of reality, or as a technique (Biti 1987:14). However, if one takes into account the *mimeisthai* concept that is closely linked with *mimesis* and was used as a symbol of the ritual and, under some circumstances, also of the «ordinary» dance and speech of the masses (Melcinger 1989:23), much closer to the folk (Kekez 1986:133) than so-called art literature (Kekez 1986:140), it becomes possible to pose certain other questions. In so doing, it

is necessary also to take into account the function of each of those notions in relation to the subject that they represent. Hence, it would follow that *mimesis* is an emphasised art function that ties *poesis* to itself, while *mimēsthai* does the same with *tēknē*. Would that mean that the aesthetic dominates in *mimesis*, while certain of the remaining functions that art can have dominate in *mimēsthai* as a reflection of ritual folk/oral (Kekez 1986:140) art?

The intention of this introduction is not to describe the relation between *mimesis* and *mimēsthai*, but immediately from the very outset to point out the interwoven nature of artistic and non-artistic elements in Greek culture and literature. So, for example, at first glance there exists a relatively perfected manner of creation in Homer, if one pays heed to the emotional complexity, the language and, primarily, the syntax. However, his expression was not oriented in the first place to creating an artistic impression, but rather to bringing the hero closer to the people of his time, and describing and enabling their experience of his emotional complexity, all in order to describe reality just as it is (Auerbach 1968:17). In any case, the function of art is not merely to entertain, but also to stimulate memory on the basis of which it is possible to make a decision that will change some aspect of life. Namely, the functions of art vary just as art is ruled by diverse functionalities. The differentiations are noticeable, and they are particularly visible in the difference between oral literature – which has preserved its traditions from Homer's time – and the literature that exists so as, with its freshness, to bring pleasure and to open up new notional horizons. We can analyse Homer, but we cannot interpret him because, in the end, everything is reduced to accepting the realities of life without the need to think about them too much or to rebel against them. In any case, Homer's literature does not demand that we yield ourselves up to it with ecstatic submission (Auerbach 1968:18). As oral literature, it is governed by a particular type of function, while art literature is governed by another type, although it is interesting to see that the initial function is always the same, the one that wants to make an announcement, but also to communicate in a different, original manner – and that is recognised as an aesthetic function.

Homer described the real world, he told stories about real life as he conceived it at that time, while he spoke with a precisely defined intent, that is, his story-telling had certain exactly defined functions. What is most interesting in all of that, something that makes Homer always current, is that very specific functionality, still alive today as in the time of Homer, and also in Croatian oral literature (Bošković-Stulli 2005:116).

"Story-telling about life has diverse functions in human communities. The functions of the aesthetic and the entertaining intertwine with the psychological and the social, which contributes to the regulation of human relations", a quote from the book *Usmeno pjesništvo u obzorju književnosti / Oral Poetry on the Horizon of Literature* by Maja Bošković-Stulli (Bošković-Stulli

1984:331). Telling stories from her own life, the author introduces narration in the context of oral tradition into the issue and, in a very vital way, on her own example, vividly shows how one single version that the audience most wants to hear is formed from several narrative versions of an event. As the author mentions, the reasons for such story-telling are very diverse: from the wish to renew a certain memory, through a feeling of joint belonging, right up to a pleasure of sorts, which, nonetheless, is not the most important factor in all of this narration. In other words, various psychosocial functions are concealed behind all these narratives and their primary task is to identify individuals with the group, to rethink negative experiences into positive ones or even to justify one's own bad actions (Bošković-Stulli 1984:331).

That is how we arrive at certain core issues connected with story-telling about life. Parallely with stark and awkward information about a particular event, successful narrative forms emerge; along with practical vital functions, minor and major as well as aesthetic functions are manifested in various degrees; within the framework of narrating about actual events, the facts are sometimes, knowingly or unknowingly, adapted, supplemented, or surrendered to the game of fabrication (Bošković-Stulli 1984:332).

As has been mentioned, the aesthetic function in "ordinary" story-telling, too, as one of the forms of oral tradition, appears in various ways. In that sense, the intention of this paper is to define the mentioned function within oral literature. Jan Mukařovský (1891-1975) was the first scholar to deal systematically with the aesthetic function in the context of structuralism, which derived from the discipline of contemporary western philosophy (Biti 1997:83-84, 107-109),<sup>1</sup> so that the approach herein shall also be structuralistically oriented. However, to avoid the possibility of this approach being termed anachronistic, it should be mentioned that in recent years, subsequent to post-structuralist criticism and/or the transition from structuralism to the frequently contradictory post-structuralism (Eagleton 1987:141-164), structuralism is experiencing a Renaissance of sorts and is imposing itself as a secure and authentic methodology in literary research (Grygar 2006:203). As a structu-

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<sup>1</sup> Aesthetics was introduced as a concept in philosophy by the German philosopher, A. G. Baumgarten, as "the capability to assimilate parts in the attributes of a whole, whereas the susceptibility to assimilation lies in the character of parts of the future whole". Such an approach would "determine the fate of the core concepts of aesthetics, the beautiful and the artistic from the end of the 18th century until today". Then Kant dealt with aesthetics so that from his time onwards it was "possible even to call that work beautiful whose goodness and authenticity was doubtful". Awareness of aesthetics developed in society to such an extent that it even became "official aesthetics", but that status changed in contemporary society because market laws, and particularly the mass media and advertising, introduced their own standards, which were not necessarily aesthetically articulated. Jan Mukařovský introduced the aesthetic function into the theory of literature and it was later incorporated in the theory of autoreferential systems by N. Luhmann.

ralist, Mukařovský observed the aesthetic function primarily in the context of art as a whole, with the emphasis on literature, particularly on so-called "high" literature, as he called it and/or art literature, while not forgetting, at the same time, "folklore" and/or oral literature. Oral literature was not the focus of his theoretical thinking and he used it more as a counter-balance to "high" literature, or as an image by way of which he could more vividly explain the aesthetic function, and its norms and values (Mukařovský 1986).

Namely, the aesthetic function will be given more prominence in certain literary works, while its presence will be almost impossible to prove in others. It does exist in each artistic and oral-literary work, but not equally in all phases of its life, that is, the aesthetic function can be confirmed and transformed in relation to the text or even concealed by certain other functions. Consequently, we are able only on occasion directly to prove the aesthetic function in an oral-literary work; we often have to prove it indirectly, and sometimes it is found only in traces or is not found at all. In that sense, a question presents itself: since it is sometimes very difficult to identify the aesthetic function, is it then a necessary part of the structure of oral-literary facts? Another question that imposes itself from what has just been said is: what happens with its functionality in the event that it is transformed into other functions or is simply concealed by them?

The hypothesis would thus state that the aesthetic function is necessary within the oral-literary structure, but that as soon as the oral-literary structure is actually structured, it conceals the aesthetic function, which then ceases to be dominant and surrenders its place to other functions. It will be interesting to see when the aesthetic function becomes important in the oral-literary structure, and when it ceases to be so.

Since we cannot speak of the aesthetic function as being on its own, we shall have to scrutinise alongside it the notion of authorship, the collective as author, and the norms and concepts of aesthetic value.

### **Oral literature as an auto-referential structure**

In his work, Mukařovský indirectly opened up the possibility of a structuralist view of oral literature, primarily in his works *Structuralism in Aesthetics and in the Science of Literature* (Mukařovský 1941, Mukařovský 1986) and *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts* (Mukařovský 1936, Mukařovský 1986).

In *Structuralism in Aesthetics and in the Science of Literature*, Mukařovský provided basic terms of reference on the notion of structure and on structural aesthetics that would all incorporate into the principles of the structural theory of literature. Due to the oral-literary orientation of this paper, the structuralist interpretation of the aesthetic function will aim to incorporate

oral literature into the above-mentioned theoretical context. Thus, I shall firstly explain the notion of oral literature as an auto-referential structure. It will further be necessary to examine the relationship between oral literature and society; however, prior to that, a word or two about structuralism (Beker 1999:121-191).

The essence of structuralism derives from structuralism itself since it creates the concepts and applies them to particular material, by which it is similar in some ways to philosophy. It is aware of the internal similarity of sciences in which every individual element is subordinate to all the others, but, at the same time, defines the relations that shall rule all those elements. It develops its own internal sense that supersedes the dimension of the content. Therefore, it is perhaps more important to notice the position of the individual element in the system, rather than its content.

*Concept* or notion is situated at the centre of structuralism. It is what gives energy, but is also, at the same time, a means in the process of self-renewal. In this, each concept can alter so that, because of that structure, old concepts are easily and readily replaced by new ones. Namely, it requires the energy which derives from constant construction and deconstruction of the relations that rule among the concepts.

After having taken note of all the relations between the elements, and having "condensed" them, we would arrive at the unique sense that emerges from their relations and/or the concept of structure. Structure is not simply the sum of all its components because it *denotes* each of the elements, while all of those elements in the same way denote that structure, and only that structure. It is obvious that a dynamic relationship rules between the elements since, as soon as one changes, almost all the relations within the structure also change. The energy that each element transfers to the structure stems from the fact that each component is given a particular function, which is connected with the structure. Namely, it performs a particular "duty" within the structure according to that function. On the other hand, since the functions and their mutual relations are constantly changing, the elements, too, undergo constant changes through such continuous mobility.

The target of examination in structural aesthetics is the *aesthetic object*, that is, the art work as a non-material structure. It attempts to describe the *dynamic balance of forces* that holds together all the elements. In the dynamic process, components separate, becoming the leading ones that govern the other elements. However, since the structure lasts in time, their places are constantly altering so that something that was dominant can become co-dominant in a certain period or, in any case, a recessive element, as I shall attempt to demonstrate in relation to the emergence of the aesthetic function in the oral-literary structure.

Because of all the above, the oral-literary structure appears as a derivation of structural aesthetics. Like the represented subject, it is both content and form, that is, material, but from the position of structuralism it is observed as an artistic procedure, or as a way of utilising the characteristics of the material.

We can recognise structure in the process of the author's development of a literary work. However, additionally, that genesis is accompanied by the development of both author and recipient in the context of society since, for example, the recipient could well be the commissioner of some artistic pattern for which oral literature is more than a good example. In other words, the listeners could be stimulated by a folk narrator to ever-new recounting of an already narrated story, and thus themselves partly become authors. since they accept some parts while rejecting others, not wanting to listen to them again (Bošković-Stulli 1984:309-316). In that process, the audience strongly influences the author, so that this is actually an auto-referential structure in which the author and the audience meld into one, differing here only according to the functions of the folk narrator and his/her listeners. The narrator's function is to recount what the listeners wish to hear, while the function of the listeners is to make a choice, to correct and, finally – to stimulate story-telling (Ecco 2005:39-64). In this way, the narrator and his/her audience together become the author so that it is said of oral literature that it is "composed by the people". By this means the auto-referential nature of oral literature is established, where the oral-literary text sends the message concerning the situation, context or subject of its own utterance (Biti 1997:23).

In the majority of cases, the above process unfolds in the manner just described, but the narrators sometimes recount certain events that are exclusively from their own lives, by which they could be identified as authors (Bošković-Stulli 1984:309-316). That would really be the case without the existence of the collective as a corrective that guides the narrator towards the familiar way of story-telling so that he/she, with his/her forcefulness, soon transforms that new story, too, into something that could already have, "in some way", been heard earlier. The element that makes possible such equalisation is the relation of the aesthetic functions, norms and values in oral literature. In other words, it is through them that knowing or unknowing adaptation to the needs of oral literature are effected, and it becomes quite obvious in this process that the collective individual acts in the same way as the single individual. A connection has been established between the author and the social structure through auto-referential nature, which results in the development of the structure that is readily accepted by all. A very good example of this can be found in the folk poem *Tamnovanje Zrinovića bana / The Incarceration of Ban Zrinović*, which commences with a direct invitation to listen and, in that way, actually by a phrase, establishes a common code between the narrator and the listener:

Poslušaj me, pobratime dragi,	[Harken here, dear blood-brother,
Poslušaj me da ti nešto kažem:	Harken to what I shall tell:
Tavnio je Zrinoviću bane,	A prisoner was Ban Zrinović,
Tavnio je devet nediljica.	A prisoner for nine full weeks.
Kad je bio u pola desete,	When half the tenth had passed,
Prenuo se od Hrvata bane,	The Croatian Ban roused himself,
Ter dozivlje tamničara Ibru...	And called his turnkey Ibro...]

(Strašek 1929:148)

Oral literature develops from itself, which actually means that it is auto-poetic (Biti 1997:17) and builds its own principles as an ever-new story, but never by radically different poetics. The folk narrator is both a gifted individual (the artist) and member of society and thus belongs to both art and society. In other words, when creating, he/she creates for the audience, for society. Society wishes to be expressed by art, while art wishes to influence social events, which can be seen as early as at the beginnings of literature, for example, in Aeschil's *The Persians* (Melcinger 1989:24),<sup>2</sup> while those relations are constantly brought into equilibrium. If "society dictates the tempo", what we have is *managed art*, while if art, for its part, wishes to exert influence on society, we have *tendentious art*. When absolute balance is established, art is able without any resistance to become part of all social development, and can even become a guild (Mukařovský 1999:17).<sup>3</sup> Although a considerable number of people would identify oral literature with managed art, it actually is not. Oral literature is much closer to a balancing between managed and tendentious literature so that its emergence is therefore more closely identifiable with output, *têknêom*, primarily because the rules of production become known and anyone who masters them can reproduce them in a superior or inferior manner. Naturally enough, that equilibrium is not easily achieved, and that is why we have the instance of folk narrators and more or less emphasised aesthetic functions in the fact of oral literature. What is most interesting in the whole story is how the establishment of the traditional mode of story-telling came about, of which much is said on the basis of the essay entitled *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value*, one of the most fundamental essays regarding the development of structuralism in literature that Mukařovský wrote.

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<sup>2</sup> Apart from being a work of classic art, the tragedy *The Persians* (472. BC) is a reflection of social events; it is actually political theatre in which instructions were given about one hundred and twenty years of democracy in front of perhaps as many as ten thousand spectators. *The Persians* depicts the struggle between Persian eastern despotism and that for which the the Greek polis stood. The tragedy was more than current because everyone who was then sitting in the theatre had in fact, directly or indirectly, participated in that war and influenced the way it was waged. Therefore, Aeschil's *The Persians* is not a tragedy that is pamphlet-like in nature, but has the aesthetic function of casting light on such conflicts and emphasising the senselessness of the imperialist policies that began to be implemented at that time in Greece.

<sup>3</sup> Mediaeval inclusion of craftsmen in the guilds of the Middle Ages.

## The function, norm and value of oral literature

Mukařovský started out from the formalistic concept and established a hierarchical relation within the text. Namely, the appearance of function in the text is "managed" by certain principles and hierarchical relations which stem from structuralism. Thus, he claims that a dominant intertextual function exists that ensues from the overall interrelation between all the parts that belong to a certain group, for example, the genre or even the epoch. Consequently, it is important for oral literature in the functional sense that it maintains its collective memory, a feeling for community and, in addition to all that, injects some entertainment into life.

In order to establish the presence of the aesthetic function in oral literature, it is necessary to examine art literature and then to return to the oral.

Along with a host of cultural functions, the aesthetic function in art literature is added as dominant in the majority of cases and opposes various social, psychological or ideological functions. When moved from system to system, such dominant function is the cause of historical changes and transformation. In fact, this is "an aesthetic phenomenon which stems from the aesthetic function based on the communicational relations between individuals in every culture" (Solar 1999:43).

Mukařovský commences his essay with the sentences:

The aesthetic function occupies an important place in the life of the individual and society as a whole. The circle of people who come into direct contact with art is, however, limited to a considerable extent in the first place by the relatively rarity of aesthetic giftedness – or at least in individual cases by its being limited to a particular artistic type – and, in the second, by the borders of social affiliation (the restricted possibility of access to works of art and the [level of] education of certain social strata); still, by its impact, art also has effects on people who are not directly connected with it (cf. on the example of the influence of poetry upon the development of the language system), while, besides that, the aesthetic function cuts across a much broader area than art itself (Mukařovský 1999:30).

Furthermore, the bearer of the aesthetic function can be anything or anybody, with the provision that the assumptions on *absence of necessity* must be realised, but only the *possibility* of the aesthetic function where it does not have to be the leading one, but on the other hand, in the same way, it need not necessarily be replaced by other functions. Consequently, the border between the aesthetic and the extra-aesthetic exists more as a series of nuances, but not as an exact line of demarcation, since nothing exists by which a certain work would immediately be *done aesthetically*, just as nothing exists that would give the work the contrary – non-aesthetic denominator. Everything, absolutely everything, can be a representative of one or the other extreme. At a



particular time in a particular place, something can be the dominant vehicle of the aesthetic function, while at another time and place that same element need not have any aesthetic characteristics whatsoever. All in all, aesthetic borders are very changeable and unstable, and are influenced by a whole series of factors. The borders in that sphere are not quite clear and firm since they are also conditioned by certain other factors according to which we make our value judgements. This also leads us, of course, to the issue of identification of art itself, because if there were no firm aesthetic borders between, for example, literary works (in so-called art and oral literature), we could not confirm with certainty whether the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as oral literature, have their place in art literature, or not. Such phenomena are arrived at because other functions appear along with the aesthetic function that can actualise it and "make a place for it" or even orient it towards some other quality.

Since a work of art is closely linked with the notion of the aesthetic, it is quite clear that the aesthetic function is dominant within it, while the same function is found in a subordinate position in the non-artistic field. That means that the aesthetic function in oral literature should be subordinate. However, since the aesthetic function can be "contaminated" by certain other functions, it could happen – and it does – that certain other functions sometimes coexist as dominant with the aesthetic, and they are then an indication that a disturbance of the former aesthetic conception has come about and that new criteria and new aesthetic values will soon be established. Moreover, in order for the aesthetic function to be able to exist, some other function must always exist from which the aesthetic one will differ and thus confirm its own existence as dominant.

Thus, on the one hand, as regards the question of the border between artistic and non-artistic effectuation, we have arrived at the notion that this is a matter of the greater or lesser presence of the aesthetic function in art, while on the other, it is a matter of the subordination or superiority of the aesthetic function over other functions in a particular hierarchical structure. All this points to the fact that art is not divided into two clearly limited and separate halves, because there is constant competition and opposition between the forces that wish to become dominant, while their "struggle" represents that dynamism that is so characteristic to aesthetic and/or structural changes.

In that sense, Mukařovský developed several degrees in which aesthetic or, for their part, non-aesthetic, characteristics prevail.

It is said that certain works create continuous series within which artistic and non-artistic manifestations are found. Thus, for example, practical functions such as, for example, heating insulation, or protection from damp penetration, often dominate in architecture. The informative function has a similar function in literature, and can be connected in the same way with the notion of public speaking. Its task is merely "technical" – to attract attention and to convince the listeners of something. This can be done by commu-

nicating important and undeniable facts, but a much better effect is achieved by using emotional language. As soon as one utilises such a mode of expression, one has also used the shaping means of such speech that immediately links one with the concept of poetry (aestheticised speech) since it, too, uses the same means. So, we are always crossing the border between the informative and poetic experience of text, and constantly moving between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic domain.

On the basis of what has been said above, it is quite clear that to separate art from non-art is no easy task, even in cases when that border is relatively clear. In that sense, collective awareness has a somewhat meritorious role, since it establishes the relations between the aesthetic function and individual awareness. In that process, collective awareness should be comprehended as a social fact in which systems such as language, culture, religion, science, and the like co-exist. All those systems standardise their own domain, which is pooled with other domains, and it is in that way that we finally arrive at collective awareness.

Naturally enough, collective awareness is not abstract since it is actually the fundamental characteristic of society, which we can analyse and classify in various ways. In other words, society is divided into social strata and social communities which make up the entirety of society, so we cannot set aside collective awareness from any of the mentioned segments. We can monitor similar processes in art and/or in aesthetics. Admittedly, it is relatively excluded from "ordinary" everyday use of form, but its social aspect is very effective in building society. From the aspect of application of the aesthetic function in society, we can immediately note that its role is undeniable, particularly in relations when something in a particular social community has an aesthetic function, while in another community it does not.

In the former case, the aesthetic function sets aside and emphasises the subject that had been under its influence, because the greatest possible attention had been paid to it and had conferred upon it the status of the exceptional. In fact, the aesthetic function is one of the components of any ritual or ceremony whatsoever, since by underscoring it and often, by awarding it exceptionality, it emphasises the diversities in individual social strata and communities.

In the second instance, it is often used in upbringing, and we can actually identify a certain degree of its presence in any social activity whatsoever. Oral literature, particularly the folk fairytale, is readily listened to, particularly by the younger generation, which in that way learns something that is important for the community and, in the process, experiences pleasure, gets into the spirit of things, and cries or laughs together with all the other participants (Jolles 1978:155-175).

At the end of this segment, I wish to emphasise the following characteristic of the aesthetic function, that is, its capability of "mooring itself" beside the particular form that a certain object or concept takes. In that sense, it can also even replace or supplement individual functions that an object or concept has lost during its development. This is particularly visible in oral literature on the example of epic poetry. Namely, it is no longer necessary in times of peace to maintain awareness of protectors of clan and home, but such stories continue to be told. So it could be expected that "tough" heroic rhetoric would start to be replaced by aestheticised forms to which the aesthetic function would be added. A lovely example of that can be found in Mažuranić's *Smrt Smail age Čengića*. In other words, *Smrt Smail age Čengića* belongs chronologically to the body of Croatian Romanticism, but also because the Aga, as a striking individualist, is a real romantic hero. The second reason is that Mažuranić's work was near to the people and/or a folk poem that underwent a series of its "aestheticisations" in European Romanticism. Romantic aestheticisation if thus seen as the struggle between Islam and Christianity in the sense of Byronic heroes (Barac 1924). If the beginning of *Harač* is compared with the beginning of the folk poem *Mijat Tomić ide u hajduke / Mijat Tomić Is Off to Be a Hayduk* [outlaw/bandit], the difference between Mažuranić's *Smail aga (Harač)* and the folk heroic poem is evident. In both cases, the subject is tyranny, thus, the themes are the same in both poems as are the fundamental motifs, but the difference in aestheticisation is considerable.

#### **Harač**

Gacka polje, lijepo ti si,  
Kad u tebi glada neima,  
Ljuta glada i nevolje ljute!  
Al te jadno danas pritisnuli  
Krvni momci i oružje svijetlo,  
Bojni konji, bijeli čadorovi,  
Teška gvožđa i falake grozne.

(Mažuranić 1999)

[Gacko Field, you are so lovely,  
When hunger harsh does not beset you,  
Hunger harsh and harsh affliction!  
Crushed down in misery today  
By murderous men and shining arms,  
War horses, and white tents,  
Heavy iron, dread' torture stocks.]

#### **Mijat Tomić ide u hajduke**

Bože mili, na daru ti hvala!  
Lijepo ti je Duvno polje ravno:  
Po njem raste bjelica pšenica.  
Konjska hrana zelena travica.  
Zaludu mu sva ljepota bila,  
Jer su Turci polje pritisnuli,  
U svoj begluk njega prisvojili.

(Strašek 1929:225)

[Thank you for your gift, dear Lord!  
Duvno Field so flat and lovely:  
On it grows our golden wheat,  
Feed for horses, green, green grass.  
All that beauty all in vain,  
Since the Turks have crushed the Field,  
Seized it for their bey's estate.]

As can be seen from the examples, there are several mutual similarities at the level of content, but Mažuranić's work still emits a certain fullness. In that

sense, the most obvious difference is visible through the specific use of lexic, particularly in the use of the epithets which, in the case of Mažuranić, only seem as if they are the so-called permanent ornamental epithets, while in the example of the folk poem one finds real permanent ornamental epithets. In this case, it can be seen how Mažuranić departed from the norms of oral literature, that is, from the real use of permanent epithets, and created his poem in the mode of Romantic literature where the epithets are primarily intended to emphasise beauty, mellowness and sensitivity. In order to provide an example and for reasons of comparison, I shall mention Petar Preradović, probably the best Croatian Romantic poet, and quote the second verse of his poem *Zora puca, bit će dana / Dawn Is Breaking, Day Is Coming*, so as to show more clearly the similarity with Mažuranić's Romantic tendency in the sense of structuring the epithets:

Ponoć prođe – još pokriva	[Midnight's passed – peace still covers
Mir preblagi dol i goru,	The over-mild valley and hill,
Ali lagan vjetrić šapće	But a light breeze whispers
Od istoka k sinjem moru,	From the east to the blue sea,
Šapće slatko iz tihana:	Whispers sweetly from the silence
Zora puca, bit će dana.	Dawn is breaking, day is coming.]
(Preradović 2000)	

As can be seen, Mažuranić's standardisation of the epithets is much nearer to that of Preradović and/or to the Romanic mode and differs considerably from that in oral literature. That is because maintaining national identity is not the main objective of *Smrti Smail age*, but that the writer primarily wants his poem to be pleasant reading; the aim is not only to inform the reader but to pass on to him/her a feeling of pleasure of sorts.

Mukařovský claims that the objective of the aesthetic function is to multiply pleasure, in which we can actually notice a difference between art literature and oral literature. The difference between the two is most obvious in the norms, as is particularly evident in the above examples because of the fact that art literature standardises differently from oral literature, although the aesthetic function is an active component in both cases.

There is no firm border between those norms and we could actually speak of a developed diffusion, but, despite that, we must distinguish the aesthetic norm from all the others. Namely, the aesthetic norm may step over the border of any norm whatsoever and attach itself to some other particular norm, while it is much more difficult for the reverse to be effected. This could be identified with the dominating social stratum, which produces norms and values and with some social strata that are the bearers of smaller, or, to put it more precisely – different aesthetic values, such as, for example, is the case in oral literature. Norms definitely exist in oral literature, but one relatively rarely finds aesthetic norms because oral literature is based on the reproduction of particular non-aesthetic patterns, which were once perhaps

also vehicles of aesthetic norms. Consequently, the aesthetic norm in those examples stepped over its borders and became non-aesthetic, which is particularly evident in the examples in which oral literature stems from art literature. We find a good example if we compare *Balade Petrice Kerempuha / The Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh* and the Eulenspiegel tradition, in which we shall not only link Krleža with Jakob Lovrenčić of Varaždin, but also with the German (European) legend of Till Eulenspiegel (Peričić 1998:49-56), by which one once again steps over almost all borders and points to the transference of art material from oral literature to art literature. Namely, Till Eulenspiegel was a historical person, unlike Petrica Kerempuh, and his place of birth is believed to have been the village of Kneitlingen near Schöppenstedt in Braunschweig. The Germans believe him to have been a German and that he died in 1350, while the Belgians regard him as having been Flemish, and to have died in 1301. The first literary adaptation of the legendary Till Eulenspiegel was done in 1515 in the book *Ein kurzweilig lesen von Dyl*, when it moved from oral tradition into art literature. Right up until the present day it has undergone numerous literary variations throughout all of Europe, Krleža's being only one in a series, and he adopted it from the above-mentioned Jakob Lovrenčić (Peričić 1998:49-56).

On the other hand, there is relatively little influence of art literature on oral literature in relation to the size of the body of oral literature. Such attempts, when they are made, are actually implemented in order to create something new as a reaction to certain new socio-historical situations, for which aesthetic functionality is not important. Because of the pragmatic nature of oral literary material, such manifestations are short-lived because, when the social circumstances change, they are no longer required and simply cease to exist. A good example is found, for example, in the political jokes (Jolles 1978:176-186) that are always an accompaniment to any regime. Fairytales are also a good example.

Fairytales can originally emerge within art or oral literature. In the latter case, they can also be influenced by literary models such as, for example, in the case of fairytales which lead to polemics between the Brothers Grimm in relation to *natural and art poetry* (Jolles 1978:176-186). What is most interesting in the entire correspondence is Arnim's comment that there is much that is artistic in the fairytale *The Boy's Magical Horn* and, in this way, a *natural* fairytale had been created to which "many words had been added" (Jolles 1978:157), by which it would be classified primarily as an art fairytale. Moreover, "learned *cognoscenti* of natural stories soon made themselves heard, and started to voice their objections to the Brothers Grimm that (the fairytale of Hansel and Gretel) was not authentic and that the authors had added quite a lot of their own" (Bošković-Stulli 1999:159). In this way, actually in the earliest period of scholarly interpretation of the fairytale, it was noticeable how the art version could influence the oral literary one, and that

the outcome was usually not a happy one. In other words, such forms are more inclined to confuse people, and they disappear more easily than those that originally emerged in the body of oral literature.

The application of such attitudes to the citizenry created, for example, the idea of the "most modest art"<sup>4</sup> and/or Czech poetism (Jirsak 1990:99-115) which, similarly to oral literature, does not, in fact, enter into the context of the aesthetic, since it has an extremely emphasised functional and pragmatic dimension that wishes to describe the relations between things and their use and, on the other hand, provokes the modest with the expressive modesty, but deep and sincere experience. So emotions are stimulated at the expense of aesthetics, and this is more than evident in oral literature. Everything is pushed into the area of emotional feeling and this attribution of emotions also attaches values to things, despite an obvious lack of the aesthetic.

Thus, it follows that the aesthetic norm constantly competes with the other norms, suppressing them or losing the battle, but this means that we have a dynamic process whose borders aspire to the eternal.

As far as the relation between the aesthetic function and aesthetic value are concerned, at first glance it would seem that these are one and the same thing, but that is not so, particularly because the area of aesthetic function spreads from the area of aesthetic value and, even if we respect certain aesthetic norms, we do not necessarily receive an aesthetically worthwhile work. Aesthetic phenomena are privileged only in art and that is why art is the only real field of aesthetic value. Value outside of art is subjugated to the norm, while the norm in art is subjugated to value. There is much more that can be valuable than the norm can encompass. It is sufficient in that sense to mention only the notion of "aesthetic ugliness"; namely, the norm cannot accept at all that the ugly can be beautiful, while value looks at ugliness through a different prism, seeing originality in it or a series of similar unique phenomena.

Since every work of art that has been created in some particular space and period endures for a certain time, it passes through several traditions, which also bring new values. Aesthetic opinions change and even if we may have the same object before us, what is actually in question are several "different works of art", because the perception of that work has altered through time. It is that very aesthetic value that changes most obviously. It constantly grows and subsides, although the amplitude of such changes differs in relation to the individual work of art, type or genre. We can readily add the term "eternal" to the works of Homer, despite the fact that they were

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<sup>4</sup> This term was conceived by Josef Čapek in his book *Najskromnija umjetnost / The Most Modest Art*, which was published in Prague in 1920. At that time, the spirit of innovation and collectivism had also started to implement its own ideas so that poetism became the centre of literary and all other artistic trends in Prague. He supported the rejection of everything superfluous – from pathos to commitment – and proclaimed art that would be accessible and comprehensible to everyone.

conceived long ago and as oral literature, which means that their amplitude is still showing an upward trend, while on the example of Robinson Crusoe we will easily discern the changeability of the amplitude. Namely, when written in the heyday of colonisation, Crusoe was incredibly popular, but his brilliance later started to fade precisely along with the ebbing of the colonial mood (Solar 2003:176-177). However, he never became completely uninteresting because his was embraced as children's literature, which is very similar in its aesthetic function to oral literature. At the end of the postmodern 1980s, the book was actualised once again so that a whole series of "Robinson Crusoe type" adventures appeared (Tournier 1997).

There are, of course, masterpieces that enjoy one brief moment of fame, then to submerge into the darkness of oblivion, as is often the case with pieces written by artists for a small, exclusive circle of friends on the occasion of some anniversary or similar event. In opposition to them, there are also relatively aesthetically modest works that have been preserved through the centuries.

This is probably so because "eternal" works change much more slowly in the context of aesthetic values, while those that do not bear that epithet undergo the most emphasised and frequent changes. Naturally enough, society plays a major role in this process, particularly in social stratification. It often happens that events from one stratum transfer to another, so that a series of values can co-exist in society and be represented in individual social strata. In the Homer example, we have epics that were written for the aristocracy (Melcinger 1989:24), while they were embraced by the "common" man, but in the literature of the Croatian Revival we have *Smrt Smail age Čengića* that was written on the basis of a "folk" oral literary model, but as a bourgeois type, that is, as part of the salon literature of that time (Novak 2003:197).

However, why is it that certain values remain as values for any member whatsoever of any community whatsoever?

The answer could lie in the semiological characterisation of art. The sign or symbol (Biti 1997:411, 412)<sup>5</sup> stands in place of something to which it refers, and in the sense of language it is usually used to facilitate under-

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<sup>5</sup> We have now reached the point at which the concept of sign or symbol should be introduced, because the oral literary work is a sign, which, for its part, opens up the way to linking aesthetics and the cited relations and/or to defining the concept of the gifted individual who connects the two. Namely, the most simple definition of 'sign' would be: representing something by something else. Structuralists were inclined to comprehend the sign as a correspondence between the denominator and the dominated. With further development, the conclusion was made that the sign could be discerned solely in relation to some other sign and/or as semiosis, while semiosis enables a change of recipient and/or reader, able to transfer from itself the comprehension of story-telling to an implicit author. Therefore, aesthetics can also be connected through the sign with the gifted individual, but also with a society in which autoreferential relations rule. Consequently, the oral literary work is a sign, a common denominator, in relation to the individual, but also to society.

standing. However, in addition to its informative function, the sign can also have additional values, such as is, for example, the case with money – which is a sign of possession. Namely, apart from its communicative character, money has a practical function in ensuring the smoother exchange of goods.

If we consider art as a sign or symbol, we will first notice its informative function. Oral poetry is the most concrete in that sense since it describes an event that has a specific social value. The narrator can concoct a part of the content, but then the listener will find it harder to find the thread of truth within such fiction. Contrary to that, a literary work based largely on the aesthetic function will basically alter its relation to reality. Truthfulness and its importance to the community loses all sense here, although it is quite clear that fiction is in question, but, in this process, reality and its context are not brought into question at all (Šklovski 1984). Here we are not interested in the truth and/or the category of informativeness it bears, but in *the way* that something is depicted. Moreover, this goes so far that the work will have an even greater aesthetic value the further removed from the truth it is; it will become more "significant" and meaningful, while this does not largely hold good for oral literature.

On the other hand, a work is a sign, and a sign is much more than the merely aesthetic. In that sense, it is therefore necessary also to examine the extra-aesthetic phenomenon in art that stimulates the unison nature of perception of both the individual and of society. It is interesting to note that those extra-aesthetic values are separated from the work of art by its very recipient so their number can thus vary. Each recipient has his/her own attitude towards reality and thus also towards the artistic and/or extra-artistic elements. In the event that the creator of a work and its recipient were to be from the same milieu, they would agree that a larger number of works are artistic, or non-artistic, than they would have if they had been located far away from one another: in completely different life contexts or times. In fact, a work of arts consists of a series of extra-artistic values that begin to be given the art designation when they start to merge into an integral whole. There are probably few examples as good as the one at the beginning of the tale of *Pinocchio* (Collodi 2005, Ecco 2005:93) by Carl Collodi. The tale (the novel) begins with the words:

Once upon a time...

– There was a king – immediately said my small reader.

No children, you are wrong. There was a piece of wood.

It wasn't some luxuriant tree, just an ordinary piece of wood from a heap, one of those that is placed in the stove and in the fireplace during winter to be used to light the fire and warm the room...



Collodi is making a selection here and skips from the anticipated fairytale to the unexpected, introducing a new value in the form of – a log. Namely, fairytales always begin with the formula that represents them as fairytales, and that is usually 'once upon a time': there was a king, a young man, a cat or 'once upon a time' there was a princess, and the like. Each of those formulae is a sign, among others in the context, indicating that you are reading a fairytale. In front of the reader in Collodi's case there is a new, "unusual" sign – a piece of wood that is still to be given new meaning in the form of – a puppet. Only when that process unfolds will the fairytale be able to start functioning in its characteristic way and, in the end, give rise to a moral, that is, add a long-legged puppet as a value which contains new meaning – one should not lie. Naturally, any psychological, mythological or any other interpretation can work a "miracle" on a fairytale, but that is not is most important here (Ecco 2005:109, 110).<sup>6</sup> The folk fairytale does not suffer such «new-fangled trends» because it has no need of new meanings, due to its recognisability and synonymity. The recipients do not need such added value because that would only confuse them. Innovations of the Pinocchio type will simply not be recognised as a value, because different relations rule in oral literature between story-teller and recipient. We have a host of fairytales in Croatian oral literature and they always begin with formulae. Thus, for example, the *Čovjek i zmija / The Man and the Snake* story also has a wood motif at the very beginning, but nothing at all similar to that in Collodi's tale:

Once upon a time a man from Veljun was walking along and carrying wood on his back. As he was weary, he said down on a stone to rest. Suddenly, something started to wail under the stone. That man lifted the stone and shifted it, and to his surprise a snake slid out from under the stone and said to the man:

– Man, you have freed me from a great evil, and therefore I shall kill you; first of all I shall poison you with my tongue, and you will certainly die from the poison!

The man answered her:

– Don't be like that, O Snake, please, spare me. It is not just, what you have decided to do!...

(*Narodna književnost* 1999)

The fairytale *Njemušti jezik / Mute Language* also begins with a formula:

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<sup>6</sup> "There are many interpretations of *Little Red Riding-Hood* (anthropological, psycho-analytical, mythological, feminist, etc.), partly because the story exists in several versions: in the Brothers Grimm text we find something that we do not find in Perault, and vice versa. It was only logical to expect that an alchemist interpretation would also appear. And sure enough, an Italian scholar tried to prove that this fairytale speaks of the process of extraction and processing of minerals."

And so, once upon a time there was an emperor, and strolling one day he met a fisherman, who was carrying fish to market. The emperor asked him:

- What would be your price for that fish?
- Whatever you give me, – the fisherman answered. The emperor took out a ducat and said:
- Here's a ducat for you, since you are so honest.

(*Narodna književnost* 1999)

In fact, all Croatian folk fairytales begin in that way; first they define a particular time and the realistic subject of the events, and only then does the rest follow. Oral literature recognises that formula as an asset and does not wish to alter it for several reasons.

Namely, in the case of oral literature, the collective is both the author and the recipient and there is no individual who would set aside extra-aesthetic values, so that everything becomes equally praiseworthy. In other words, after some time has passed certain values come to the surface and remain in permanent utilisation, while others are irretrievably lost. And that is the very instance in which the aesthetic function in oral literature also ceases to exist. When the aesthetic function is no longer recognised as a value, but some other current functions take its place, it loses its *raison d'être* and starts to fade in the mere fact of oral literature.

The fundamental question opened up at the beginning, to which we have definitely arrived now, reads: can we prove in any way the objective aesthetic value of oral literature?

What we are evaluating here is not the subject but the aesthetically formed subject that exists as such in our consciousness, into which it has made its way through perception. So, we are not evaluating what we see, but rather what we have experienced in our consciousness! Since only the subject is a material object, the sole permanent and constant form in that system, the answer on the objective nature of aesthetics should be sought in that very place, as it communicates with numerous people, that is, with society as a whole. We have shown that the more extra-aesthetic characteristics a certain subject links with itself, the greater the possibility of its perception in the aesthetic sense. Those extra-aesthetic elements are in dynamic mutual relations, by way of which their homogeneous nature develops. However, that is, at the same time, a double-edged sword because certain values can overwhelm aesthetic values and exclude them forever from the context.

### **Identifying the aesthetic function in oral literature**

A work in its nascent stage, be it art or oral literature, tends towards complying with all generally accepted norms and life's values, but, in so

doing, it can lose its independence in the aesthetic sense. In the event that it preserves all aesthetic values as primary in comparison with all the others, we speak of an art work, but if it primarily actualises certain values other than the aesthetic, it passes into the category of oral literature. This holds particularly for works that cannot be applied to actual reality – as in the case of Homer, as explained at the beginning of this paper – because they then become more productive in the sense of renewing the relationship between Humankind and reality, that is, history.

Consequently, the aesthetic function is at the very core of human activity and, for that reason, any act at all in human life can be its exponent. It has an incredible capability to attach itself to any other function whatsoever, and to take its place without fail in the hierarchy immanent to the subject. In this way, it makes possible creative perpetuation of the process, revealing new and ever-newer uses of the subject, by which it is directly and indirectly included in almost all social events. At the moment in which it is superseded by some other function, there is no longer any of the above-mentioned perpetuation in the creative sense so that certain forms become "ossified" as being "eternally" interesting. The aesthetic norm determines which forms will remain like that, unchanged.

Namely, the norm regulates the disposition of the aesthetic function, but is not based in that process on any firm and unchangeable rule: it is constantly deconstructed in a variety of ways and creates new norms, by which the status of the creative individual in society is actually maintained. When the individual is introduced to the collective, the process of further production is halted because the aesthetic function is not what is most important to the collective, but usually some other social function instead: economic, political, religious, didactic, and the like. Therefore, oral literature, which some gifted individual represents for the collective, will not standardise something radically new that could disturb the distribution of functions to that time, but will adhere to the stable norm that it considers to be "sufficiently" aestheticised for it.

Furthermore, since the aesthetic function whose domain is art, although not exclusively, attempts to support the aesthetic norm as a social value, it, too, becomes a social phenomenon, through which it also finally becomes a social function. The relationship between art and society modulates its development and in that process, it organises in a certain way the extra-aesthetic elements and positions them in the field of art. For that reason, the aesthetic value must be superior to all others, it must see some sort of selective horizon; but it does not impair it, rather it simply "ties it all together". This is a dynamic process which must constantly be in motion. It affects the emotional level of the individual, and creates a certain satisfaction in perception, which acts upon the relationship between the individual and the world. The relationship between art and society modulates its development and in that

process organises in a particular way the extra-aesthetic elements and positions them in the field of art. Therefore, the aesthetic value must be above the others; some sort of selective horizon must be visible, but it does not disturb it, rather simply "binding it into a whole". This is a dynamic process that must be constantly in motion. It acts upon the emotional level of the individual, creating a certain pleasure in perception by which it influences the relationship between the individual and the world.

However, since the individual in oral literature is integrated in the collective awareness, the aesthetic value acts upon the emotional character of the entire collective. When the collective recognises something as aesthetically valuable, it tries to retain it so that its value can be experienced by each member of the community in individual manifestations. For that very reason, certain oral literary works can be recounted hundreds of times and almost never lose their actuality, because it will always be worthwhile to listen to them and, in any case, there will always be someone who has not heard them. The value held by the collective must become the value of each member of the collective and, until that process ends, the norm is not changed nor is it permitted that the aesthetic function creates a series of variants. The aesthetic function is replaced by some other one which justifies that "uncreative" series of repetitions right up to the moment when that function is replaced by some third one. The beauty lies in the fact that an aesthetic function can once again appear in that place, as shown in the example of *Smrti Smail age Čengića*, but only after some time has passed, since those patterns cannot be changed; it will simply disappear and surrender its place to some other function, most frequently of late – to a political one.

Consequently, the aesthetic function in oral literature has been a moving force in story-telling, but it has had to surrender its place to certain other cultural and social functions. The aesthetic function is not – nor may it be – dominant, because that would disrupt the very essence of oral literature, which is to preserve and pass on knowledge from one generation to the next.

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## ESTETSKA FUNKCIJA U USMENOJ KNJIŽEVNOSTI

### SAŽETAK

Namjera je ovoga rada promotriti estetsku funkciju unutar usmene književnosti, a u kontekstu književnog strukturalizma praške škole, odnosno na temelju rada Jana Mukařovskoga. Mukařovský je kao strukturalist estetsku funkciju prije svega promatrao u kontekstu umjetnosti općenito, s naglaskom na književnosti, napose na tzv. "visokoj", odnosno umjetničkoj književnosti, ali pritom nije zaboravio niti "folklornu", odnosno usmenu književnost. Usmena književnost nije u središtu njegova teorijskog promišljanja, uporabio ju je više kao protutežu "visokoj" književnosti, odnosno kao sliku kojom je mogao zornije obrazložiti estetsku funkciju, norme i vrijednosti. U cijelu je njegovu radu najvažnije primijetiti da će estetska funkcija u nekim književnim djelima biti naglašeniija, dok će je u drugima biti gotovo nemoguće dokazati.

Ovaj rad pokušava dokazati da estetska funkcija postoji i u umjetničkom i u usmenoknjiževnom djelu, ali ne jednako u svim fazama života književnoga djela. Naime, prikazuje li književno djelo estetske vrijednosti kao primarne, govorimo o umjetničkom djelu, ali ako primarno aktualizira neke druge vrijednosti, a ne estetske, može prijeći u usmenu književnost. Estetska se funkcija s obzirom na tekst potvrđuje, transformira ili pak biva prikrivenom nekim drugim funkcijama. Dakle, u usmenoj je književnosti estetska funkcija pokretač strukturiranja, ali je svoje mjesto morala ustupiti nekim drugim kulturnim i društvenim funkcijama. Estetska funkcija nije niti smije biti dominantnom zbog toga što bi narušila samu bit usmene književnosti, a to je kolektivno čuvanje i prenošenje znanja s naraštaja na naraštaj.

Ključne riječi: estetska funkcija, usmena književnost, strukturalizam, Jan Mukařovský