

“ST. GEORGE’S DAY LAMB” VICTIM AND EMPATHY

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In Serbian and Croatian, the word *žrtva* “sacrifice, victim” has two basic meanings: 1. a ritually executed person or animal as offering to a deity, and 2. a person who was killed by accident, through no fault of their own (in a car accident, a fire, by lightning, etc.), or someone who has suffered as a result of someone else’s actions (a victim of violence, cheating, conspiracy, etc.). On the basic level, the two meanings overlap and cover the same archaic notion of victim, which 1. links community to transcendental spheres (communication with god/s, based on a connection between giving and receiving in return, which is unquestionable in traditional cultures), or 2. acts as a (fundamental) way in which gods appear in the human world (punishment as proof of gods’ existence). In both cases, folk narratives abolish empathy with the victims (even if death comes for ritual reasons or as an exemplum) and often conceptualize the victim in animalistic terms (e.g., *jagnje đurđevsko* “St. George’s Day lamb” – a lamb slaughtered on the main spring holiday, St. George’s Day; *kurban*). The concept of communicating with god through the victim is radically criticized in modern literature, also in terms of the lamb (Thomas Mann, *The Tables of the Law [Das Gesetz]*, 1944; *Joseph and his brothers [Joseph und seine Brüder]*, 1933–1943; Jose Saramago, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ [O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo]*, 1991; *Cain [Caim]*, 2009).

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The title of this paper, “St. George’s Day Lamb” (*jagnje đurđevsko*), – which refers to a lamb slaughtered on the main spring holiday, St. George’s Day – was chosen for two main reasons.¹ Firstly, it denotes a typical blood sacrifice in the Balkans – *kurban*, but secondly, it symbolically refers to a human sacrifice too. *Kurban* is known in various ethnical and confessional groups, and it is widespread in the Balkan area – from Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Romania to Serbia and Bosnia in the central parts, and the Muslim communities in modern Slovenia (Sikimić and Hristov 2007; Sikimić 2008). The slaughter of sacrificial animals is practiced by both Muslims and Christians, with the

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exception of Catholics.² The animal that is slaughtered could also be an ox, a deer, a sheep, etc., but lambs are most often mentioned in the ethnographic material. It is primarily a spring sacrifice, but the animals could be slaughtered even later, on St. Elijah's Day, St. Nicholas' Day, etc., as there were other reasons for slaughtering the sacrificial animal.³ Given that one of the features of the Balkan Slavic tradition of calendar customs in relation to other Slavic traditions is "the hypertrophy of the cult of St. George and holidays associated with his name" (Agapkina 1999: 79; cf. Sobolev 2007: 16), the phrase *jagnje đurđevsko* 'St. George's Day Lamb' (with its dialectal variants – *đurđilko*, *đurđofsko jagnje*, *gergofsko agne*, *gergofče*; Sobolev 2007: 29–31) is reported with great frequency in the records of blood sacrifice. "St. George's Day Lamb", on the other hand, establishes a connection between different layers of tradition and different types of cultures. The motif of the sacrificial lamb evokes biblical topoi and contemporary literature that challenges the biblical narratives related to sacrifice. Two fundamentally different literary systems (folkloric and modern) – although incomparable in many ways – are deliberately contrasted as antipodes with regard to empathy with the sacrificial victim. We will therefore analyze narratives, rather than ritual practices, although contextually they must inevitably be kept in mind. In addition, the paper is typologically oriented and does not intend to present any South Slavic oral tradition in particular or to present a single tradition in its entirety, but to point to several patterns of child and animal sacrifice and the presence or absence of empathy with the victims.

In Serbian and Croatian the word *žrtva* 'sacrifice, victim' has two basic meanings: 1. a ritually executed person or animal as an offering to a deity (*sacrifice*), and 2. a person who was killed by accident, through no fault of their own (in a car accident, a fire, by lightning, etc.), or someone who has suffered as a result of someone else's actions (a victim of violence, cheating, conspiracy, etc.) (*victim*).

In both cases the meanings imply passivity and helplessness of victims, as well as a type of connection with transcendence, which is basically seen as something unpredictable and incomprehensible – regardless of whether it is observed as "a higher power" (God's will) or chance. The second meaning of the term is probably derived, because coincidence as such basically does not exist in the traditional system of representations. There is always a reason why something happens, and instances of sudden deaths and long and serious illness are generally perceived and described in terms of sin and punishment. And it is at this point that oral narratives neglect emotions and empathy with the

² Kurban is also known among the non-Slavic people in the Balkans, among the Banjas (Roma population whose mother tongue is Romanian), in the Turkish and Tatar communities in Romania, as well as in the small Greek community in Dobruja (Sorescu Marinković 2008: 101).

³ "The kurban can be dedicated to the 'host' spirit of the house or a Christian saint – the patron of the family, clan or village municipality at the celebration of a saint's feast day; to an individual on the occasion of a birth, wedding, illness, funeral or commemoration. It is also carried out for shepherds, during farm work, customs accompanying work, hunting for treasure, establishing boundaries between adjoining estates. For Slavs in some parts of the Balkans, the kurban is a necessary custom when building" (Sikimić and Hristov 2007a: 12).

victims. There is a great number of poems and legends where children are killed or led to illness or madness as punishment for the sins committed by their parents (Katinski 2013). Punishment for working in the field on Fiery Mary (The Holy Martyr Marina, July 30) is cruel for the farmer (Saint Panteleimon and Fiery Mary kill his ox), but far crueler for his wife who was spinning on the holiday:

But thus speaks great Saint Panteleimon:
 "Oh, my sister, oh, Fiery Mary,
 We will manage this one quite easily:
 I will do away with the ploughman's ox,
 And with his wife's darling in the cradle." (BV, 1901, 17–18: 306)

Numerous legends talk about illnesses that afflict descendants, several generations after their ancestors' sins:

There was an old man and his family wanted to work on *mlada nedelja* (lit. young Sunday),⁴ to plough, and he said: "Don't! Don't!", but they went to plough in the end. "Just you see what will fall down on some of your furrows!" They ploughed one – nothing, another – nothing! The third, fourth, fifth, sixth – when they came to the seventh, a crow cawed and fell down [...] You know. And I heard that here, the workers worked on my house and they counted – the once, twice, three times [...] seven times removed, they are all deaf and mute, both women and men! None of them left uncrippled. (Marković 2004: 95)

A famous sinner from epic poetry – Grčić Manojlo – is also punished by the death of his child for being an unfaithful godfather, and in terms of cruelty his punishment is comparable to ancient tragedies. His son turns into a lamb, and he slaughters and eats him unknowingly:⁵

"I welcomed the lamb, my dear darling one,
 Killed it, and thereupon roasted it,
 That was what I dined, my dear darling one,
 And I have left the shoulder of that meat;
 Flung the arm into a black horse's nosebag!"
 She threw her arm into the nosebag,
 Laid her fingers on that shoulder of meat,
 But there she found the arm of her own child! (Vuk II, 6)

Even if narratives do not mention sins and do not announce God's laws, the status of a child / baby is not significantly different. The position of infants in traditional culture and oral folklore is generally extremely marginal: babies are non-independent, androgynous

⁴ A holiday which celebrates the beginning of New Moon or the beginning of a calendar month.

⁵ The motif of cannibalism appears primarily (but not exclusively) in the poems about hajduks. There are two basic types. The first (collected mainly in Bulgaria) describes hajduks who drink blood and eat the body of the first person they come across in the woods and kill (Krstić 1984: Q 7, 13), which is a sort of an initiation for them. The second is a large group of variants (over fifty poems) which describe the long and painful illness of a sinful hajduk who forced a mother and father, sometime even a sister, to eat the body of their son / brother (Krstić 1984: no. 216) (cf. Delić 2019).

(despite their biological markers), nameless, unbaptized (in the Christian interpretation socially uninitiated), without clothes, speechless (unmarked by language), under the power of primary instincts. They are still not included in culture (or in the everyday life of a traditional community) and are therefore ideal victims (Vukićević 2021: 44–62). Despite the well-developed system of prophylactic actions that invoke and protect childbirth in traditional communities (Đorđević 1990), in folk narratives babies and children primarily appear as victims. Their deaths figure as the emanation of force majeure and they act as sacrifices in exempla that prescribe ritual behavior and demonstrate the power and will of the Christian God and his earthly messengers and executors – saints and angels. In a poem from Vuk's collection, Emperor Constantine finds the True Cross on which Jesus was crucified by setting a child of a Jewish empress on fire on the advice from God's apostles, thus forcing her to admit where the cross is hidden:

Snatch the babe from the arms of the empress,
 You go and light two burning fires,
 Put the babe 'tween the two burning fires,
 Let it cry out just like a bitter snake,
 For every mother must be merciful
 And weak when it comes to her own dear child:
 The empress will say where the crosses are. (Vuk II, 18)

On the other hand, saints disguised as travelers slaughter the child of Deacon Stefan and his wife with her permission, and sprinkle its blood around the house:

Then he gave them the babe from the cradle [to the saints – comment L. D.]
 And they slaughtered the oh so weak a babe,
 And from it blood they did collect,
 Thus, they sprinkled the white castle with it:
 What was mute started speaking once again,
 What was blind started seeing once again. (Vuk II, 3)

The motif of sacrificing one's own child connects the quoted poem with extremely diverse and rich prose material, which was pointed out by Theodor Benfey and Friedrich Von den Leyen in the 19th century, and later by Mihailo Dragomanov (Milošević Đorđević 1971: 282).⁶ As Nada Milošević Đorđević highlights, in the South Slavic oral tradition there are two types of songs about sacrificing one's own child. The first "fits the motif of Abraham's sacrifice into the stereotypical epic framework of the arrival of a book⁷ with unpleasant news" (op. cit.: 283). In that group of variants, God or Jesus tests Marko Kraljević's faith by asking Marko to serve him the meat of his own child:

⁶ The above-mentioned authors established the connection between the central motif and Indian story about Viravara, a faithful servant who sacrifices his son to save the emperor. After the murder of the child, Viravara's wife and daughter die of grief, and he commits suicide. In the epilogue, goddess Durga, for whom the sacrifice was intended, resurrects the four dead (Dragomanov 1889: 93).

⁷ "A book" means "a letter".

Dear Jesus writes from the heavens above,
 A letter to Marko over the seas:
 "Oh, my Marko, oh, my faithful servant!
 Do prepare a lordly dinner for me,
 Do not slaughter a lamb or a swine,
 But do slaughter your only son Stevan
 A young dear one, just seven years of age." (Begović 1986 [1887]: 92; MH I, 8)

In these variants – similar to the biblical pattern – God either stops a person's hand holding the knife or replaces a lamb for the person's son. In some poems, the international motif of a bequeathed child (cf. Janićijević 1995: 100) is also introduced – a father prays to God to get a son, with the promise that when the son turns sixteen, he will slaughter him as sacrifice:

May it be alive for fifteen years round,
 But the moment he is sixteen years old,
 I'll slaughter him in sacrifice to God. (Zlat., 11)⁸

The second type of poems combine topoi of legendary tales about God or saints who test human piety and hospitality disguised as travelers with the motif of sacrificing one's own child to heal relatives or persons that one is responsible for. Comparative narrative material – regardless of genre diversities⁹ – offers equally cruel images of slaughtering and roasting of a child, that will be brought back to life in the epilogue:¹⁰ in the fairy tale *The Emperor's Son and Sharp Day*, published in 1890 in *Letopis Matice Srpske* (145: 106–109), the emperor's son sprinkles a dead friend with the blood of his own child so that he would come to life; in Valjavec's collection from "Varaždin and its surroundings" (no. 180), Jožef and his wife slaughter their two sons in order to revive Jožef's brother Ferdinand; in a legend from Bogišić's manuscript legacy (Cavtat Library, sign. III/ba), the youngest of three brothers slaughters his child to satisfy a guest; in a story collected in Kupinovo in Srem (BV [1897] 12: 120), a poor gravedigger puts his only son in the furnace to feed the disguised Saint Sava, etc. (Milošević Đorđević 1971: 283, 289–290).¹¹

None of the aforementioned cases feature empathy with the child who suffers. On the contrary, it is on the periphery of the plot, and in his comment, the singer explicitly glorifies

⁸ In some poems, the motif is directly related to the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac (Mil., 29).

⁹ In fairy tales, a murdered child comes to life through magic; in legends – through a Christian miracle.

¹⁰ In this plot pattern (epiphany / divine presence → sacrifice of the son → body and blood bring healing → the son-sacrifice is resurrected) Lasta Đapović recognizes "the story of Christ's sacrifice" (Đapović 2004: 255).

¹¹ In all narrative and poem versions, a male child is sacrificed, which, apparently, was influenced by the Christian tradition of sacrificing Isaac, and then Jesus. According to the books of the Old Testament, however, both male and female firstborns were originally sacrificed: "All the references to the sacrifice of human offspring in Deuteronomy, Kings, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel make no such distinction between male and female. Indeed, the use of the term 'first birth', literally, 'opening of the womb' [...] makes it unlikely that any distinction between the sexes was intended and the restriction of this term to males must be secondary" (Van Seters 2003: 459).

the saints and God's (cruel) deeds – "Thank God it happened the way it did!" (Vuk II, 6) – establishing the Christian canon and leaving the victims aside.

Ritual sacrifice¹² – based on a fundamental and, for archaic communities, unquestionable connection between giving and receiving in return (Mos [Mauss] 1998) – is richly ethnographically attested. Although traces of human sacrifice can be reconstructed in ritual practices where the substitution of a human with a doll is obvious, in oral folklore human sacrifice is denoted only in connection with the building of cities or bridges (cf. Dundes 1996; Kropelj 2011).¹³ Children are, however, metaphorically placed in the domain of ritual sacrifice by blending the spheres of the animal and the human. A typical ritual sacrifice in the South Slavic tradition is *kurban* – "St. George's Day Lamb" – which intertwines pagan ritual practices and (equally pagan) biblical narratives:

The *kurban* of the entire village is dedicated to the most revered saints – St. George, St. Elijah, St. Demetrius, the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, St. Nicholas, St. Atanasius among the Bulgarians and Macedonians. In general terms, the holiday as a rule consists of killing the animal in a certain place (the blood is used to sprinkle on the holy stone, cross or tree) and the communal eating of the sacrificial animal (one or more, usually a sheep, lamb, more rarely a calf), usually cooked in a cauldron. The ritual food – a thick meat soup or a piece of meat – is shared by all those present, and part of the food is taken home for absent family members. (Sikimić and Hristov 2007: 13)

Oral poetry shifts the phrase "St. George's Day Lamb" (*jagnje đurđevsko*) from the animal to the human domain, thus petrifying the motif of human sacrifice. The song sung by Bora Stanković's famous heroine, Koštana, the Gypsy girl, is undoubtedly of folkloric origin, and interweaves the motifs of the firstborn son and St. George's Day sacrifice – the lamb:

Jovan, my son, Jovan,
You are, my dear son, my firstborn!
Jovan, my son, Jovan,
You are my St. George's Day Lamb [jagnje đurđevsko]! (Stanković 2008: 187)¹⁴

The motif of the spring sacrifice is also found in a large cluster of poems about the long and severe illness of a sinful rebel (*hajduk*) who forced a mother and father to slaughter their son and eat his body (Krstić 1984: 627, no. 216). In this case, although the ritual paradigm is radically transformed, the ritual character of the sacrifice is "remembered"

¹² Rich material is given in Janičijević 1995.

¹³ Todor Molov brings great number of poems and narratives from Bulgaria about "Walled-Up Wife" (<https://liternet.bg/folklor/motivi-2/vgradena-nevesta/content.htm>).

¹⁴ In Stanković's novella *Old days* [*Stari dani*], the same song is sung at *slava* [lit. glory, an annual Serbian Orthodox Christian ritual of glorification of a family's patron saint]. The choice of the song about the murder of the firstborn "unusual and, at first glance, inappropriate for the holiday atmosphere" is also related to the concept of life: "Slava is a holiday dedicated to ancestors and the dead. Together with the living members of the family, they gathered for a solemn and rich meal. The deity, from whom protection was expected and sought, was worshiped by offering human sacrifice too" (Samardžija 2018: 326).

through the chronotope. In many poems from this group, the child is slaughtered, roasted and eaten at the churchyard on Easter:

So, I took out the sharp-edged knife of mine,
 And I cut down all three groups of people.
 Only but one little child spare did I,
 I left him his mother and father too,
 Then I forced both his mother and father,
 And thus, slaughter did they their little child,
 Then I made them to skin it alive too,
 Then I made them to season it also,
 And then I made them to eat it up too. (Jastrebov 1886: 323)

Understanding sacrifice as a sin and its relatedness to demonic (and historical) criminals – “hajduks” (robbers and rebels) – is certainly of a later date.

Ritual sacrifice of lambs on St. George’s Day coincides with biblical texts: The Bible varies the motif of the sacrificial lamb many times – from the literal meaning to the metaphorical name for Jesus Christ, who is, according to Christian tradition, “The Lamb of God” sacrificed for the salvation of mankind (cf. Shaker 2016). Lambs as sacrifices and children as victims appear in the liberation and exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt. In order to force the Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt, Yahweh sends ten plagues on the Egyptians. In the final plague, Yahweh kills all the firstborn sons of Egypt and firstborn cattle, but he instructs “his” people beforehand to prepare male lambs and slaughter them the night before the execution of the children:

Let your lamb be without a mark, a male in its first year: you may take it from among the sheep or the goats:
 Keep it till the fourteenth day of the same month, when everyone who is of the children of Israel is to put it to death between sundown and dark.
 Then take some of the blood and put it on the two sides of the door and over the door of the house where the meal is to be taken.
 And let your food that night be the flesh of the lamb, cooked with fire in the oven, together with unleavened bread and bitter-tasting plants. [...]
 For on that night I will go through the land of Egypt, sending death on every first male child, of man and of beast, and judging all the gods of Egypt: I am the Lord.
 And the blood will be a sign on the houses where you are: when I see the blood I will go over you, and no evil will come on you for your destruction, when my hand is on the land of Egypt. (Exodus, 12: 5–8, 12–13)

Ram appears as a sacrifice in the episode with Abraham and Isaac too, which is the structural opposite of the poem about the sinful father (Grčić Manojlo) who eats his own son turned into a lamb. In the Bible, Abraham, instead of slaughtering his own son, slaughters the ram that magically appears:

And they came to the place of which God had given him knowledge; and there Abraham made the altar and put the wood in place on it, and having made tight the bands round

Isaac his son, he put him on the wood on the altar.
 And stretching out his hand, Abraham took the knife to put his son to death.
 But the voice of the angel of the Lord came from heaven, saying, Abraham, Abraham:
 and he said, Here am I.
 And he said, Let not your hand be stretched out against the boy to do anything to him;
 for now I am certain that the fear of God is in your heart, because you have not kept
 back your son, your only son, from me.
 And lifting up his eyes, Abraham saw a sheep fixed by its horns in the brushwood: and
 Abraham took the sheep and made a burned offering of it in place of his son. (Genesis,
 22: 9–13)

The concept of a lamb or a child sacrifice related to biblical narratives is present in modern literature too. In the novel *Cain*, Portuguese Nobel laureate José Saramago refers to this biblical scene: Isaac asks his father who holds a knife under his throat “And if that lord had a son, would he order him to be killed as well?”, thus presenting Jesus Christ as a sacrificial lamb (Saramago 2011: 67).¹⁵ Abraham’s attempt to sacrifice Isaac and the sacrifice of Christ are usually linked in studies and literature, and the first scene is seen as a foreshadowing and a variation of the latter.¹⁶ However, child sacrifice is not exclusively a biblical motif, and – as Tertullian’s (160–240 AD) testimony of the ritual practices of North African cultures in the first centuries of Christianity shows – it was interpreted as an *imitatio dei* too:

In Africa infants used to be sacrificed to Saturn, and quite openly, down to the proconsulate of Tiberius, who took the priests themselves and on the very trees of their temple, under whose shadow their crimes had been committed, hung them alive like votive offerings on crosses [...] and to this day that holy crime persists in secret [...] Saturn did not spare his own children; so, where other people’s were concerned, he naturally persisted in not sparing them; and their own parents offered them to him, were glad to respond, and fondled their children that they might not be sacrificed in tears. And between murder and sacrifice by parents – oh! The difference is great! (Tertullian 1977: 47; cf. Levenson 1993: 25)

Challenging religious beliefs and stories – among others, those about sacrifice and innocent victims, human and animal – is one of the foci of a broad literary and philosophi-

¹⁵ Despite obvious analogies established between the two biblical scenes from the very beginnings of Christianity, there are still two crucial differences between them: Jesus sacrifices himself, and Abraham sacrifices another. Secondly – unlike Jesus, who is aware of the sacrifice and who agrees to it, Isaac knows nothing about his father’s intentions. Leaving aside the complexity of Søren Kierkegaard notions on sacrifice of children and his critical, but still theological thought, the following part shall be quoted: “His silence has by no means the intention of saving Isaac, and in general his whole task of sacrificing Isaac for his own sake and for God’s sake is an offense to aesthetics, for aesthetics can well understand that I sacrifice myself, but not that I sacrifice another for my own sake” (Kierkegaard 1941: 86; cf. Žižović 2021: 278). Although in both cases a son is sacrificed, Jesus’ crucifixion is essentially rethought in the Old Testament story by his transformation into self-sacrifice: “God’s willingness to sacrifice the Son is only like Abraham’s because now it is not a question of a son in the earthly sense, as was the case with Abraham, but God is sacrificing himself” (Žižović 2021: 280).

¹⁶ “As Jesus supplants Isaac in Paul’s theology, and the Church, the Jews, so does God supplant Abraham in the role of the father who did not withhold his own son from death itself” (Levenson 1993: 220).

cal orientation which formed during the 20th century. The so-called "revisionist fiction" (Longenecker 2012; Kumar and Mishra 2017) (or "prototypical rewriting", cf. Ben-Porat 2003), which critically examines religious dogmas and ideas, was formed practically as a separate genre.¹⁷ One of the most prominent works of this kind is *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991) written by Saramago. In that novel the author radically rethinks and restructures the biblical prototext, offering an alternative story from the position of the victim: What would the Gospel be like if told by Jesus Christ (Kumar and Mishra 2017: 11)?

In Saramago's interpretation, Jesus establishes alliance with God by sacrificing what is the closest and dearest to him, as did Abraham in the Book of Genesis. In the novel, the most beloved is a sheep that Jesus feeds and nurtures, and he tries to avoid slaughtering it.¹⁸ But the knife that the angel kept in the Bible, thus saving Isaac, magically appears in Saramago's novel in the desert where only Jesus and his dearest animal are, and Jesus kills it:

Then offer this sheep in sacrifice, or there will be no covenant. Take pity on me, Lord, I stand here naked and have neither cleaver nor knife, said Jesus, hoping he might be still be able to save the sheep's life, but God said, I would not be God if I were unable to solve this problem, here. No sooner had He finished speaking than a brand-new cleaver lay at Jesus' feet. (151)

Saramago rewrites the biblical episode of temptation in the desert introducing new elements and radically changing the plot and meaning of the original story. Jesus stays in the desert for four years (not forty days as in the Gospels), there is no fasting or hunger, no wild animals, but there is a Pastor, a vegetarian who eats meat only if an animal dies accidentally, and who appears to be both an angel and the Devil. The Pastor teaches Jesus how to be a good shepherd and to take care of his flock; "the only test that the Devil puts him to during that time is weighing the innocent life of a lamb against religious commandments" (Ben-Porat 2003: 100). Jesus passes the test when he finds a lost lamb, but fails when God tempts him. Having slaughtered the lamb, Jesus finally crosses over to God's side. Protesting because of killing the animal, the Pastor sends Jesus away, uttering a telling comment: "You've learned nothing, begone with you" (152).

In fact, the angel kept the knife when Isaac was to be killed, but gave it to Abraham to slaughter the ram, as well as to Jesus in the desert to slaughter the sheep and make a covenant with God. Perhaps more than anywhere else in contemporary prose, in *The Gospel according to Jesus Christ* the Christian God is represented according to the folklore model of the "old executioner" ["stari krvnik"], a bloodthirsty warrior deity of the ancient Indo-

¹⁷ Lubomir Doležel defines radical adaptations of textual templates as "displacement": "Displacement constructs an essentially different version of the protoworld, redesigning its structure and reinventing its story. These most radical postmodernist rewrites create *polemical* antiworlds, which undermine or negate the legitimacy of the canonical protoworld" (Doležel 1998: 207).

¹⁸ "Can I save my ship [...] No. Why not. Because you must offer it in sacrifice to Me to seal our covenant" (151).

European pantheon, who literally took blood.¹⁹ A bloodthirsty God delights in the blood of the victims in Saramago's novel as well. Going towards the temple of Jerusalem where priests sacrifice animals, Jesus has "a horrifying vision, a vast sea of blood, the blood of the countless lambs and other animals sacrificed since the creation of mankind, for that is why men have been put on this earth, to adore and to offer sacrifice" (143). Saramago describes God who enjoys the smell of burned animals ("and how the fat splits and the carcasses sizzle as God in the sublime heavens inhales the odors of all this carnage with satisfaction", 143) and the blood of the lamb that Jesus slaughters in the desert. As blood starts to flow, God gives "a deep sigh of satisfaction" – "Ah" (151/198) – "like a drug addict finally getting his fix" (Longenecker 2012: 131).²⁰ The scene of the sacrifice of the lamb was anticipated by the description of a Jerusalem temple, a slaughterhouse toward which all those who sacrifice animals and try to make a covenant with God rush, among others – Joseph and Mary. They enter the temple with two doves in their hands:

It is not just the smoke rising from the burning fat or the smell of fresh blood and incense but also the shouting of the men, the howling, bleating, and lowing of the animals waiting to be slaughtered, and the last raucous squawk of a bird once able to sing [...] Within the Court of the Israelites there is a furnace and a slaughterhouse. On two sizable stone slabs, larger animals such as oxen and calves are killed, also sheep, ewes, and male and female goats. There are tall pillars alongside the table, where the carcasses are suspended from hooks set into the stonework, and here one can watch the frenzied activity as the butchers wield their knives, cleavers, axes, and handsaws, the air filled with fumes rising from the wood and the singed hides, and with the smell of blood and sweat. Anyone witnessing this scene would have to be a saint to understand how God can approve of such appalling carnage if He is, as He claims, the father of all men and beasts. (53)

And while in Saramago's novel Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, sacrifices doves with discomfort in the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus' heavenly father is consistent in his non-empathy

¹⁹ God is referred to as the "old executioner" in the song about the death of Kraljević Marko: "My blood brother, oh Kraljević Marko! / Nobody will snatch your Šarac from you, / Nor can you die, my blood brother Marko, / By a hero's hand or a sharp sabre, / By a mace or a battle spear either, / No hero scares you on the face of earth; / But you will die, Marko, my blood brother, / by God's hand, that old executioner" (Vuk II, 74). Cf. "As the ruler of the kingdom of the afterlife into which go the warriors who fell in battle, he [the god of war] is eager to get as many good subjects as possible, in other words, he wishes for the best warriors to die in battle, in order to make his dead army complete. [...] It is in that god that Visnjić's old executioner from the song about the death of Marko should be sought" (Loma 2002: 153). One of the most frequent epic formulas – "they drink wine" – could have its ground in the identification of blood and wine ("Is there, Marko, a river or alehouse? / I am feeling mighty thirsty right now". / But then these words Marko directs to him: / "That is not how heroes behave, Demo, / Slaughter do they a horse or an eagle, / And thereupon they do drink from their throats" (Vuk II, 68; cf. Delić 2015). Wine is identified with (Christ's) blood in Christian concept of eucharist too.

²⁰ Saramago also writes about human victims: "According to Saramago, God will continue to work miracles through his puppet Jesus in order to accomplish his plan of attracting all nations to himself, so that they too might play the victim, and so that blood will continue to spill and satisfy God's bloodthirstiness throughout history [...] This sets off an eight-page account of the bloodbath that is to follow – martyrs, victims, heretics, all massacred in the most horrific of manners and in the name of God" (Longenecker 1012: 132).

for the sacrifices and the victims. The same indifference he shows towards the suffering of twenty-five infants and children under the age of two in Bethlehem, the suffering of Egyptian firstborn sons and firstborn cattle, the children burned in Sodom and Gomorrah, the children executed by sword in Jericho – he also exhibits towards the suffering of his own son, whom he sacrifices with a sensationalist rhetoric:

And what is this part You have reserved for me in Your plan. That of martyr, My son, that of victim, which is the best role of all for propagating any faith and stirring up fervor. God made the words martyr and victim seem like milk and honey on His tongue [...] A martyr's death should be painful and, if possible, ignominious, that the believers may be moved to greater devotion. (211)

The episodes of the sacrifice of the Egyptian firstborns and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac were also re-examined from an ethical perspective by Thomas Mann. Making minimal but essential changes to the biblical narrative, Mann set the story of the execution of Egyptian children on a completely different footing in *The Tables of the Law*. In this novella, which is a faithful retelling of the biblical proto-story when it comes to the plot, Thomas Mann completely removed the figure of God from the narrative world, thus giving the events a completely different meaning. Unlike the biblical model, where God speaks, gives instructions to "his" people and acts (he therefore exists in the narrative universe) – in Mann's story only people act and exist:

This is a dark chapter, one to be voiced only in half-whispered and muffled words. A day came, or more precisely a night, a wicked vesper, when Jahwe or his destroying angel went about and smote the children of Egypt with the tenth and last plague. This is, he smote a part of them, the Egyptian element among the inhabitants of Goshen and those of the towns of Pithom and Rameses. Those huts and houses whose posts were painted with the sign of blood he omitted, passed by, and spared. [...] One has to note the difference between Jahwe and his destroying angel. It was not Jahwe himself who went about, but his destroying angel, or more properly, a whole band of such, carefully chosen. And if one wishes to search among the many for one single apparition, there is much to point to a certain straight, youthful figure with a curly head, a prominent Adam's-apple, and a determined, wrinkled brow. He becomes the traditional type of the destroying angel, who at all times is glad when unprofitable negotiations are ended and deeds begin.²¹ (Mann 1947: 39–40)

The "destroying angel" is described almost identically to Moses' loyal companion and helper, a radical advocate of war and revenge – Yeshua – who is "curly-headed", with "a prominent Adam's-apple, and a clearly defined wrinkle between his brows. He carried his

²¹ Mann's novella was initially part of the anti-Nazi project *The Ten Commandments: Ten Short Novels of Hitler's War Against the Moral Code*, in which each of the ten eminent writers was to deal with one of God's commandments (Thomas Mann, Rebecca West, Franz Werfel, John Erskine, Bruno Frank, Jules Romains, André Maurois, Sigrid Undset, Hendrik Willem van Loon, Armin L. Robinson, Hermann Rauschnig, Louis Bromfield). Thomas Mann was supposed to have the first commandment in focus, but the novella significantly exceeded the given motive. The first English translator of the story is George Marek, although this was not mentioned in the British edition of 1947 (Horton 2010: 155).

new name with pride, though he had his own views of the whole affair, views which were not so much religious as military" (Mann 1947: 23).

The other episode of the sacrifice of the innocent – the one with Isaac and Abraham – was targeted by the Nobel laureate in the novel *Joseph and his brothers*, where Abraham's grandson Jacob admits to his son Joseph that although he has eleven other sons, he would not be able to replicate Abraham's act. He imagined a possible scene of sacrifice, and when the actual event occurred, he gave up on God, choosing his son (cf. Žižović 2021: 279):

And when we came to the place, I built a table of sacrifice with stones and laid the wood on it and bound the child with ropes and laid him on top. And took the knife and covered both your eyes with my left hand. And when I drew out the knife and put the knife blade to your throat, I faltered before the Lord, and my arm fell from above my shoulder, and the knife fell, and I tumbled to the ground, falling on my face and biting the earth and the grass of the earth and striking it with my feet and fists, and I cried, "Slay him, You slay him, O Lord and Destroyer, for he is my one, my all, and I am not Abraham, and my soul falters before You!" [...] And I had the child, but I had the Lord no longer, for I could not do it, for Him, no, no, could not do it. (Mann 2005: 80)

Sacrifice is, undoubtedly, of essential and vital importance for the traditional community as an attempt to communicate with what is sacred, with transcendence, force majeure, and as a form of bringing a community together and constructing its identity. Thus, the act of killing in such situations was never seen as a crime, and the victims, especially animals, did not encourage empathy. Ritual slaughtering is considered to be violence only in a group of poems about a rebel who forced a father and mother to slaughter their son, roast him and eat him, but the ritual matrix is almost forgotten here, and it can be detected only in the deeper layers of the poems (a child is slaughtered on Easter, in the churchyard). Except this one, all the remaining folk narratives with the central motif of sacrifice glorify devotion to God, endorse Christian values and, less frequently, relate to collective endeavors (building a city), completely disregarding the position of the victims. Moreover, the victims and sacrifices range from children literally transformed into lambs for slaughter and children slaughtered by saints or parents, to the metaphorical human-animal projection "Jovan, my son, Jovan, / You are St. George's Day lamb / *kurban*"). Biblical models largely overlap with folkloric ones, both when it comes to the prototypical sacrifice (a lamb) and when it comes to a lack of empathy towards animals and children, who suffer innocently and in great torment. This attitude towards victims – human and animal alike – is disputed by a powerful current in modern literary and philosophical thought (T. Mann, L. Kolakowski, J. Saramago, etc.), which shifts the focus to the position of the victims, identifies crime and exposes its frightening potential: "It starts with a lamb and ends with the murder of the

very person you should love most" (Saramago 2011: 65). At the same time, this essentially challenges the idea of sacrifice as a form of communication with God.

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"JANJE JURJEVSKO" (SRP. "JAGNJE ĐURĐEVSKO"): ŽRTVA I EMPATIJA

U srpskom i hrvatskom jeziku riječ žrtva ima dva osnovna značenja: 1. ritualno ubijena osoba ili životinja kao dar božanstvu i 2. osoba koja je stradala iznenada, bez vlastite krivice (u prometnoj nesreći, požaru, od udara groma i sl.) ili netko tko pati nevin (žrtva nasilja, prevare, zavjere itd.). Na osnovnom semantičkom planu ova dva značenja se preklapaju i pokrivaju arhaično poimanje žrtve, koja 1. povezuje zajednicu s transcendentnim sferama (komunikacija s bogom/bogovima zasnovana na, za tradicionalne zajednice neupitnoj, vezi između dara i uzdarja) i 2. figurira kao točka božjeg objavljivanja u ljudskom svijetu (kazna kao znak božje egzistencije). U oba slučaja usmeni narativi prenaplaćavaju empatiju sa žrtvama (bez obzira na to dolazi li smrt iz ritualnih razloga ili kao egzempl) i često konceptualiziraju žrtvu u animalističkim terminima ("janje jurjevsko"). Koncept komunikacije s bogom putem žrtve radikalno je preispitivan i kritiziran u modernoj literaturi, također u vezi sa žrtvovanjem janjeta i djeteta (T. Mann, *Zakon*, 1944; *Josip i njegova braća*, 1933–1943; J. Saramago, *Evandjelje po Isusu Kristu*, 1991; *Kain*, 2009).

Ključne riječi: žrtva, empatija, janje, T. Mann, J. Saramago