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THE PARADOX OF THE "FAMILIAL ELEMENT" IN THE ORAL BALLAD: THE EXPERIENCE OF CONFLICT

The article is the final chapter of a longer paper (MA Thesis) on the relationship between the oral ballad genre and the phenomenon of the family. It is stressed that the family is the dominant theme in the oral ballad and its thematically distinct feature, as well as being its spiritual horizon, in view of the fact that the ballad understands the world exclusively in the framework of the family and the network of familial relations (Germ.: *Familiarismus*). It is observed how the "familial element" in the considered corpus (*Matrix Croatica's* 19th century "Female Collections") is evaluated contradictorily, since, even though a large part of the material analysed shows an inclination to the institution of the family, a considerable number of the poems show efforts to achieve liberation from its centripetal force. One can identify the conflict between the individual and the family group in ballads, this having influenced the shaping of the ballad and even the emergence of the genre itself.

Keywords: oral ballad, familial, paradox

*... At the final curtain, there they still are, trapped within each other by the past, each guilty and at the same time innocent, scorning, loving, pitying each other, understanding and yet not understanding at all, forgiving but still doomed never to be able to forget. (Eugene O'Neill: on the family in his play *Long Day's Journey into Night*)*

The family in the oral ballad, just as in the fairy tale or the novel, is more than a mere thematic level of the work in question. Speaking generally, the literary, idealised and mythicised representation of the family, as an institutionalised but also an emotionally based relationship, does not necessarily transmit a realistic image of the extra-textual world. Still, its themes and the ideas with which they are implemented are not selected by

chance, but always react to the society in which they emerge and to the trends of change in that society (cf. Luhmann 1996:18). In this sense, one could say that the family makes up a *code*, analogous to the code of love in Luhmann's semiotic approach to different kinds of texts (including literary ones) (*ibid.*). However, the presence of the family in the tale roles and character structure of the ballad (Greimas: *actant* and *acteur*), fairy tale or novel, the genres in which the theme of the family is most highly represented (cf. Davis 1988; Horn 1984), stress the important cognitive role played by the family complex in these genres. According to the genre-cognitive approach, all genres emerge from the specific questions which Humankind asks of the world about it, while the shaping of the genre is also influenced by the circumstances under which that discursive mediation of reality is conducted, and the audience for which it is intended. When speaking of the oral ballad genre, we could also say that the narrator of the oral ballads — male or female — recounts (or sings) them in an attempt to answer the following question, the cognitive sting from reality: *is it possible to reconcile the position of the individual with the institution of the family* (cf. Delić 1999)? Consequently, the family is that segment of reality which can be of help in bringing us nearer to the cognitive aspect of the genre, so we recognise it as a *genre-defined code*. Considering the theme of the family in ballads also testifies in this way to the extra-literary reality which made possible the emergence of the ballad genre (cf. Lüthi 1970). Moreover, that genre-defined code does, of course, also reveal the features of the patriarchal type family from the second half of the 19th century, the period from which most of the ballads in the *Matrix Croatica Anthology of "Female Poems"* derive, which serves as our source for analysis of the narrative structure of the ballad genres (Delić 1999). This family code in ballads — which is the subject matter of literary and anthropological interest, but is, at the same time, the genre-defined determinant of the ballad — is called *Familiarismus* in German by Max Lüthi, which could be translated into English as the *familial*, or the *familial element* (1970:79).

In this article we will be reviewing the *form* in which that code appears in the body of 19th century Croatian ballads, on the basis of insights arrived at in analysis of the fundamental semantic axis (crisis — — consequences of the crisis), the plots and the tale role and character structure (Greimas: *actant* and *acteur*) of the ballads (Delić 1999). At the outset we can anticipate the conviction that such excessive preoccupation with the family in Croatian 19th century ballads shows itself in the form of the *paradox*. Moreover, we believe that it is the paradox which is the genre-defined code of the ballad in general, and that this holds notwithstanding temporal, local, regional or national differences. In addition, since the causes for the formation of this code should be sought in the "pre-genre needs" from which the ballad emerged, it follows that the reflection of human ethics and/or ethical relations within the family, are shaped in some way on the experience of paradox.

The paradox is also set in the foundations of some other genres such as the riddle or the saint legends (Lüthi 1970:21, 184-185, 189-193). However, the paradox is more than the mere experience which makes possible the birth of those genres; it is also a frequent figure of thought, which is included even in the genre-defined symbolic languages which emerged from diverse experiences. The favourite rhetoric tool in mystic poetry, particularly Baroque poetry, is the paradox, which is also present in sayings, and in the saint legends (Lüthi *ibid.*:185-187, 193-194), genres which are formed on the experience of distrust (Lüthi *ibid.*:11, 14). However, even the fairy tale which derives from naïve trust, is full of paradoxes (cf. Chesterton 1970:176-191). Still, in the majority of folklore genres, even in the "paradoxical" ones like the riddle or the saint legend, what are actually in question are the "surprising" and "ostensible" contradictions in which the confronted phenomena are not really in a relationship of irreconcilable contradiction, but it is the contradictions which prevent from being immediately evident the link which connects them (Lüthi 1970:181). For example, what seems to be the insoluble question in the riddle is followed by the answer which fully justifies the content of the question (Lüthi *ibid.*) Unlike such signifier paradoxes there are also paradoxes of the signified, "insoluble, although not senseless, attempts to express the inexpressible" (Lüthi *ibid.*), such as, for example, theological or philosophical paradoxes. However, according to Max Lüthi, they are rarely represented in folklore (*ibid.*). Contradictions which we recognise in separate segments of ballads (e.g. in the formation of tidings of death: Delić 1997b), in ballad typology, and in variants of solutions of the same ballad type, are also nearer to the "ostensible" rather than to authentic paradoxes. For a young man's mother, by his falling in love with a girl or by his marriage, a son in some way becomes "dead", explaining why tidings of death are formed like tidings about weddings (*ibid.*). The moralistic endings to the *ballads of order*, unlike the "amorality" of the *casus ballads*, or even the moral and amoral ends of the same ballad type, are composite parts of the functioning of the traditional value system, and, while being contradictory to the potential dialogical norms, are also active in other genres (e.g. in addition to moralistic sayings, there are also those which are amoral; cf. Lüthi 1970:10-11).¹ However, our assumption is that,

¹ I am taking the terms *ballads of order* and *casus ballads* from my paper *The Theme of the Family in Croatian Oral Ballads*. The typology of the ballad among which we have identified two groups more — *ballads of death* and *ballads of crimes avoided* — was derived with reference to the illocutional aspect of the genre. We shall refer to the meaning allocated to individual types of ballad and shall, for that reason, hereunder in this article rely on the typology mentioned. In the *ballads of order* the family crisis culminates with some type of crime, often with an actual murder, but such a crime is mandatorily punished. Unlike the *moralising* in the *ballad of order*, the *casus ballad* — in which the family crisis is often also represented by a crime — is also taken as an issue because the crime often remains unpunished (the paradox of "guilty but unpunishable"), or the crime itself is ambivalent (the "tragically wrong conclusion" and the like). In the *ballads of death* the culmination of the crisis is not represented by a family crime, but by

apart from ostensible contradictions, paradoxical philosophemes are also formed in popular ballads, which is not followed by the conceptual nor genre-defined relief of the confident answer. In ballads, discomfort disappears after the genre-defined "answer": both ballads and legends reveal the insecurity of Humankind, unlike the "self-confident" genres of sayings, fairy tales and saint legends (cf. Lüthi *ibid.*:18). That insecurity, which even emerges in the looseness of their forms as opposed to the firm structure of the fairy tale or the riddle (cf. Lüthi *ibid.*), makes it possible for questions to be put again to their genre-defined answers.² In this sense, it is no surprise that ballads, like legends, would not be first on the list of genre-defined repertoire to which children would be pleased to listen. Children need firm answers and first listen to fairy tales which impart a feeling of trust; only then are they able to pass on traditional legends and ballads which show people in situations of quandary and loss (cf. Lüthi 1970:19).³

Notations of ballads from the 19th century can primarily thank the "small piece of reality" for which the genre is responsible to their specificity in forming the paradox, in relation to the majority of other folklore genres: the family as a place of permanent crisis — which on the one hand allows social consensus, often through active sanctioning, and, on the other, never stops being an area in which emotional "personal relations" develop — is ideal material for the signifier paradoxisms, but also the paradox of the signified. Apart from that, the broad representation of the paradox in the Croatian tradition of the 19th century was also favoured by the circumstances in which the patriarchal multiple family household (Croatian: *zadruga*) — which was the most frequent traditional context for performance of the ballads considered in this paper — entered into a period of crisis in the second half of the 19th century. This crisis was caused by the restructuring of the family alliances, by the confirmation of individualism within the family, and by the liberation of women deriving from the changes in how they made their livelihoods (Čulinović-

the death of male or female family members because of ill fate, accident, or because supernatural creatures have joined to plot against them, so instead of moralising or taking at issue, these ballads — *console*. Quite to the contrary, *ballads of crimes avoided* — *dramatise*. All these diverse narrative intentions result in diversely structured plots (see Delić 1999:41-82).

² This similarity between saint legends and the ballads is maintained in the theme and topic affinity of the two genres which often deal with the same plot, and are sometimes in genetic dependence on each other (cf. Sirovátko 1967).

³ Ballads are largely a genre "of adults" for "adults". Still, children can learn ballads as part of their games, adopting only the most important scenes. Ballad text in children's adaptations can undergo considerable transformation, from the introduction of jokes, burlesque or parody, often interwoven with a lack of logic and with senselessness, and even for the childish tendency towards the themes of murder and death, although there are examples which show avoidance or softening of tragic situations. Children also have a strong sense of justice, and they avoid erotic themes (cf. Dittmar 1988).

-Konstantinović 1994). *And the experience of "authentic" paradoxes is the experience of crisis and conflict.*

We could mention here that ballads also owe the specifics of their contradictory nature to the time in which they emerged — the late Middle Ages i.e. the 14th and 15th century — as well as to the time which immediately followed. Here it is necessary to differentiate the content-related contradictions of individual mediaeval ballad types from the contradictions immanent to ballads as a mediaeval genre which conditioned that new content, too, which could have entered into ballad tradition during various times (cf. Gerould 1932:192-193), was formed as a paradox. On another occasion we saw that ballad plots are also divided into two considerably opposing types, formed at the time when written culture became a more frequently used means of communication in mediaeval Europe (Delić 1999:77-82).⁴ Just as in the fundamental contradictory nature of the ballads in which we learn so unexpectedly that the hero's closest family relatives are also his most violent enemies, is also possible to seek answers in both the currency of such content in the shaken structures of the patriarchal family in the 19th century, but also in the past. Max Lüthi assumed that the "obsession" of the ballad with the family theme could also have been a consequence of the rearranging of the family alliances and the crisis of the family in the later Middle Ages, the generally accepted time of the birth of the popular ballads (Lüthi 1970:88). If we were to venture into the "anthropological archaeology" of the genre, we could also find traces of the crisis of the clan (*Sippe*) among 19th century notations of the ballad. On the whole, ballads do not present a sufficient number of anthropologically relevant parameters (cf. Čapo Žmegač 1996) for us to be able to conclude which type of family is in question, but its symbolic language corresponds largely with the *idea* of the "nuclear family". However, in some of the ballad types, like those, for example, which have as their theme the conflict between brothers because of an inheritance, it is possible to identify the traces of the clan — the family of the agnatic type, which was the characteristic formation of the mediaeval family organisation among the feudal and peasant classes (Le Goff 1974:328-329). In addition to such familial contradiction in the historical environment mentioned, we should look for an explanation for the unusual circumstances in which the individual in the ballad — despite the fact of being "twenty-four hours a day" under family supervision — is very much on his or her own, much more than in other folklore genres (Lüthi 1970:19). Crises of conscience and the beginning of introspection are linked with Christian worldview, the dominant view of the world at the time in which the ballad emerged. In the contradictory image of human beings in the ballads, which is sometimes "flat" and sometimes "more rounded" (cf. Forster 1984:73-74), it is possible to find in the same genre

⁴ What is in question is the linear climatic plot and the telegenetic plot (also cf. Org 1986:147-151; Davis 1992:355-357, 361).

both the indication of the new Renaissance comprehension of the individual (cf. Burckhardt 1991:79), and comprehension of the mediaeval ethos, according to which the family is still the (sole) guarantee of the freedom of that individual (Le Goff 1974:327). Among the large number of maidens-warriors who march through the ballads, we can identify the signs of the changing stance towards women in the crisis period of the Middle Ages (*ibid.*:333-335). The theme of the Amazons, even in those traditions in which there do not exist any old notations of ballads, thanks to attention to the "voices of the past" in comparative and typological studies (cf. Zumthor 1992:186-187), are attributed with having mediaeval origins (cf. Kumer 1978:46).

Research into the socio-historical causes or crises which created the genre-defined need for reflection about human ethics, particularly regarding family hostilities, would require much more detailed analysis. In this short review we shall satisfy ourselves with their mere listing, while, recognising the contractions in mediaeval ethics, we are obliged to include those of religious character. In the diverse notations of ballads from the 19th century, there is an overall *feeling of threat and insecurity* which was otherwise characteristic to the mediaeval mentality (Le Goff 1974:378). Doubts on the possibility of reconciling the freedom of the individual with the family bond found in the family ballads (Delić 1999), deserve to be broadened. Isn't the question put by ballads, which we can identify both in the familial ballads themselves, and in those which do not recount familial content (e.g. in the historical, heroic ballads), a question in fact of *whether it is at all possible to reconcile the individual with the various limits imposed by "institutions"* (by the family, society, fate, by God)?

Writing about the ethics of fairy tales, G.K. Chesterton, himself a ballad poet, emphasised that the fairy tale is ruled by "the Doctrine of Conditional Joy": the vision of happiness in the fairy tale always depends on some condition, and it is most frequently an incomprehensible one ("You may live happily with the King's daughter IF you do not show her an anion!") (Chesterton 1970:182). The condition is always on the very edge of what is achievable. That is why one of the most frequently occurring materials in the fairy tale is glass: "Strike a glass, and it will not endure an instant; simply do not strike it, and it will endure a thousand years." (Chesterton *ibid.*:183). The hero of the fairy tale, who is not always morally spotless, is successful in that "world of glass" primarily thanks to "blind" fulfillment of unreasonable conditions. The supernatural world inclines towards him: some "Good Fairy", who informs the hero of the unusual conditions, always flutters in from somewhere. Apart from that, the hero can also count on the help of celestial bodies, plants and animals (Lüthi 1970:63-78). Success is the result of great effort, not only on the part of the hero, but also on the part of an entire legion of the most diverse tale role helpers.

Unlike those in the fairy-tales, the hero in most ballads must be morally glowing, but he does not have helpers, or, if he does, they usually

arrive too late, only in time to take revenge after his death (cf. Lüthi 1970:19). The ballad hero is graced by patience; he suffers, but the conditions — which he guesses at more than knowing what they are, since no intermediaries provide him with information about them — do not in any case promise happiness in this world. Organic Nature — and its soil and trees, with their natural green and brown colours, differing completely from the metallic colours of copper and golden forests from fairy-tales (Lüthi 1976:21-22) — only serves to assure the ballad heroes of the shortness of the lives before them. The system of beliefs in the ballads is, moreover, a mixture of pagan beliefs, natural logic and popular Christianity, fear of fleetingness and the anxieties which dominate the genre, painted largely in the hues of the Christian worldview. Perhaps it is in that fear of the fleetingness of life that one should seek for the reason behind one of the most significant ballad themes, passion (cf. Lüthi 1970:20; Huizinga 1964:5-28), not only in the *ballads of order*, but also in the profane *casus ballads*, at first glance uninterested in the afterlife. This feeling of peril runs through some themes in ballads on the death of family members which are specific to folklore, but not to the mediaeval "high" and "middle" style. The macabre image of death does not prevail in such ballads. Although the ballad characters here, too, are afraid of death and do everything they can in order to suborn the generally relentless fairies and goblins (Croatian: *morija*), the pain of their own death is replaced with sadness because of the loss of loved ones (cf. Huizinga 1964:150): reception of tidings of death is rarely absent in those ballads. In some poems, the anxious atmosphere is more than only genre-defined; what are in question are authentic mediaeval ballad types. Thus, ballads about the walling in of living creatures in buildings or ballads about robbers' wives are ascribed mediaeval origins, which is not the case with all the legendary ballads which could have entered into tradition at different times (Kumer 1978:44-46). Mediaeval ethics can be identified in the ballads about the funeral shroud of a child, soaked in its mother's tears, whose sentimentalism and the drawing of attention to the fate of a child is in contrast with the macabre obsession with their own deaths which prevailed in the mediaeval world of adults, who had no understanding for childhood and did not recognise it (cf. Huizinga 1964:151).

The image thus formed by the ballad is primarily the image of a human being who is constantly exposed to danger. Fear of eternal damnation, which is characteristic for the mediaeval worldview (Le Goff 1974:378), is not, true enough, the only concern of ballad protagonists. The heroes of the ballads also fear that they could lose their lives because of the *conflict of individual and extra-individual (familial) interests* in this world. However, the ballads do not stop only at the presentation of such situations, but also offer certain solutions for extraction from such crisis situations. Moreover, there also exists in ballads a certain "yearning for a good life" (Huizinga 1964:29-54). Two different options, which are not necessarily connected with the individual ballad types, can be identified in

such proposed solutions. Contradictory ballad solutions are also offered within individual ballad types, so that variants of one and the same ballad type select different ways out of the family labyrinth. Thus, the ballads reveal, both typologically and in variance, two different images of Humankind in which one can identify the contradictory (unsure) relationship of the ballad towards the family phenomenon.

If we now refer to what individual ballad plots offer as possible ways out of positions of peril, we will see that the *ballad of order* transfers solution of the feeling of danger to the future, to the afterlife. In this life, the individual is fated to suffer: he is abused by powerful family members. Still, there is no need for despair. In the end, he will still be redeemed. The paradox of the Christian ethic "he who is last shall be first" (Lüthi 1970:193) was the norm in these ballads whose world was ruled by the principle of "absolute justice". Redemption could also commence with a miracle, which did not occur only in the lives of the saints but also in those of ordinary mortals, while the ballad ended with the punishment of the wrong-doer. Not only supernatural forces took justice into their own hands but also members of the family and the family itself; despite the fact that it was the venue of discord and the stifling of individual freedom, it still represented almost the sole source of support in this world. The conception that the individual did not exist outside the group (the family) still prevailed in the *ballads of order*: the free individual was one who had a strong protector (even if that protection came when it was already too late) (cf. Le Goff 1974:327). The individual is aware of the gap between individual interests and common interests, but assumes that such conflict is unavoidable. The path chosen by the hero in the *ballads of order* is "the path of rejection of the world" (cf. Huizinga 1964:34). The hero in the *ballads of order* could take comfort in the conviction that the one who took liberty from another was himself deprived of liberty in the final accounting (whether it was a heart he "stole" or a life). Even if the crime was a foul one, the family protector would ensure that the punishment corresponded to the crime perpetrated.

Unlike in the *ballads of order*, the threat of danger to the individual in the *ballads of death* did not come from members of the family circle, but from the unpredictable storehouse of "blows of fate" (cf. Lüthi 1970:20). Here, the gap between the individual and the common (the familial) is also considerable: fate cannot be outwitted nor prevented. It depends on the whim of some fairy or goblin, on earthquakes, floods, the chance bullet from some unknown hand ("a rifle firing"). As in the *ballads of order*, all one can do is passively yield to fate. However, only in such a world in which a human being is a plaything in the hands of destiny does the individual exist only through the family. The general connection between his fate and that of family members, and with that of the broader community, confirms to him that he, as an individual (a microcosm), is part of the macrocosm (Gurević 1992:176). Perhaps the family does not

offer existential protection, but it is the emotional shelter of the individual being hounded by the whims of Destiny.

In the *ballads of crimes avoided*, an attempt is made to solve in this world the feeling of threat resulting from individual and common interests. The afterlife is uncertain and distant, and it might not even exist. Therefore, the individual in these ballads does not endure the conflict passively, but tries to contribute to the settling of misunderstandings. The ballads in which a foul deed is avoided believe that the feeling of threat can be overcome by familial consensus. However, the nature of such agreements is such that they do not remove the *causes* which motivated the conflict. These ballads recognise the causes of the conflict, but they do not manage to impose a "new" family conception. The women, admittedly, dress as men and go out of the family circle to perform warlike deeds, emphasising the divide between free opportunities and gender-imposed roles (Lüthi 1970:195); but, in the end, they always return home to continue their lives "in the old way". The freedom of the individual in these ballads continues to depend primarily on the family. Nonetheless, the path chosen here by heroes is "the path to improvement and perfection of the world itself" (cf. Huizinga 1964:34).

It is this very relationship of the individual towards the family which differentiates the plots in the *casus ballads* from the foregoing types. The feeling of threat is opposed by revolt instead of by consensus, and that revolt here, too, remains in this world and not in the next. In any case, the world of the family in the *casus ballads* is not ruled by the principle of "absolute Good". Even if Good does win out in the end, this is not the consequence of "the logic of necessity", but of "chance", while the world is perhaps founded more on the principle of Evil than that of Good. For that reason, the family corrective is opposed by the revolt of earthly love which is successful in confronting family interests. Revolt against familial repression can still end unsuccessfully — in suicide, "the tragically wrong conclusion" — but always with awareness of the irreconcilable conflict, the non-acceptance of the unsatisfactory consensus. The hero in the *casus ballads* has an inkling of the fact that freedom in the family should be sought in love; otherwise, it is not possible to find freedom within it. The way chosen by heroes in these ballads is a radical one; it demands a sacrifice without reflection on the other world. We shall categorise this option, too, as a path towards "improving and perfecting the world".

If we now turn to consideration of the plot types, we will notice that they provide various ways of reading off the phenomenon of the family. *Ballads of order* are stripped of life *here and now*, expecting Utopian happiness in the future, while the *ballads of crimes avoided* accept the incomplete solution of this world. In these ballads, the place of the individual in society is determined primarily through the family and would be inconceivable without the family. The same holds for ballads dealing with the death of family members, but in them the features of the patriarchal family are pushed into the background, under the threat of

mortal danger which, in these ballads, is not a threat from within the family. Only the *casus ballads* reveal the self-aware individual who is in open revolt against the familial throttling of freedom. The ballads themselves are not sure about the future of the family, as is confirmed by the fact that in the repertoire of one and the same singer (cf. the repertoire of Mare Karač in Delić IEF, MS 1621) one finds ballads which, even they do not perhaps view the future of the family as being rosy, they nonetheless still count upon it; as well as *casus ballads* which offer revolutionary solutions. The paradoxical stance towards the phenomenon of the family is a conceptual doubt among bearers of ballad tradition, and not a definition deriving "from the scholar's armchair".

The image of the solutions offered by individual types of plot as the way out from a threatened position could still raise doubts about whether the conflict experience and/or the paradox are noted only in the *casus ballads*. Familial sanctions are looked on more favourably in the second type of plot, so these ballads perhaps do not show a parting of the ways between individual and collective norms, or — if they do — it could be that what are in question are not "authentic" but only "ostensible" contradictions. It is as if these ballads with their genre-defined answers do not put the questions reserved for the *casus ballads*. After this review of diverse ballad "yearnings for a better world" it may seem that only the *casus ballads* manage to make an issue of the conflict between the individual and the family, and even put in doubt the very existence of the family as such. However, we argue that in other separate types of ballads, too, it is possible to recognise the *familial code* in the plot, based on a real conflict, the intensification of the contradictory norms, and even an appeal for change, which is an unusual fellow-traveller of the paradox.

Common to both the *ballads of order* and the *ballads of crimes avoided*, and to the *casus ballads*, is the revelation of the conflict, the "dramatic history" of the family, which the family community otherwise keeps secret in modelling its idealised patriarchal family "devised order" (cf. Rihtman-Auguštin 1984:174). The *ballads of order* plots do not seek in love consolation for existential insecurity, and choose not to give in to "chance"; perhaps in making automatic the mechanism of crime and punishment, they have stopped being surprised that, in their world, Good always prevails. However, because they never grow tired of repeating the scheme in which Good always wins out in the end, the *ballads of order* in fact reveal the "same" as the *casus ballads*: that the final victory of Good is not always a self-understood fact. And while the *casus ballads* indicate this in their paradoxical plots ("guilty, but unpunishable", "the tragically wrong conclusion"), the *ballads of order* make use of a general narrative paradox: what is narrated is never *self-understood* (Lüthi 1970:196). These ballads really are ballads of *imaginary* order. Perhaps by declaring "weaker" members of the family to be saints in life after the grave, the *ballads of order* are too direct in supporting their "canonisation" in this word, without taking into account the complexity of the parallel contradictory norms.

This is because the split between the individual and super-individual interests in the *ballads of order* is so wide that it cannot possibly be mended in this world. The *ballads of order* try to draw closer to the "ideal culture" — the family with no conflicts — by drastic sanctioning mechanisms, an extreme polarisation of their world into Good and the punishable Evil. However, it could not be said of these ballads that they primarily *promise* that they will "research and inform the public of certain extremes" of social behaviour (cf. Buchan 1989:137). The ballads in which the crime does not come about are perhaps opportunistic in their persistent return to the past. These ballads, too, like the *casus ballads* are "a socially sanctioned area for narrations about hostilities within the patriarchal family" (Coote 1977:338; Catarella 1994:423-424). Finally, are not the *ballads of crimes avoided* the only anti-nihilistic product of the ballad genre? Familial interests have a stronger voice than those of individuals in the *ballads of order* and in the *ballads of crimes avoided*, but these types, too, both affirm family interests and, just like the *casus ballads*, modify and even refute them. The "passionate consideration of earthly life" (cf. Jauss 1978:139) in which the individual and the common, set clan roles, and freedom of choice are so belligerently confronted, is the joint rhetorical objective of the ballads at the level of the narrative discourse, despite the diverse strategies of their plots.

The bearers — both narrators and audience — of Croatian ballad tradition in the 19th century were primarily women, and the ballads, along with the art of recounting stories in general, were recognised early on as a part of female activities in the function of the division of gender role, notwithstanding the social stratum of the narrator (cf. Dégh 1995:63). Consequently, the stories, including those in the ballads, were not only entertaining, but invoked laughter, excitement, feelings or fear. They also disciplined and socialised children, while they taught little girls how to behave in preparation for their future role as wives, while adult women found an outlet in the stories while they carried out their daily tasks (cf. Dégh 1995:63). The women could invite men to be part of their audience, and the source for the female narrators of ballads were often male narrators.⁵ Apart from that, the ethical code of "female" ballads differs from what we know of the heroic poems and songs.⁶ Although a

⁵ The place of the ballads, as that of fairy tales, is in the folklore genres which travel outside regional and national borders, even when their geographic and inter-ethnic dispersion is less than that of the fairy tale (cf. Sirovátka 1974:245). On the whole, women did not participate in this dissemination of the genre: ballads were transmitted by pilgrims, soldiers, sailors, merchants, and members of the fringes of society such as beggars and Romanies. Even with prominent narrators like Kata Murat from Luka on the island of äipan, the influence of male narrators (sailors, merchants) and educated family members is stressed in the formation of repertoire (cf. McGregor 1996:660-662; Dégh 1995:63).

⁶ In his book *Moral Concepts in Traditional Serbian Epic Poetry* (1961), Jovan Brkić mentions these cases in which a hero's *honour* is brought into question: 1. The hero must not bear being beaten by another without taking revenge; 2. The kidnapping of a woman

considerable number of ballads was also preoccupied with the "honour and shame" complex, "female" ballads frequently offered unusual interpretations (e.g. the man in jail is freed by a woman, not because of a matter of "honour", but for emotional reasons); or they openly revolt against the patriarchal order (e.g. a woman is not prepared to bear injustice without seeking revenge; she communicates with her husband in a freer manner; adultery is "permitted" in certain circumstances; and the like). Ballads also reveal features which are usually allocated to "female folklore" e.g. realistic details in the descriptions of everyday life at home (cf. McGregor 1996:660-662; Dégh 1995:69), but the "feminine" men of the male narrators often refute the stereotyped concept of women as exclusive narrators are capable themselves of producing affective utterances for all the characters — both male and female (cf. Dukić 1995:183).⁷

What is significant for the ballads is that the narrators — largely female, rarely male — first of all reveal the "female sub-culture", suppressed in the "devised order" of the patriarchal family (cf. Rihtman-Auguštin 1984:169 and later). However, female narrators primarily are the uncovers of the reality of the hushed-up familial conflicts, the "realised order" of the family. The very *act of narration* of the ballads always reiterated the question on the validity of the common norms, implicitly questioning the sense of "devised" and "realised order", this often with no reference to the gender of the ballad heroes. "The path of dreams" for which all the ballads "yearn" is, at the same time, "the path to rejection of the world" in the *ballads of order* and "the path of improvement and perfection of life", diverting both paths again into social reality (cf. Huizinga 1964:35). The most diverse types of ballad, in their confrontation with the norm of passing over issues in silence and the narratives about conflicts, also make possible the creation of a "new ideal culture" (cf. Rihtman-Auguštin 1984:188), which perhaps does not have to be based on the insoluble paradox between the personal and the common. In the permanent dilemma in relation to the collective and the personal seen in Croatian family ballads, between harmony and conflict, authoritative force and compromise, and also in their subversive strength, we gain an inkling of the emergence of modern sensibility and the concept of values. Admittedly, it is not easy simply on the basis of the freedom which is only breaking through in the *casus ballads* and in the *ballads of crimes avoided* to identify the contemporary conception of the individual. Nor do we find in the ballads such a comprehension of "personal relations"

is a challenge to the honour of her husband; 3. To avoid a duel (*megdan*) is cowardly; 4. An unfair fight (two against one); 5. The killing of a prisoner without giving him the chance to fight for his freedom; 6. To give his word and then to break it; 7. To be forced to do something against his will; 8. A woman addressing her husband; 9. Enquiring into the family tree of a guest; 10. Boasting; 11. Extramarital sex with a girl or a woman.

⁷ The preponderance of ballads with female protagonists in 20th century repertoire, in comparison with the older *bugarštica* ballads with mainly male heroes, speaks of the fact that, in the 19th century, the ballads counted more on addressing female audiences.

in which we could identify an independent auto-referential system, built up, true enough, upon only one paradox of contemporary intimate communication — the interpersonal interpenetration which "destroys" the personality itself (cf. Luhmann 1996:51-62, 211 and later). In the ballads, freedom is still one-dimensional; the paradoxes of the "familial" derive primarily from the localisation of resistance. The yearning for love and pleasure, which is a composite part of the *familial code*, brings into question the dominant *patriarchalism*.

Perhaps from our perspective today the paradoxes which the ballads take as their own and upon which they are formed and seem (to an extent) to have been prevailed over, are only seeming paradoxes. However, we should bear in mind that the identification and comprehension of paradoxes, such as the conflict between the common and individual norms, or the disharmony between the role imposed by gender and freedom of choice, made possible the skill of modern living of which Niklas Luhmann speaks, but which, it would seem, are made up of "the ability to live with tensions, contradiction, dilemmas, paradoxes and ambiguities — without seeking for solutions in the framework of either/or choices, but instead endeavouring to integrate" (Gullestad 1996:21). However the search for such solutions was no longer contrary to the familial concept after marriage came to be based "on love" (cf. Luhmann 1996:178 and later). The contradictory stance of the ballads towards the family — a stance which fears change while at the same time demanding it — should be prevailed over in the ideal (Utopian nature?) of the contemporary nuclear family (cf. Luhmann 1996:*ibid.*). But do not the ballads of the death of family members — although still miles away from the modern comprehension of the "coming of age" of the individual — assume a step closer to the interest of the individual and the family in that they choose a "yearning" for familial sentimentalism? Even if that in itself does not put an end to the endangered state of either the individual or the family.

It is not, after all, any surprise that ballads remained one of the most vital folklore genres, even in the 20th century. The instinctive interest in terrible and unusual stories is obviously essential in understanding the phenomenon. However, the traditional ballad on familial themes could retain its currency and, in conditional terms, "avant-garde impulse" even then: the fundamental changes in the traditional family and the reorganisation of family alliances which commenced in the 19th century, carried on into the 20th (Erlich 1971; Čulinović-Konstantinović 1994). Nor is there anything surprising in the fact that the trend of ballad genre revitalisation was continued in the 20th century, even in culture of high aestheticism. The folk ballad became part of literature back in the time when it was still a vital folklore genre, performed among the masses but also among the gentry: *Majka Margarita* in *Vila Slovinka*, the ballads in

the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas (*King Lear* was inspired by a ballad), those in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, along with many other interweavings between ballad folklore and various literary genres even earlier in modern times, were decelerated briefly during the period of 18th century Enlightenment, which was not inclined to the conception of the superiority of fate as can be identified in a part of the ballad topics. The ballad was a folklore genre which had all the pre-conditions for being adopted by art literature. It was a "product" which could serve as a *ready-made* art, something again recognised by the Romantics. There are almost no 19th century European poets who did not show an inclination towards the linear dramatic plot of the ballad and its brisk narration, which implied more than it actually says. The year 1797 will remain marked in the history of European literature as the *Balladenjahr* (the Year of the Ballad), because of the competition between J. W. Goethe and J. C. F. Schiller in composing ballad poems. It would be hard to image the opera of the 19th century without the ballad.

Apart from that, the ballad is a genre which is interested in the individual, but not in Humankind generally (as, for example, the fairy tale is: Lüthi 1970:19). This traditional genre was in harmony with the growing trend for introspection and conscience-searching, which did not concern only literature, and did not commence only in the 19th century (cf. Ong 1986:152), but was also reflected in the psychology of the lyric subjects and the narrators. After the insights provided by the profound psychology and psychoanalysis in the 20th century, and after the post-modern destruction of the heroes, even the traditional "typical" ballad characters can serve as a foundation for "Pynchonian characters" (cf. Ong *ibid.*:151-155) — such as those in the murder ballads by the popular Australian singer Nick Cave — which are "bizarrely hollow" but only after the experience of the "round" protagonists of modern literature (cf. Ong *ibid.*:154).

Admittedly, art literature is not as interested in the ballads emerging from familial causes of conflicts. In various periods, poets have recognised the diverse elements of tradition in accordance with their own poetics, but also in keeping with the *Zeitgeist*. Thus, for example, a human being threatened by natural or supernatural forces was closer to the Croatian Romantics than one under threat from his or her family, and here they were in complete accord with the course of European Romanticism (cf. Röhrich 1973:102; Sertić 1970). Although we find among the 20th century art ballads ones like Vraz's *Lepa Vida* with the "traditional Nora" in the main role, family members are largely threatened "from outside" as is seen in Vraz's *Bura* [Tempest] or in Preradović's *Zmija* [The Snake], which also "slithered off" into oral tradition (cf. Delić IEF, MS 1621, Song No. 2). If these ballads do not take as their theme the "spiritualist seances" of encounters between the living and dead family members (e.g. *Majčina dušica* [Wild Thyme] by Franjo Marković), the family does not appear in

them at all (e.g. *Romantični konac* [Romantic Ending], *Srdžba* [Wrath] and other love ballads by Vraz).

Apart from the theme of death, modern poetry (e.g. in the *Ballada o Tounjčica* by Vladimir Vlaisavljević) is attracted to rarer ballad themes which reveal that human beings are not the sole preoccupation of the genre, and that conflicts affecting other inhabitants of Nature also appear on the genre-defined horizon. On entry into southern seas, the murder of the albatross had fatal consequences for the crew of Coleridge's phantom ship and for the "ancient mariner", and announced the poet's philosophical preoccupations — the theme of exile and returning home, a psychological fascination with states of insanity, dreams, and hallucinations which spill over into the world of reality, as well as Man's problematic relationship with Nature (Holmes 1990:173). In Croatian modern literary ballads, too, Humankind continues to cause the death of animals and plants. If sheep are the victims in Dragutin Tadijanović's *Balada o zaklanim ovcama* [The Ballad of the Slaughtered Sheep], the unfortunate fate befalls a rabbit in the traditional ballad, which has its origins in a 16th century Latin poem by a German Benedictine friar, Huseman Beckemensis (cf. Kuhač 1881:246).⁸ In *Balada prevarenog cvijeća* [The Ballad of the Cheated Flowers] by Vesna Parun, "Man the enemy came to raid the defenceless flowers".

The feeling of threat from the extra-familial world dominated in the art ballads of modern and contemporary poetry. It is true that in certain ballads, such as Thomas Hardy's *During Wind and Rain*, the family has not been abandoned, and it has become the symbol of human success. However, even in that poem which, like many other Hardy poems and novels, was under the strong influence of folk ballads (cf. Gunn 1979) — the family, just like the sunken *Titanic* which Hardy wrote a poem about, announcing the "ballad" course of the 20th century, can be only an example of the theme of transience (*ibid.*). The anxiety caused by "nostalgia for the past" and awareness of fleetingness no doubt suited the

⁸ Because the theme is a rare one, we quote one variant (in translation) of the ballad of the rabbit:

Wind is shuddering the tree,
Time for me my copse to flee.
When the hunter's bullet shoots me,
straight into his bag he boots me,
Then he hangs me on a hook
Even though I'm not some crook.
Three skins he removes from me,
But he gets them all for free,
Kitchens then become my place,
broad smiles on the Šokač face.
Šokač ladies now prepare me
If they'd eat pork it would spare me.
My meat's in the marinade,
Bacon-wrapped in herbs I'm laid.
(Žganec *Koprivnica*, No. 323).

worldview of the Romantics. According to Jacques Le Goff, that insecurity of and threat to human beings of the mediaeval ethos is similar to the anxiety which Jean Baudrillard identifies as the main feature of contemporary man (Baudrillard 1993:Le Goff 1997:44). "The Middle Ages and modern times were exposed to strong attacks of fear, frenzied madness, which Michel Foucault quite rightly located between fear of change and the trauma of hospital repression, epidemics of suicide, the ungovernable behaviour of flagellants, the delirium of the millennial expectation of the fall of Humankind" (Le Goff *ibid.*). Perhaps it is in that affinity of anxiety that one should search for the reasons of the ballads' success in efforts to revive contemporary poetry, qualified by O. Paz in his essay on poetry as "tired" (1996). However, the *revival* of the ballad was contributed to by the recognition of "open forms" of art (Eco 1965) which could shatter the "closed" and "completed" state of art, which, after the Middle Ages, forgot how to recognise the skill of variation as a form of transmission and reception of literary messages (Catalan 1997:159 and later). W.H. Auden's imitation of the performance convention of so-called *broadside* ballads (Ger. *Bänkellied*) when he stresses that his *Let Me Tell You a Little Story* should be sung to the well-known melody of the ballad *St. James' Infirmary* (Caro 1998:383) — was guided by the thought that poetry should revert to the "openness" of oral tradition.

Perhaps for similar reasons — the "desire for openness of forms"; the "similarity of anxieties" — the ballad has been revitalised in certain branches of contemporary pop-culture. In the ballads by the singer, Nick Cave, who also has fans among the Croatian "pop public", the mentioned anxiety is present also as a consequence of reversal of the traditional model, making these ballads nearer to the popular *broadside* ballad tradition. The protagonists of the murders in Nick Cave's ballads are women, these ballads also being a female genre in the Anglophonic tradition. Instead of being victims, women are the murderers. Instead of familial "examples" and "cases" — one finds chance extra-familial mass murders which seem to be taking place against the backdrop of a *Pulp Fiction* or *Twin Peaks* setting. The sensationalist events in these ballads make it possible for us to identify in them the plot of *memorabilia* (cf. Jolles 1978:142-150; Ward 1998:180-181). Cave's *memorabilia ballads* narrate only the crime without the punishment (Cave 1997); while in the descriptions of the crimes it is not easy to find any anagogic sense whatsoever which would manage to elevate the misogynist descriptions of cruelty into the co-ordinates of the moral, as is otherwise achieved in the metaphysical poets of the post-modern grotesque (cf. Mužina 1987:136-138) within the framework of which Cave's poetics are situated. Unlike the self-identification of the female public with the heroines in the ballads, the reaction of Cave's audiences is withdrawal or, possibly, complicity (Romac *ibid.*:286).

We have touched on another interesting theme in the similarity of the mediaeval ethos of the ballad and contemporary quality which exceeds

the framework of this paper. However, whether the popularity of ballads in contemporary culture should be sought in "actual" affinities between the Middle Ages and the present, or in the post-modern inclination to recycling of the past, including mediaeval times, the ballad genre in the 20th century, too, still seems appropriate for expression of the experience of the paradox. Perhaps only the emphasis in reception — and interpretation — of the ballad has shifted. From the contradictions which have been identified in the family scenes to the identification of the paradox which lies at the essence of human existence (Lüthi 1970:196) — the one in which we live — and narrate — it is as if life is given meaning, but we do not know that meaning and do not even know if that existential situation is an authentic paradox or an absurd (Lüthi *ibid.*). But perhaps what is in question is the *same* Freudian *Familienroman* [family romance].

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PARADOKS "FAMILIJARNOSTI" USMENE BALADE: ISKUSTVO SUKOBA

SAŽETAK

Članak je zaključno poglavlje duljega rada (magisterija) kojemu je predmet odnos žanra usmene balade prema fenomenu obitelji. I u njemu se, kao i u radu, ističe kako je obitelj dominantna tema usmene balade i njezino tematsko distinktivno obilježje. No, na tragu sociološkoga pristupa i onih folklorističkih i književnoantropoloških pristupa koji su zainteresirani za spoznajni aspekt žanra, autorica ističe kako je obitelj istodobno i pripovjedna građa kojom tradicijski kazivači/ce izražavaju i svoje filozofske nedoumice što ih u njihovu svakodnevnom životu izazivaju ne samo sukob između individualnih i obiteljskih interesa nego i onaj sukob što proistječe iz sraza koji osjećaju da postoji između položaja pojedinca i drugih različitih središta moći (društvene, religijske itd.). Balada je tako u usmenoj baladi i tema, ali i kôd u značenju koji ovome terminu pripisuje društveno-epohalna semiotika njemačkoga sociologa N. Luhmanna. Osim toga, usmena je balada, posebice pak obiteljska balada, i žanr čiji protagonisti svijet razumijevaju gotovo isključivo putem obitelji i odnosne mreže *familijarnosti* (njem. Familiarismus). U tom se smislu autorica ne distancira ni od pokušaja nizozemskog teoretičara A. Jollesa, koji je, slijedeći tradiciju filozofskog apriorizma, različitim folklornim žanrovima — koje imenuje "jednostavnim oblicima" (njem. Einfache Formen) — pripisao različite kognitivne

interese koji da su čak bili i presudnima u doba nastanka folklornih žanrova, a koje danas prepoznajemo u žanrovskoj tematskoj specijalizaciji (jedan od tih interesa predstavlja i spomenuti "familiarizam" s tim što A. Jolles taj termin upotrebljava u opisu islandske sage, a ne balade, koja nije ušla u njegov inventar jednostavnih oblika).

Autorica prepoznaje kako se obitelji u usmenoj baladi proturječno vrednuje s obzirom da veliki dio analizirane građe (iz Matičinih "ženskih zbirki") otkriva sklonost instituciji obitelji dok se u značajnom broju pjesama protagonisti pokušavaju osloboditi centripetalne sile obitelji. Pokušava u tom temeljnom paradoksu, uočljivom na cjelini promatrane građe, ali i paradoksima prisutnima u pojedinačnim baladnim tipovima, odčitati i srednjovjekovni etos budući da se i postanak balade povezuje s kasnim srednjovjekovljem. Naposljetku, u zaključnim razmatranjima i vitalnost žanra u usmenoj tradiciji, ali i njezinu aktualnost u suvremenoj pisanoj i u popularnoj književnosti pokušava protumačiti "srodnošću" paradoksimi nekad i danas.

Ključne riječi: usmena balada, familijarnost, paradoks