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THE RIDDLE: AN EXAMPLE OF CIRCULATING WATER

A riddle from the Croatian Renaissance poem by Petar Hektorović, *Fishermen and Fishing Talk*, is compared in this paper with the riddle from the Vedic Hymn RV I 164. The riddle has typological similarity in that they deal with the theme of circulating water. The cosmogonic riddle, the metaphor and the annual cycle are also discussed in the text.

In the first part of the paper, a brief outline is given of the issues connected with the relationship between the riddle and other genres, as well as a short description of the literary-theoretical aspects of the metaphor. This is followed by excerpts and examples of cosmogonic riddles with the theme of circulating water and the annual cycle, presented through the image of the World Tree, in which such riddles are observed in the ritual context of archaic social structures. The final passages deal with examples from modern times.

Keywords: riddle, metaphor, myth

> *Ein Rätsel ist Reinentsprungenes. Auch*
> *Der Gesang Kaum darf es enthüllen.*
> (Friedrich Hölderlin, *Der Rhein*)

> *New grass coming*
>
> > *through oakleaf and pine needle*
> > *we'll plant a few more trees*
> > *and watch the night sky turn.*
> > (Gary Snyder, *The Years*)

Introduction

In dealing with the riddle we could conjure up a river of oral tradition which does not differentiate between originals and copies, where repetition is equally as original as the first presentation, and each reproduction is a

premiere (cf. Sloterdijk 1992:64). If Zagreb were a city on the Ganges, that would be understandable in itself, and I could sit on the bank of the river and put the question: Who wanders alone? And who will be born again? to which someone present might answer: The Sun wanders alone. The Moon will be born again (cf. Vajaseneyi-Saṃhita 23:45-46). Since Zagreb is a city on the Sava River, its course forces me to follow a relatively strict scholarly discourse by which I shall endeavour to describe some aspects of the manifestations of that archaic genre.

What drew me to the study of the riddle was the possibility that the genre could be linked to a broader contextual framework, and that its sense could be shown in interaction with other literary, linguistic, and even extra-linguistic structures.

Hermann Bausinger drew attention to the issue of the interaction between riddles and other genres in the text "Rätsel-Fragen" (Bausinger, *Rheinisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* s.a.:48-70). The question of the connection between the riddle and the tale (*Erzählung*) takes us back to the earliest period of human culture. The tale-telling elements of the riddle were insignificant, although they did often lead into the entirety of a tale, largely in mythic legends. That fact contributed to the riddle and the myth (*Rätsel und Mythos*) mutually defining each other. André Jolles expounded on this question in that sense, arguing that the myth was an answer containing a question, while the riddle was a question which demanded an answer (Jolles 1978:93). Taking issue with Jolles's explanation, Bausinger confirmed the connection between the tale and the riddle, but was, at the same time, sceptical of interpretations which tried to find the essence of early sources in conjecture about the most distant past. In the context of mythic legends, the riddle was used to unravel the sense of the world. This fact is confirmed by a certain number of riddles which are cosmogonic in character. However, according to Bausinger, the older stratum of riddles in diverse cultures are ritual riddles from the Rgveda, Arabic and Hebrew riddles — such as one finds noted down in the Bible, Greek collections of riddles and riddle/fairytales, (*Rätselmärchen*), and the verbal duels from the Edda — showing that only a few are of them are oriented towards interpretation of the world, to a mythic explanation of the world. The Biblical riddle put by Samson to the Philistines (Judges 14), concludes Bausinger, provides a basis for arguing that the solution of a certain number of archaic riddles required concrete knowledge, and not overall wisdom, and that they could not be connected with the myth as an explanation of the world. This would mean that the riddle requires context for its solution i.e. expansion of the tale which uncovers the circumstances under which the riddle was set and thus made possible its solution. On the basis of such examples, Bausinger confirms the connection between the story and the riddle, but that fact does not infer that the riddle derives from mythic legends or from tales. Moreover, it is impossible to determine which genre emerged first or had more significance. Such questions are similar to the one about what came first? the chicken or the egg? so the

author does not enter into interpretation of the initial sources (cf. Bausinger, 49-51).

Bausinger's description of the relationship between the joke and the riddle is an interesting one, and has formal similarities to Jolles's view of the relationship between the myth and the riddle. Bausinger argues that the joke is the narrative form nearest to the riddle — the riddle puts a question to which an answer has to be found, while, to the contrary, the joke is an answer which simultaneously contains a question i.e. the riddle. If the raising of the question in the joke is not recognised, then the joke remains incomprehensible (Bausinger, 55).

Bausinger is of the opinion that the significance of play and entertainment have been fairly much ignored in research connected with the riddle. Adopting Huizinga's definition of the game as an area of tension between freedom and necessity ("*Spannungsfeld von Freiheit und Bindung*"), he sees the possibility of including, in the concept of play, riddles whose solution is a matter of life and death (*Halslöserätser*), the agonistic moment of the duel, and the ordinary jest, and that their very mixture can best characterise the functional possibilities of the riddle (Bausinger, 66).

Riddles and the issues connected with them have been the theme of a large number of literary-historical, literary-theoretical and genealogical research projects, and I shall turn briefly to the literary theoretical issue of the metaphor, because I believe it is exceptionally important in understanding the nature of that genre.

In their work on the riddle, the majority of researchers into folklore linguistic forms have set their fundamental objective as formulation of its definition. This task necessarily developed the need to define and describe the relatively constant constitutive elements which make up the riddle, and thus determine the characteristics by which the genre is codified. Underlying such research is the intention to draw clear lines between the riddle and other linguistic structures in the form of question. This resulted in a division into "authentic" and "inauthentic" i.e. false riddles. The criteria for delineation was the metaphor — "authentic" riddles, or riddles in the narrow sense of the word, compare one object with another completely different object. In other words, the "authentic" riddle consists of two descriptions of a particular object — one of the descriptions being figurative, and the other literal.

Consequently, there is a metaphoric quality connected with the riddle. Since research was limited to the text of the riddle, metaphoric quality was interpreted by the theory of the trope. That means that the metaphor was observed outside the context of the totality of the discourse and its referential orientation, and was largely conceived as a shift in and expansion of the meanings of certain words. Following this terminology, the authentic riddle would have to be expressed in a stylistic figure which traditional poetics calls a figure of speech or a trope, because those stylistic

figures are formed by changing the fundamental, customary meaning of individual words (cf. Solar 1977:64-65). The basic assumption in that poetics is that the word is the bearer of meaning, while the entire theory of the trope and the figure of speech is based on the primacy of words. In a similar way, scholarly linguistic tradition links the meaning with the sign so that the metaphor in both cases is defined as a transferral of meaning from word to word, from symbol to symbol, which in the end leads to the comprehension of the metaphor as a mere ornament. This tradition is inherited from Aristotle, who connected the metaphor with a name or a word, and not with a discourse.

Paul Ricoeur expanded the classic theory of the metaphor which links meaning with the word, and allocated the metaphor the character of an utterance, creating the "discursive" theory of the metaphor. The metaphor as a discourse rests on predication, and, as a consequence, metaphoric nature would be that characteristic which places the verb *to be* as a copula between the symbol and the context, or between symbol and symbol. The verb *to be* copula connects the inner constitution of the sense of a particular discourse with the transcendent objective of the reference. The sense of a discourse is its internal organisation, while reference is its power to indicate extra-linguistic reality. In all discourses, there is a merger between sense and meaning (cf. Ricoeur 1981:8).

The verb *to be* copula stands on the border of different levels of reality — it creates the axis between the modelled object and the modelling object, which by analogous procedures link language and its reference point. It is interesting that one cannot speak of a identity relationship because the metaphorical *is* at the same time means *is not like* and *is like*, within which is concealed the ambiguity of language itself. It is important to point out the key role of the verb *to be* as a copula i.e. as a link in transmitting meaning, since, as Ricoeur argues, it is "the most intimate and the absolutely last place of the metaphor". That is neither a word, nor a sentence, nor even the discourse itself (cf. Ricoeur *ibid*.). This also explains the very mechanism of the riddle since it is the subject matter of riddle-solving by that principle — what is being decyphered is and is not, at the same time, like the question which has to be decyphered.

Two riddles from Hectorović's *Fishing...*

I shall expand this brief outline of the basic problems connected with consideration of the riddle by concrete examples from Croatian Renaissance literary heritage. The riddles in question are from Hektorović's poem *Fishermen and Fishing Talk.* Petar Hektorović came from the Hvar circle of Croatian 16th century writers. He was born in 1487 into a prominent noble family, most probably in Stari Grad on the island of Hvar. He was schooled in Split, where he received his initial Humanistic education, knowledge of the Latin language and philosophy. Hektorović would celebrate with great enthusiasm in his poem this city of famous people, particularly Marko Marulić, the father of Croatian literature. By general categorisation and by its superficial similarity, this work has its place among the output of Humanistic bucolic literature about fishing, which Jacopo Sannazzaro established as a genre in his *Fishing Eclogues* written in Latin, taking the *Fishermen* idyll attributed to Theocritus as its model. However, Hektorović's work is, in fact, an autochthonous work of art which has little in common with the Italian eclogue and its Classicist features of form. The authenticity of Hektorović's poem rests on the tradition of Croatian writers who utilised features from popular literary creativity. *Fishing...* also has its roots in this domestic tradition, where its real source lies, and we can regard Hektorović as the first Croatian folklorist (Čale 1974).

The first riddle is connected with the everyday life of two fishermen from the Adriatic island of Hvar, while the agonistic moment of the duel is connected with a jug of wine. Nikola has to solve Paskoj's riddle, and the prize is a "jug of muscat wine". Paskoj sets up the riddle with the characteristic introductory formula:

> (...)
> Can you figure out, tell me, do you know,
> But first think well before you give your answer;   120
> Someone somewhere bitterly complained
> That a strange misfortune befell him in his home,
> A rich man he was, with assets galore,
> But in his house he met his end;
> A band of brigands surrounded him,   125
> Threatening him with their weaponry;
> His house fled through the windows,
> He was left bound for he could not go in.
> What do you think now, could that be
> True, tell me, or is this a lie?   130
> (...)

Nikola replies:

<pre>
    That profit now shall I ensure
    And that drink, too, so listen if you will: 140
    Do you know who's rich with assets galore?
    This dentex fish, whom you gave no quarter!
    If you want to see that what I say is true,
    Come to count his scales, more glistening than silver!
    The sea's the home of fish, that you have seen,   145
    Not one of them can survive on land.
    To fish, those who surround them are brigands.
    All fishermen who catch them.
    The weapons which kill fish are these:
    Hooks on lines, and walls of grass, and wooden beaters, too,   150
    The windows, you should know, are holes in the net,
    Through which, when tightened, the sea rushes out.
    (...)
</pre>

This is a complex riddle with a series of surreal images which have to be placed in actual and logical sequence i.e. unravelled. The riddle is structured as a paradox: a rich man's house escaped through the windows, and he was left bound. The solution is arrived at through a decoding process by which the paradox is solved in a series of isomorphic equalisations: the rich man is a dentex fish, its house is the sea, and the windows are the apertures in the fishing net mesh. The riddle cannot be solved by logical deduction; instead a solution has to be arrived at through a code which uncovers the mechanism of equalisation on the diverse levels of reality.

This is, at the same time, an example of a metaphoric riddle in the strict sense of the trope theory: one object is compared with another completely different one; there are two descriptions of a particular object — one figurative, the other literal.

Analytic quality and logic are opposed by the analogical equalisation of the diverse levels of reality, while the unknown element of human reality is described as a function of the relationship with the fictional but better known area — the story.

In Hektorović's poem we also find the question of the genesis of water. By its external structure, the question does not seem to be similar to the classic riddle, although the agonistic charge of the circumstances is reminiscent of the verbal contest in possession of knowledge, such as is also found in other traditions.

The formula which introduced the question reads: *ča je toj prosim vas...* [How can it be, if you please, that there is some much water in the mountains?]. The formulated use of the query expressions by which the cosmogonic themes are brought into the dialogue is one of the features of what George Thompson, quoting Schmidt, calls *indoeuropäische Dichtersprache.*[1] One of the features of that "Indo-European poetic

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[1] Rüdiger Schmidt, *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in indogermanischer Zeit*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1967.

speech" was the use of the verbal root *prek-, [to ask] in the function of introducing a whole series of questions, as part of the verbal competition in knowledge. Diverse variants of the query formulae are confirmed in the Vedic, Avestan and Old Nordic traditions (for more on this see: Thompson 1997:23 passim).

One of the young friars gave an answer to the question from the traditional, Biblical and mediaeval perception of the Earth as a flat plane which floated in the sea, while his colleague who put the question had been expecting a scientific answer based on knowledge of the laws of physics. Here we have a confrontation between two diverse types of knowledge, two diverse "casuistics" — mythological and scientific, metaphoric and analytical. Paskoj describes the encounter with the Dominican friars on the *Solinska rika* (the Jadro River near Solin in Dalmatia). After a rich meal, the older friar puts the question on the origins of water. From the narrative aspect, this is an example of the direct incorporation of the words of others in one's own utterance:

> (...)
> Said he: Brothers, be sure, of much shall I speak,   323
> But pay good heed to my word!
> You see that river, swift and deep,
> Here where you're sitting, it's not too wide.
> It hasn't stop flowing since the world began —
> How do the mountains have so much water?
> If it filled all the fields and the mountains,
> By now it would be emptied, all gone into the sea,   330
> Not ever stopping for the smallest instant,
> Nor coming back — how can that be, I ask you?
> (...)

This question differs from Paskoj's riddle put to Nikola, because the answer does not require decoding of the paradoxical situation in which various levels of reality blend. The question is not metaphoric in the sense of the trope theory and no transference of meaning from one level of reality to another is required; instead an answer is needed which explains a physical and chemical process in Nature. One of the younger friars confuses the referential level of the question's orientation and starts solving it from the function of the relation derived from traditional, mediaeval- -Biblical conceptions, which is an attempt to employ what is rational but inaccurate, and an experiment with unproven interpretation:

> (...)
> Another, somewhat younger, said: If you want to know, 333
> As if reflected in a mirror, all shall I make clear.
> This Mother of ours, upon whom we walk, 335
> Whom we call Earth, has sea all around her;
> A host of nooks and crannies has she,
> Pebbles, dunes, limestone cracks and travertine,
> Through which the sea passes, and hides.
> Slowly filtering, it becomes fresh;
> Entering those hollows from above,
> It is set free, flowing into rivers,
> That's how water above comes to the sea,
> While other sea-water furtively enters,
> And that's why rivers never cease, 345
> Because of the sea which gives them its aid.
> If not for this order since the world began,
> Know that this river, and every other,
> Both large and small, flowing downhill
> Would be left empty, bereft of its water. 350
> (...)

Here one sees an inversion in the comprehension of the referential level: a direct, non-metaphoric question is answered with analogical equalisation in the province of the story. The answer to the question on the origins of water does not derive from the empirical, analytical observation of a natural process, but from the comprehension of the Earth as a flat area which floats in the sea. The unknown factor of reality is explained by the relationships which exist in the fictional area of mediaeval legends. To support his statement, the friar cites Solomon's saying, using it to conclude the "verdict" in the legend from which the answer to the riddle derives:

> (...)
> Solomon says that it's no different, 351
> And in these words he doth confirm it:
> Know that all rivers flow out from the sea
> And then from above flow back into it.
> (...)

The answer to the question — explaining the water cycle derived from the experiment — is given by the friar who asked the question. The form of his answer falls under scientific, analytical-empirical discourse. Before he answers, he analyses the explanation of the younger friar, pointing out the errors in his line of thought. His answer reads:

> (...)
> The truth shall I tell, naught else
> Doth make the river flow but the Sun's heat. 400
> (...)

The friar's statement relies on scientific experiment, and this section places Hektorović's work in the context of the penetration of the free thought brought by the Renaissance, through which the European spirit started to free itself of the mediaeval theological dogmatic framework:

(...)
If you know not the power of that heat,	403
But know you would, do as I say:	
Come, take a bottle (that's something you do know),	405
Either new or old, simply that's it whole,	
Then heat its base, and put the neck	
In a pail of water, sending the base into the sky	
And when you look closely, you'll see it's made	
The water rise from that bucket.	410

(...)

Varying the experiment once more, the older friar concludes the question concerning the origins of water:

(...)
Pour a little water on a tablet of stone	425
Where dogs don't come, who'll thirstily drink it	
Where the Sun burns down when there's a drought;	
You'll know how the heat raises the damp.	
If you linger a while, there'll be no more to see,	
Feeling down with its rays, the Sun will collect it,	430
It endlessly scoops up water from the sea	
It can always be found there, freshest of all.	
So make no mistake, because with its power	
It does so eternally, by day and by night,	
And when it's night here, elsewhere it is day,	435
Over all, the Sun's power shines without rest.	
When little by little it collects enough damp,	
Our region and others it covers with cloud,	
From which the rain falls, and the snow and the hail,	440
Sometimes in the garden, sometimes in the field,	
In the uplands the most, and then on the plains	
On the highest cliffs and the thickest mountains;	
And from that place the clear waters flow	
Through fast-rushing rivers to the salt sea below.	

(...)

These examples, among other, point to the ambiguity of language itself. The same question could be answered in two different ways — one answer deriving from the process of isomorphic transference onto a background of mediaeval comprehension, the other from an experimental process and from empirical observation.

The cosmogonic riddle in Vedic tradition

Monitoring the history of the question on the origin of water, we found a very old piece of writing on that theme. The "theory of rain" is mentioned in the strophes of the famous Vedic hymn-riddle (Ṛgveda I 164), whose analysis I shall present because of similarity to the scene from Hektorović's poem. However, before the actual analysis, something general should be said about archaic culture, particularly Vedic culture. I have adopted the description and analysis of Vedic culture from the texts about the Vedic

riddle of the *brahmodya* type, written by Tatyana Jakovlevna Elizarenkova and Vladimir Nikolayevich Toporov (1987). Their work is exceptionally important and represents something new in riddle research to date, because it regards the core issue of research to be the circumstances under which the riddle came about.

Cosmogonic myths and the rituals connected with them represent a repetition of the original act of God — the Creation of the Universe. Myth and ritual were the key institutions of archaic Humankind, and the function of the riddle in archaic societies was determined by just that relationship between myth and ritual. It can search for the meaning of the myth in the sense that knowledge determined by myth provides the solution, or it can also find it as a composite element in the narrative structure which we call the myth (as with the Sphinx riddle in the myth of Oedipus).

The riddle is the archetypal dialogical form which derives from ritual contests about the nature of the Cosmos. In its oldest stratum, it puts ontological questions about its origins and hierarchy. The Vedic tradition maintains just those original, ritual circumstances in which the riddles came into being and were institutionalised, very clearly showing the connection between the riddle, the myth and ritual.

Radoslav Katičić presented the Vedic ritual in the context of the division of Vedic literature (1973). In the Vedic tradition, a great sacrifice was offered up by four priests, while, later, each one of them had his assistants. They were called *Hotr, Udgtatr, Adhvaryu* and *Brahman.* In early times, when the ritual was simpler, the *Hotr* was the main priest and, probably, the only one. He alone poured the sacrificial offering into the flames. This is seen from his name which means *the one who pours*. When making the sacrifice, he uttered ritual strophes. In later times, only the final strophe remained. Thus, in the era of developed Brahmanism, the *hotr* was the priest who recited the ritual strophes (*rc*). With time, there was a collection of such strophes for his use: *Rksamhita. Udgatr* means *the singer* and he was the priest who sang the ritual songs during sacrifice (*saman*). Again, with time a collection of such tunes was accumulated for his use: *Samasamhita.* The *Adhvaryu* was the priest who carried out the ritual acts. In so doing, he touched the objects charged with supernatural forces during the course of the ritual. In order to protect himself, he muttered prose sayings (*yajus*), which shielded him from danger. And for his needs, too, a collection of such sayings developed: the *Yajuhsamhita* (Katičić 1973:70).

Thus the three Vedas emerged which were later joined by theoretical texts. Subsequently, yet one more *Samhita* strophe attained the repute of a Vedic text. It was a wizard collection (*Atharvanas*) and largely contained strophes of popular wizardry. That is why it is called the *Atharvasamhita.* When it, too, entered into Vedic literature, in order to maintain the

symmetrical nature of the system it was included as a text of the *Brahman*, the priest who had to oversee the trio mentioned and to correct their mistakes so that the sacrifice would not remain futile, or even turn against the one who offered it up. For that reason, he was considered to be the healer of the sacrifice, had to know all three Veda, while the *Atharvaveda* was shown as his text because of the system, quite mistakenly according to Katičić.

The Vedic mantra are preserved in the collection in such a way that each collection (*Samhita*) contains only mantra of the same type. The strophes are preserved in two collections: the *Rksamhita* and the *Atharvasamhita*, which are songs and prose sayings with one *Samasamhita* and one *Yajuhsamhita* each. Each of these collections has added *Brahmanas* with *Vedanta*. All the *Samhita* together with their *Brahmanas* comprise one Veda. There are thus four of them in all and each takes its name from its mantra collections: *Rgveda*, *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda* (Katičić 1973:70).

The Vedic model of the world rests on the conviction that the sense of the world is enclosed within it, in its interior. This sense can be uncovered by the solution of riddles. The uncovered sense is always new and unique and is not present in the part of the riddle which makes up the question i.e. it cannot be uncovered by a specific procedure, typical for riddles. The disclosure and proclamation of that sense is always something supernatural, it is always a miracle, accessible only to the cognoscenti of supreme wisdom. The Vedic riddle is put together in such a way that it is never a matter of logical tautology between the question and the answer. While the part of the riddle which consists of the question always maintains its direct and profane sense — which means that it is ambiguous — the answer removes such sense and directs the person unravelling the riddle towards the most profound and sacral meaning, which is connected with the highest values of the world. The riddle-solver is lead primarily towards the genesis of the world, the composition and organisation of its parts, towards its connection with human beings, in other words, towards what is confirmed and proven in the fundamental annual ritual in the specific tradition.

The meanings revealed in the answer to the riddles incline to be proper nouns (*Sky, Sun, Moon, Year, Human Being*, etc.), without meaning in general the sky or a human being, but merely the particular sky or the particular human being coming into being here and now i.e. for the first time in the act of Creation.

Only outside that situation under conditions of desacralised existence do the linguistics signs mentioned become indicators of the species i.e. general nouns.

For the answer to the riddle to demonstrate new, unrepeatable sense, the question has to be put in a fully defined manner. First of all, the question must not relate to the domain of the profane and everyday —

— although the material in the question posed may, and often does, refer to everyday life. Quite to the contrary, the question itself must be a unique one about the highest values of the world, which are a composite part of a series of hierarchically organised questions drawing, in their integrity, on the meaningful structure of the mytho-poetic model of the world.

The rule in the Vedic tradition, and many other archaic traditions, is that any question at all can be posed, but that an inappropriate question may not be answered — the riddle does not assume any answer whatsoever, but instead a particular answer which is limited to the sphere of sacral meaning. The answer to the riddle is always a revelation of something new — unlike what is contained in the riddle, the tautology does not touch on the highest sacral meaning but is limited exclusively to the external level of the riddle structure (Elizarenkova, Toporov 1987:40-41).

Brahmodya or *brahmavadya* means discussion about the *bráhman* i.e. about the most elevated principle from whose reification the world and everything that exists in it was created. (In order to avoid possible terminological confusion later in the text, it should be pointed out here that the word *brahman* has diverse meanings, depending on the accent: the word *brahmán* means a priest, while *bráhman* denotes the Vedic saying which embodies the highest principle of the cosmic order). This is a very simplified definition of the word *bráhman*. It is an enigma of sorts which has undergone numerous interpretations whose amplification has invoked arguments among Indologists. The Croatian Indologist, Mislav Ježić (1989:74) believes that the Greek word *mythos,* meaning a poetic word or speech, is called *bráhman* among the Vedic Aryans. It is comprehended as an invocation: a powerful insight (*dhí*) into truth (*ŕta*, *satya*). In his entry on this matter, Ježić mentions the opinion of the German Indologist, Paul Thieme, whom he regards as having deduced the most authoritative contextual semantic analysis of the word. Thieme concluded that in the *Rksamhita* it means formation, poetic formation (*Formung, dichterische Formulierung*), while in the *Brahmanas* it means formulation of truth (*Wahrheitsformulierung*).[2] In his book of *Rgveda* hymns, Ježić (1987:104) also gives the opinions of other Indologists in the relevant entry, including Luis Renou's interesting interpretation. He understood *bráhman* as a "puzzle" (*forme de pensée à énigme*). Ježić also mentions Thieme's expanded explanation which interprets *bráhman* as arduous effort of the spirit on artistic and linguistic stylisation, which is located between insight (*dhí*) and utterance (*ukthá*).[3]

The *brahmodya* represents the verbal part of the ritual, which is formed in a dialogical structure of questions and answers. The riddle and its solution alternate, and their theme is the structure of the Cosmos. *Brahmodya* is also the source of the broad class of texts which can be

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[2] Paul Thieme, *Brahman*, ZDMG 102, N.F. 27, 1952, 91-129.

[3] Luis Renou, *Sur la notion de "brahman"*, Journal Asiatique, Paris 1949.

found in various archaic cultures, but which have no riddle form i.e. they are not formed in that genre. These are texts which almost fully preserve a particular archetype, whose essential feature is a dialogue on cosmogonic themes — with a temporal sequence of events from the genesis of the Cosmos out of chaos to the appearance of human beings and social institutions. The texts are in the form of questions and answers, they have a numerical approach to the organisation of the texts and some other characteristics such as the equalisation of parts of the body and the elements of the world, linked with the tale of the creation of the original "Man" — *Purusha*. Here the Original Being is in question, called "Man" only in the metaphorical sense, while human beings are in some way his image in micro.

The objects providing the solutions to the riddles, which go on to serve as elements forming the basis upon which new questions are created, belong to the basic elements of the Vedic Cosmos: *Sky*, *Earth*, *Interspace*, *Sun*, *Moon*, *Fire*, *the umbilicus of the Cosmos*, *Purusha*, *Brahman*, *the altar*, *sacrifice*, *Soma* [potions], *speech*, and many others. Built in to a specific order of creation, they show the diachronic aspect of the Vedic Cosmos, from the naturo-cosmogonical to the culturo-anthropological.

This path repeats the chain of riddles which are strung along one after the other in such a way that the answer to the previous question leads to the putting of a new one i.e. the answer to the question in the first riddle becomes the question in the second one. The chain is reminiscent of the chain of cumulative fairy tales which emerged on the basis of the *koleda*. The *koleda* also speak of the transition from the Old into the New Year and represent a type of verbal duel between questions and answers, unravelling and solving conundrums. However, unlike the archaic riddles, the *koleda* are devoted to everyday themes, or they are comic variants or travesties of the original cosmogonic riddles (Elizarenkova, Toporov 1987:50).

The dialogical structure of the *brahmodya*, the alternation of questions and answers, the inversion of participants in such dialogues — — the question is commenced by the *Brahmán*, is answered by the *Hotr*, then the *Hotr* asks a question, the *Brahmán* answers him, and so on — — clearly indicates that what we have here is an archaic ritual with a system of binary opposition and an archaic variant of human society as its backdrop, which assumes a dual type of social organisation. The fundamental organisation of such a society rests on the organisation and control of the exchange of "goods, women and words". That exchange warrants the necessary sphere of knowledge and information about the world and, at the same time, confirms its integrity and correctness as against what it was "at the outset". In this context, the *brahmodya* must be observed as the conceptual nucleus of the ritual which underlies it (Elizarenkova, Toporov 1987:48). These authors concluded that the interpretation of the archaic ritual in the terms of Claude Lévi-Strauss's

structural anthropology, indicating a structure of the basic mechanism of social control: knowledge, kinsmanship (gene), and economic goods (cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss 1989:291).

The reason for performance of the ritual is the fact that the world is descending into chaos, and the function and task of the ritual is to integrate the Cosmos. The ritual is located in spatial and temporal conditions which reproduce the situation of Creation — the one which happened at the very beginning — i.e. before the beginning of the New Year and in the very centre — the umbilicus of the Cosmos — which is marked by the World Tree or the *bráhman*. The priest conducting the sacrificial ritual utters a type of sacral text containing equalising cosmological elements over the body parts of the sacrifice — man, horse, and so on, as the case may be. One of the sacrificial priests puts a riddle about the elements of the Cosmos, or its image (the World Tree, the *bráhman*), and in so doing observes the order of the creation of those elements and the order of their meaning, while the other priest, or several of them, give the answer. The ritual is concluded by pointing to the *bráhman* or the World Tree and to images of the re-integrated Cosmos (Elizarenkova, Toporov 1987:65).

It is important to note that the central part of the ritual consists of a series of equalisations in which a series of riddles is in the background. The riddles have the function of representing the isomorphisms of the microcosm and the macrocosm, the world and the sacrifice.

The *brahmodya* is of exceptional importance in study of the historical fate of the riddle and its archaic structure. One of the reasons is that the *brahmodya* reveals with full clarity and detail the development and structure of the riddle genre, thanks to knowledge of the circumstances which lie outside it i.e. because it can be connected with a relatively well-
-known context, the ritual whose purpose was to repeat the initial event —
— the creation of the Cosmos — and, in that way, to re-integrate it once more from chaos.

It is in that ritual/mythic context that one can interpret the fragments of the famous Vedic hymn-riddle, *Rgveda I*, 164. Commentators on the hymn are not even in agreement on whether these are riddles or not. Norman Brown, from whom I have adopted the translation and interpretation (Brown 1978), claims that riddles are not what is involved here, but rather *a highly figurative and allusive presentation of ideas*. The only "authentic" ritual riddle — the *brahmodya* — is found in Strophes 34 to 35, while two other strophes (16 and 48) are formed as quasi-riddles, *using a riddle-like form of statement*.

These questions deal with the external form of the utterance and can develop into academic discussions on the nature of a specific genre. Looked at from the aspect of the discursive theory of the metaphor, all metaphors are a riddle in some way or another. In any case, what makes them similar is the mechanism of meaning transfer to different levels of

actuality. Be that as it may, riddle or not, the theory of the origin of water is described in the 7th, 47th, 51st and 52nd strophe of that hymn, and it is very similar, typologically, with the theory of the circulating water in Hektorović's poem.

In the seventh strophe the opinion is expressed that while the Sun is still hidden, before it appears from the ocean, cows with coverings (a metaphor for the Sun's rays) drink water with their hoofs:

> 7. Let him here (*ihá*) who really knows proclaim where the place of that
>   benign bird (the Sun) was located. From his head cows (the rays)
>   draw milk; when wearing a covering they drank water with the foot.

It is not explained in this strophe what it is that covers the cows. But in the 47th strophe, one learns that the covering is of water: "clothed in the Waters, fly up to the sky", and in the sky the cows draw milk from the Sun's head, as we learn in the 7th strophe, and in this way descend from the sky to the Earth. The Waters which now falls to the Earth are metaphorically referred to as milk, since this is the sustaining rain, which, as is said in the 47th strophe, causes the Earth to be moistened with fatness. In that strophe, there is an alteration of the metaphor describing the Sun's rays. It becomes "yellow birds":

47. The yellow birds (light rays) clothed in the Waters, fly up along the dark path to the sky. They have returned from the seat of cosmic order. The earth is moistened with fatness.

In the 51st strophe, the Vedic poet expands the theory of rain, stating that the Waters ascend into the sky and descend to the Earth at regular intervals throughout the year and continue to link that natural process with the sacrifice, concluding that just as rain clouds revive the Earth, so, too, does the flame (the sacrifice) revive the sky. The sacrificial flames revive the sky because the act of sacrifice causes the Sun to rise and to create rain clouds:

51. The same amount of water ascends and descends with the days (that is, throughout the year). While the rain clouds vivify the earth, the flames (of the sacrifice) vivify the sky.

In the 52nd strophe which is the closing strophe of the hymn, the poet calls on the help of the great heavenly bird (the Sun) full of life-giving moisture, which brings the delight of rain:

52. The great heavenly bird (the Sun) with beautiful wings, the lovely embryo of the waters and of the plants, which brings delight straight to us with the rains and is full of life-giving moisture — — him I invoke for help.

These examples demonstrate the blending of the cognitive levels: the natural process is described in mythic images which can be transferred to the scientific discourse, similar to the experiment from Hektorović's poem.

The World Tree — the year

Deduction of the annual cycle was one of the key moments in the development of human culture. Its basic notion is the picture of the World Tree, the cosmic tree (*arbor mundi*). That theme is found in the hymn--riddle, whose nucleus represents just that conundrum about the World Tree by which the annual cycle is established.

20. Two birds, inseparable companions, embrace the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit; the other looks without eating.

21. Here, where the birds (priests) in conclave flawlessly laud their portion of immorality, the mighty herdsman of the whole world, the wise one (Agni) has entered me, the simpleton.

22. That tree on which the birds that eat the sweet fruit all light and breed — no one eats the sweet fruit at its tip, they say, who does not know the father.

This riddle has undergone numerous, very diverse, interpretations. It can be said with certainty that it presents the World Tree scheme with the characteristics symbolic of the whole and its parts, such as can be found in the texts of other traditions. The riddle conjures up the tree on which two birds are sitting. In a way, they are opposed to one another. Eating the

sweet fruit indicates certain benefit, the pragmatic aspect, and the condition of knowing the father (although unclear) indicates the possibility of realising that benefit. That is how the picture of the World Tree was explained by Elizarenkova and Toporov (1987:61). They added that in the diverse texts with the Cosmic Tree motif, where that image forms the various aspects of the Cosmic Order, particularly the structure of time, the picture of the pair of birds is often correlated with the Sun and the Moon which determine the structure of day and night, and of the entire annual cycle.

It is interesting that the same hymn contains a strophe in which the year is very clearly deciphered (11-14, 48):

> 11. Never does the twelve spoken wheel of the *rtá* wear out as it keeps
>   on revolving over the sky. Seven hundred and twenty sons in pairs,
>   O Agni, rest on it.

(The wheel is the year; the twelve spokes are the months; the 720 sons in pairs are the days and nights).

> 48. Twelve are the fellies (parts of the felly); the wheel is single; there
>   are three halves (parts of the nave). Who has comprehended this? On
>   it are set together 360 peg-like unwobbling [spokes].

(The wheel is the year, the twelve parts of the felly are the months; the three parts of the nave are the seasons, namely spring, summer and autumn. The 360 peg-like spokes are the days and nights) (Brown 1978).

These examples indicate the isofunctional Cosmic Tree with the theme of time. The tree is identical to the year and represents its image, it is the symbolic expression of the mytho-poetic time and place continuum (the world throughout the year).

Two of the most important characteristics of the Vedic riddle-like *brahmodya* are: one is a series of riddles with cosmological content, while the other is its connection with the New Year (which means a new natural and economic cycle, a new Sun, and a new harvest).

Similar schemes of the World Tree are found in the texts and art works of other traditions. It has also been preserved among some European peoples in the pagan stratum of their cultures, seen in the numerous riddles about the structure of time in which the year is interpreted as a Tree (piece of wood or a beam) with bird nests. The following are a number of Croatian riddles about the year from Marijan Vuković's collection (1890).

> Twelve nests, three hundred eagles and more, and one egg laid.
>
> I am a tree with twelve branches, each branch has three nests, each nest has seven birds.
>
> A dish of yew-wood, from it protrude twelve forked branches, from each forked branch four ribbons.
>
> A cluster of purple willow with twelve stalks, on each stalk — four small nests, in each small nest — seven chicks.

Croatian scholars, notably the linguist, Radoslav Katičić (1987, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1991a, 1991b) and the ethnologist, Vitomir Belaj (1988), have engaged in the unravelling of puzzling Slavic folklore tests containing the traces of early myths. The result of such research has been the reconstruction of the proto-Slavic myth of fertility, which has the World Tree as its symbol.

The picture of the proto-Slavic variants of the World Tree iconically present the story of the conflict between Perun, the God of Thunder, and Veles, or Volos, the Ruler of the Netherworld. The simplest explanation of the image of the World Tree would be that it manifests the entire world conceived in the image of a tree. The crown of the tree represents that part of the world in which the celestial deities live and act, this world being ruled by Perun, the God of Thunder. The tree trunk is the world of mortals, while the roots are the Netherworld of the dead (and the Ktonic deities), whose ruler is Veles (Katičić 1991b:37; Belaj 1998:238). The myth of the cosmic conflict between Perun and Veles is reconstructed from fragments of the folklore texts of the various Slavic peoples, with comparisons added from other Indo-European traditions, in which the battles between the God of Thunder, the Celestial Father and the Snake or the Dragon are recounted.

This is the basic image of the World Tree which is supplemented by the myth of George the Green [*Zeleni Juraj*] in which the basis of the story is the incestuous affair between Juraj, who is Perun's lost son, and his sister Mare, Perun's daughter. Juraj journeys from Veles's netherworld to Perun's court, located in the crown of the World Tree i.e. the hero moves from the roots — the home of the Snake God who rules over wealth, its nest being in a hollow in the tree, beneath the crown — towards Perun's seat (cf. Katičić 1989b:59). His journey is presented through the annual cycle which begins in Spring, when Juraj's emergence from the Netherworld awakens vegetation, and ends with the death of Juraj and Mare.

Work on reconstruction of the myth was initiated by the Russian philologists, Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov and Vladimir Nikolayevich Toporov.[4] They showed that the myth about the conflict between the

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[4] Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov and Vladimir Nikolayevich Toporov: *Slavjanskie jazykovje modeliruöčie semiotičeskie sistemy*, Moscow, 1965; Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov and Vladimir Nikolayevich Toporov: *Issledovanija v oblasti slavjanskih drevnostej*, Moscow, 1974.

Slavic variant of the Celestial Father and the Snake/Dragon was firmly rooted in Indo-European legend, with particularly significant parallels with Vedic texts (Belaj 1998:76). They tried to uncover the precursors of proto-Slavic pagan rituals connected with the cosmic conflict myth found in the St. George's Day customs, for example, in the Croatian George the Green — St. George who fought the Dragon is interpreted as a replacement for Perun — in the rain-making customs (*dodole*, *prporuše*) and in the custom of burning the Yule Log at Christmas time (the log representing the Snake from the Netherworld) (Belaj 1998:87).

In his analysis, Radoslav Katičić reconstructed the proto-Slavic myth of fertility linked with the personage of St. George, amending and expanding the conclusion reached by Ivanov and Toporov. They interpreted Juraj as a replacement for Perun, while Katičić showed that Juraj was Perun's lost son, and on that basis reconstructed the proto-Slavic myth by expanding it with the incest motif (cf. Belaj 1998:325). Vitomir Belaj enriched Katičić's philological analysis with ethnographic material from Croatian, Slavic and other traditions, composing the material in his book *Hod kroz godinu* in such a way that the reconstruction of the proto--Slavic fertility myth follows the customs throughout their annual cycle.[5]

The typological similarity of the description of the water cycle from Hektorović's poem and the Vedic hymn shows the superficiality of entrenched opinions on the essential and insurmountable differences in metaphorical-mythic and analytical-discursive opinions, between the mythic and scientific world. Jurij M. Lotman and Boris A. Uspenski (1979:382) have already pointed to the ongoing overall human striving for knowledge and comprehension: Preventing development of the logical-syllogistical opinion, the "language of proper nouns" i.e. the nominal type of semiosis and the mythic thought connected with it, prompted the capability of establishing sameness, analogy and equivalence. Just as, for example, the bearer of mythic awareness created a

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[5] In the Afterword to his very interesting book, Belaj gave the following summary of the Juraj myth:

"He was born on New Year (*Velja noć* [Great Night]) to a highly-placed deity, the Night God (on the proto-Slavic level, to the God of Thunder, to Perun) and his wife the Sun, as the Young King (the Young King, or *Božić* [Little God]); on the very same day he was kidnapped by the followers of the God of the Netherworld and taken off to the world of the dead, from where he returned in the guise of a horse, on St. George's Day, as Juraj and unrecognised, he wooed his own sister; on Midsummer, St. John's Day, he married her as John and — in keeping with the Moon's fickle meaning — was untrue to her so that, in the end, she killed him. The murder of the greatest god's son was also understood as a sacrifice for renewal of the entire Cosmos. After her brother's/lover's death, Juraj's sister, the young, innocent virgin Mara, would transform into the cruel old Morana, and a similar fate would befall her at the end of the year. With the renewal of the order of time at the New Year, the whole story starts again from the beginning. It has been established that this myth, whose elements can be monitored back far into ancient proto-Indian times, probably did not have a uniform text. Admittedly, this was a myth whose content was familiar, however, it was textually implemented at individual festivities, describing only individual aspects of its content" (Belaj 1998:349).

typical mythic model by which the Cosmos, society, and the human body are experienced as isomorphic worlds — the isomorphism could extend as far as establishing similarity between the individual planets, minerals, plants, social functions and parts of the human body — then in this aspect itself, it built upon the idea of isomorphism, one of the leading concepts of both contemporary mathematics and science as a whole.

A brief excursion into the modern

It seems to me that the traces of the poetic preoccupation of the early poet--visionaries can be found in an altered form in modern and contemporary thought and poetry, which ultimately desacralised the myth or even tried to establish the lost connection with the sacral.

In *Zarathrustra* (Part Three, Chapter: *Vom Gesicht und Räthsel*), Nietzsche expressed his thought which it is the most difficult to comprehend — the idea of eternal return to the equal (*ewige Widerkher*), which indicates the cyclical unity of time and space — in the form of a riddle about paths which cross at a door called the "Instant" (*Augenblick*) i.e. about the directions which intersect in one point and move into Infinity in opposite directions — vertically and horizontally. Here, too, the emphasis is on the agonistic instant of the duel: Either you or me, says Zarathustra to the dwarf to whom he puts the question about movement forward in a horizontal direction and the possibility of the encounter of two directions in one point. The dwarf answers the question as follows:

> *Alles Gerade lügt, murmelte verächtlich der Zwerg. Alle Wahrheit ist krumm, die Zeit ist ein Kreis* (Nietzsche 1967-1977 and 1988:200).

> [Everything straight, lies, contemptuously muttered the dwarf. All truth is crooked, and time is a circle.]

However, Zarathustra puts the question about the intersection of the directions if we move backwards in a horizontal direction:

> *Muss nicht, was laufen kann von allen Dingen, schon einmal dise Gasse gelaufen sein? Muss nicht, was geschehen kann von allen Dingen schon einmal geschehen, gethan, vorü bergelaufen sein?*

> *Und wenn Alles schon dagewesen ist: was hältst du Zwerg von diesem Augenblick? Muss auch dieser Thorweg nicht schon — — dagewesen sein?*
>
> *(...)*
>
> *— müssen wir nicht alle schon dagewesen sein?*
>
> *— Und wiederkommen und in jener anderen Gasse laufen, hinaus, vor uns, in dieser langen schaurigen Gasse — müssen wir nicht ewig wiederkommen?* (Nietzsche 1967-1977 and 1988:200).

> [Should not everything in the world which can run, already have run the whole length of this path? Has not everything in the world which could happen, already happened once, completed, past?
>
> And if everything has already been once: what do you think, Dwarf, of this Instant?
>
> Has not this door once been already?
>
> (...)
>
> — Have not all of us once been already?
>
> — And won't we come again, and race along that other path, outwards, in front of us, that long eerie street — won't we come back eternally?]

Zarathustra's second question was left without an answer, while the eerie empty street was confirmed by Cioran's desacralisation of the act of Creation itself.

There is a sharpened anticlimax in the stance to date towards the sacral in the fragment *Impoverishment: a stimulus for the spirit* in the chapter called *Surrendering*, since the tension of the conflict in revealing the secret does not float in the atmosphere, there is no new and unrepeatable meaning emerging from the tension, which is located outside each of the rules established earlier, nor does the Spirit of God float on the waters. The "cheated" cognitive subject responds to deception with irony:

> To wander through the city begging small change from people, or to wait for an answer from cosmic silence — is more than similar. Miserliness has come to rule over souls and matter. Let the Devil take such a stingy existence! It accumulates money and secrets: banknotes are as inaccessible as the depth of the Unknown. But, who knows? perhaps one day the Unknown shall reveal itself to someone; (Ciroan, 1979:222).

The hope is treated with irony since:

> No fatherly principle whatsoever kept vigil over the creation of the world: only — buried ewers: Harpagon in the role of the Creator, as the Almighty Miser and bearer of the secret. It was he who sowed in you the fear of tomorrow: one should not be at all surprised that religion itself is a form of that fear (Cioran 1979:223).

We can oppose this anticlimax — in which Cioran seems to have broken Harpagon's pitcher and found that no treasure hidden in it — to the fragments of poetic expression which are the motto of this paper.

The purest element which emerges is the riddle. And the poem hardly dares to reveal it, wrote Friedrich Hölderlin, referring to the sublime vision which precedes each utterance, to the greatest secret which barely touches the power itself of poetic formation, calling on the feeling of sanctity and veneration which we also encounter in the very earliest sacral poetry.

Gary Snyder, the contemporary American poet of the Beat Generation, relies on the extremely archaic, mythic stratum, like Hölderlin and Cioran, but he sees it with very different eyes. His poetic vocabulary consists of elementary natural objects, reminiscent of the vocabulary of mythic sacral poetry: grass, trees, the sky, and this procedure is frequent in other poems also in which the Earth, stone, mushrooms, rocks, and forests are mentioned. It is as though they adopt in some way the material of the early poet-visionaries, while directing a completely fresh gaze at it. I would venture to say, playing with words, that Snyder converts the mythological view of the cosmic order into the ecological, as seen in his verse on the planting of trees. The last verse — in which the view of the circular movement of celestial bodies directs us to the concept of the circular course of time — also links us with the mythic stratum. When Snyder adopts the archaic layer of poetic expression, he does not speak from *ressentiment* which incurs a outburst of rage, nor does he write intoxicated with mystery. His poem calmly accepts the life cycle. So it would seem to be appropriate to repeat his verse:

New grass coming

Through oakleaf and pine needle
We'll plant a few more trees
And watch the night sky turn.
(Gary Snyder, The Years)

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ZAGONETKA: PRIMJER KRUŽENJA VODA

SAŽETAK

U ovom se radu uspoređuje zagonetka iz hrvatskog renesansnog spjeva Petra Hektorovića *Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje* sa zagonetkom iz vedske himne RV I 164. One su tipološki slične po tome što kao temu obrađuju ciklus kruženja voda. U tekstu se govori i o kozmogonijskoj zagonetki, metafori te o temi godišnjeg ciklusa.

U prvom je dijelu rada dat kratak obris problema vezanih uz odnos zagonetke i drugih žanrova kao i kratak opis književnoteorijskog problema metafore. Slijede odlomci s primjerima kozmogonijskih zagonetaka s temom kruženja voda i godišnjeg ciklusa, predočenog slikom svjetskog drveta, u kojima se takve zagonetke promatraju u obrednom kontekstu arhajske društvene strukture. U zadnjem se odjeljku razmatraju primjeri iz novovjeke tradicije.

Ključne riječi: zagonetka, metafora, mit