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**"THE MIRACLE" AS A LITERARY
DESTINATION (INTERSECTION)
IN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TWO
WORLDS, THE NATURAL
AND THE SUPERNATURAL,
IN THE BIOGRAPHIES OF THE 18TH
AND 19TH CENTURY SAINTS
IN CROATIAN LITERATURE**

The biographies of the saints, as examples and models for imitation, represent exciting, edifying, and entertaining texts intended for all the social strata. Imitation is the final degree in the practice of lessons in piety: *legere, credere, docere, imitare* (to read, to believe, to edify, to imitate).

The present is not without ambiguity, since eternity is reflected within it. Everyday life assumes value in the very fact of how much eternity it contains, meaning *the fear of God and love for God*, and, consequently, the life here and now is a transitional form of life, the battlefield for the future i.e. for eternal life.

The lives of the saints unfold in the cleft and struggle between the two worlds: members of Humankind live in this world so as to confirm their rightful place in the other, sublime world, the afterlife. The lives of the saints emerged from the belief that both worlds are in close, mutual permeation. Miracles arose as a literary form of communication between the two firmly connected worlds: the physical and the metaphysical; we could say that a miracle takes place when nothing but a miracle remains, as a sudden paradoxical incision of the supernatural into the natural world.

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In his brilliant research into mediaeval culture presented in the book *Problemi narodne kulture u srednjem veku* [The Issues of Popular Culture

in the Middle Ages], Aron Gurevič, among other, gave the following definition of saints:

The saint is the most popular hero of mediaeval society, his feat is the most sublime that can be performed on Earth. (...) However, at the same time, the saints had to meet the comprehensive and irresistible demand for miracles. Without fail and always, the saint was a miracle-maker, a healer, capable of delivering his adherents from natural and social temptations (Gurevič 1987:76) [Emphasis D. Z.].

Particularly during the 18th century, the immeasurable nature of the pain and suffering endured by the saints i.e. the future saints, was emphasised in the sermons about them and in their biographies. Analysing the legends, André Jolles wrote:

Good and Evil can be evaluated, but not measured. They become measurable only when they are embodied in a saint in the form of active virtues, in the criminal in the form of punishable guilt. Only when we have seen them in this way in people, in their measurable independence, are we able to separate them from the ones who bear them: the saint and the criminal are thus people in which Good and Evil are reified in a particular way (Jolles 1978:30).

According to the claim of a contemporary historian, as cited by Aron Gurevič, the cult of the saints and relics was imposed on the Church by common believers. The popular influence was decisive and determined the stance of the clergy towards miracles. Members of the priesthood did, from time to time, speak out against the excessive proliferation of the cults of the saints and relics, seeing it as a renewal of pagan idol worship (Gurevič 1987:77, 79).

Remaining within the bounds of hagiography analysis, we can speak of the fact that the process of adaptation of religion to the needs of the masses was under the control of the Church: the saint legends had their origins in folklore, and received their final form in the writing of ecclesiastics (Gurevič 1987:131).

In the biographies of the saints and in the exempla which preached about the miracles performed during life and after the saint's death (the exempla appeared both in the descriptions of the saint's life and in sermons about that saint, as an example to be followed by all the faithful), the saint was "in the sense of form, imitable" (Jolles 1978:31). Dialogues were not only conducted on the level of the protagonists of earthly life but, in a completely natural way and on an equal footing, took place between people in this world and those in the afterlife. Communication was lively in both directions, as if on an open, permanent radio link. There is also an example of written exchange between the grave and the afterlife: the living put questions and received answers at the same place in which, as if in a post box, they had left a letter beside the deceased who answered, also in writing.

Holiness and the emanation of holiness is as incapable of being demonstrated as God is; holiness is a mystery and a miracle which is confirmed by the aid of a miracle which occurs through the intervention of God in the activities of the saints in everyday life. The most profound message: *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth* (Exodus 20, 4), also instructs about the impossibility of demonstrating the undemonstrable.

It was in popular literary texts, as well as in secular texts, that the mediaeval worldview was maintained, as it can be said to have persisted until the present day, parallelly with the life and trends in art literature. In the foreword to the *Srednjevjekovni imaginarij* [The Realm of Mediaeval Imaginings], as well as in the first essay in his book, Jacques Le Goff advocates the idea of a protracted mediaeval period, whose basic structure evolved only slowly from the 3rd to the 19th century (Le Goff 1993:27-32).

During the Middle Ages there was a belief in the close connection between this world and the next, so the frequent statements and sermons about the crossing over from one world into the other are not surprising. Not only did everyone accept the existence of two worlds, it was also believed that they were closely intertwined (Holdsworth 1963:No. 163).

Hilarion Gašparoti (1714-1762) in *Žitku sv. Heme vdovice* [The Life of St. Hema the Widow] in the book *Cvet sveteh (...)* [The Flower of the Saints (...)] writes about her miracles and miraculous activity and her intercession after death, invoking the authority of a source:

We will see only some of the miracles here in Bolland.¹

In one of a series of miracles connected with St. Hema, we find the detailed fable of secretive nocturnal appointments and searches, which are also found in the sphere of popular and trivial literature (in mass literature): the living and the dead are closely linked, the two worlds are reconciled and act towards the same objective; graves open, iron covers move of their own volition, the dead rise up and speak with the living, it is night, the netherworld, candles burn, the dead are aware ahead of time of the reason for the visit of the living, they return into their coffins as if returning home. One of the many exempla shows that the biographies of the saints could be, and indeed were, avidly read. I cite a brief excerpt:

The chaplain together with the watchman came at night into the church, to the Werenher tomb, carrying burning double-candles. But, O miracle, they found the bishop who had died so long ago outside of his tomb, standing there speaking to them who were terrified: "Throw away your

¹ Jean de Bolland (1596-1665), a Flemish Jesuit. He started to issue critical biographies of the saints in the collection *Acta sanctorum*. His associates and those who continued his work later are called *Bollandists*. The periodical *Analecta Bollandiana* has been published since 1882 (*Enciklopedija...* 1967:437, 441).

fear, because I know what my cousin Otto wants. So let us go to this grave to find out from the Blessed Hema what will happen to Otton, Blessed Hema who can do so much with God."

They then went into the grave while the iron cover of the coffin opened of itself and the Blessed Hema in the robes of a nun came out, shining with light, and greeted the newcomers by name, saying: "I know your wish on behalf of Otto the Bishop, who since he lives a pious life has no need to fear death; nor that his prayers will be cast aside; let us go to the altar of Mary, the Queen of Heaven, she will announce what you should transmit to our friend."

All together they approached the altar which by a miracle separated and from out of it came a light in which the Queen of Heaven in all her power appeared and said: "Let Otto have no fear in leaving this world since a prepared place is waiting for him in Heaven because the body of one who lives a just life surely receives peace. Our faithful Otto shall die on the third day at the third hour from this hour. And at the moment of his death I shall come to defend his soul from the clutch of Death."

After this announcement the Blessed Hema and the Bishop bowed to the Queen of Heaven, the altar shut, Hema went to her coffin, and the Bishop into his tomb, and the vision disappeared. After this vision they reported it all accurately to their Bishop who did indeed depart this world at the hour foreseen (Gašparoti 1760:66-67).

This is an example of novelistic narration with a developed plot and dialogues which confirm the firm connection between the two worlds: the connection is pyramidal and leads from the chaplain to the Queen of Heaven.

In the introductory part to the *Life of St. Hema the Widow*, Gašparoti lists a series of analogously good and important women from the Bible. However, at the very beginning, in order to awaken the interest of his readers or his listeners and to entertain his audience, he recounts a witticism of his time about women, which it can readily be assumed, was spread orally. Ignac Kristijanović adopted the same witticism from Gašparoti in the 19th century in his book: *Žitek sveteh mučenikov z trudom i marljivostjum na duhovnu zabav i hasen naroda horvatskoga* [The Lives of the Blessed Martyrs with Effort and Diligence for the Spiritual Entertainment and Benefit of the Croatian People] (Kristijanović 1871). Later, at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, the genre of such literary entertainment and the practice of attracting audiences to listen to sermons, or reading the lives of the saints, would disappear:

I am surprised how some hope, through the use of scolding and putting to shame, to create from the pious a different female gender, saying that only three good women among so many thousands have been found in all the wide world; and among these three, the first went to Heaven, the second drowned in water, while the third disappeared, the one everyone looks for but no-one has been able to find (Gašparoti 1760:58).

Ignac Kristijanović told the story of St. Eustachius's life (*Sveti Eustakijuš, vitez i mučenik, i njegva tovarušica Theopista i njihovi dva sini Agapetus i Theopistus, mučeniki* [St. Eustachius, Knight and Martyr, and His Female Comrade Theopista and Their Two Sons Agapetus and Theopistus, Martyrs], as a summary of numerous plots in an adventure novel which follow after the opening scene of the meeting between Jesus and Eustachius. In the first sentence, the preacher announces the framework of the sermon's analogy:

In Eustachius, wisdom and divine goodness give us a second Job (Kristijanović 1871:71).

The analogy is a literary procedure in the lives of the saints, present in the entirety of the life described, as it is in its details:

The generalisation is assisted by constant analogies from the Bible, which accompany the report on the life of the saint. These analogies force one to observe the entire life of the saint as a symbol of eternity, to find what is the most general to be seen in it, to find some edifying sense in it all (Lihačov 1972:135).

Through the mediation of a **miracle**, Kristijanović solved the attempt by a bully to rape Theopista (Eustachius's wife) on a boat:

God the Almighty at the moment when [the bully] prepared to rape Theopista and to shame her punished him with instantaneous death so that she could maintain her conjugal purity unsullied (Kristijanović 1871:75).

A typical example of novelistic narration: *Život svetog Eustahija* [The Life of St. Eustachius] with a developed fable in a series of plots, is found in the 18th and 19th centuries in collections of lives of the saints, and also in independent publications, adapted, for example, in the verses of Antun Josip Turković in 1795. The book was read in the 19th century as is shown by the notes of the names of the owners and the years (1859, and 1874) in a copy kept in the Museum of Slavonia library in Osijek. The book was obviously popular and well-read and carries all the signs left by "book-worms" (Turković 1795).

In the narrow flow of the existence of two parallel worlds and two realities, in the joint existence of the spiritual and the material world, miracles are unavoidable; this is not a matter of fantasy or "exaggeration". In sermons devoted to the lives of St. Laurence, Štefan Zagrebec shows the parallel effect of two fires:

On the day of St. Laurence the Martyr. St. Laurence, grilled for the love of God, coated himself in material fire, but nothing could harm his holy body.

Filled with the powerful fire of God's love, St. Laurence lay peacefully.

(...) naked on a burning grill above live coals, and it seemed to him that he was lying on grass covered in dew. O, the strength of the unspeakable fire of the love of God! (Zagrebec 1718:327).

In the midst of fire of this world, St. George strolls in the furnace as if in *the most pleasant grove*:

At the end of it all, he ordered that he be thrown into a burning white-hot lime kiln, but there, too, he strolled happily singing and praising God Almighty as if in the most pleasant grove, as Lipomanuš bears witness. And that for a whole three days and three nights among the burning flames of that lime kiln he lived praying to God and praising Him (Zagrebec 1718:156).

In Theodorik Ruinat's *Dilima svetih mučenika* [The Deeds of the Holy Martyrs] (published in Paris in 1689) and translated by Ivan Marević in 1800, there is a sermon on the life of St. Laurence "whose grill on which he was slowly roasted in the name of Jesus Christ by a merciless judge, is very well known to all and sundry", with fighting spirit and transcendence inviting the enemies of Christianity to the cannibal feast:

He's done! Turn him over and eat! (Ruinat 1800:301).

In the same way, Ignac Kristijanović's description of the head of John the Baptist on the platter invokes the cannibalistic nature of his murderer, Salome's mother.

Everyday life i.e. the present, has more than one meaning because eternity is reflected in it. It was shown that the everyday achieved worth by the extent of that very eternity within it, that is to say *the fear of God* and *the love for God*. When life in this world is threatened, then eternal life becomes the focus, illuminating the state of disorder or, in other words, sin and the sinful person's way of life. The two lives of one and the same person are always what is in question! At moments when a hopeless situation arises, the possibility may arise of its solution by a miracle! The lives of the saints show that an irresistible need for miracles ruled in everyday life.

When an attempt is made to prevent or to hinder the communication between the two worlds, then such a sinner is punished. Hilarion Gašparoti at the end of the life of St. Ferenc Borgijaš narrated "a terrible event" in which a rich man on his death bed refused the confession. Suddenly demons riding horses and carrying burning canes rushed into the house; this is followed by a dialogue between the dying man and the demons and by his punishment. They "vomit" the sinner's soul into Hell, the intensity of the expression used demonstrating the intensity of the lesson delivered in popular Baroque preaching.

Communication between the two worlds is both verbal and reified i.e. it derives directly from the effect of the blood of Jesus. Before the sinner who refuses confession, the crucifix of itself "moves one hand away

from the Cross, fills it up with blood from the ribs and mercilessly throws it into the face of the unhappy sinner!" (Gašparoti 1751:439).

If the connection between the two world is unquestionable, then everything is possible and probable:

Then the crucifix starts to pour the blood flowing from the five wounds over the sinner and tells him to see and think over the price with which his soul was redeemed. But, even that was all for nothing (Gašparoti 1761:128).

What was never in doubt was just this connection between the two worlds — this world and the afterlife — which has been narrated about in the oral literary sphere right up until the present day in numerous legends which express man's fear of death and numinous forces (Röhrich 1983/1984:197).

Exempla from the sermons which often preached about the lives of the saints or individual scenes from their lives, often transferred into oral narratives, just as the motif from oral stories and legends transferred into the exempla through which the Christian way of life was imparted. In the biography of St. Augustin Kažotić, Hilarion Gašparoti gives an account of the miracle after the prayers *as fleet as arrows* uttered by St. Augustine when the Pope offered him baked quail. As the saint was not permitted to eat meat, he called on God's help in prayer:

... and behold to the wonder of all, the baked birds flew out of the dish and left two baked fish in their place. This miracle was confirmed by the above-mentioned cardinal when he came to Zagreb (Gašparoti 1760:341).

Nikola Bonifačić Rožin, the researcher into oral literary tradition and the folklore theatre, heard and noted down oral tradition in Zagreb as told to him by his home-help. Tahi came to lunch with Baron Halper: after Grace had been said, the roast rabbit on the table jumped out through the window; the explanation was that the hunter who had bagged the rabbit had gone hunting on Sunday at the time of mass:

Halper invited to lunch a young priest, a seminarian from Luka, who had just celebrated his virgin mass. They were to eat roast rabbit which had been caught for him by a hunter from Pljuska. He had caught numerous rabbits. He went hunting on Sundays, while mass was being celebrated. And Tahi from Podsused also came to have lunch with Halper.

And as priests observe the custom of blessing everything, so this young priest blessed the rabbit on the table. He made the sign of the Cross over it. And the roast rabbit jumped out of the big dish, and out through the window. The young priest told the baron that he had eaten many devils if the same hunter was in his service (Zečević 1973:17).

Oral tradition is very closely linked to the Church, both in the mediaeval and Baroque exempla, and in the belief that through education at the "Black School" one could learn magical skills. The motif of the miracle could have originally been a folklore motif, or vice versa, it could have entered into the exempla from folklore, which is more likely. The popular belief was that only those who were "pure" i.e. without sin, had power over other-worldly, impure forces, consequently:

Young priests can do a great deal because they are still pure, while later they commit sins the way people like us do, so then they are not so strong (Zečević 1973:17).

The scene with the aggressive throwing of a handful of blood into the face of the sinner is extremely reminiscent of an automatic 18th century toy: the statue "unwinds" its arm as if it were screwed on, and pours itself a handful of blood from the ribs; in other words, it seems that there was a container of fluid under the ribs.

The man who does not even want to hear of confession, cuts himself off from a direct link between the two worlds. The link is established by punishment and a dialogue (an argument) between the natural and the supernatural world:

Ah, Lord Almighty, help me!

At this cry, the demons mockingly reply: — It's only now that you remember God, when the sun of mercy has set! Until today you did not know how to repent, nor did you think of repentance! It's too late to talk now, when your life is over and all hope is past.

Then they grabbed his miserable soul and took it to eternal atonement instead of atonement for a limited time [Purgatory], casting it into the tortures of Hell (Gašparoti 1751:439).

The lives of the saints are an expression of the religious literary realisation of the utilitarian description of the undemonstrable: eternity, the other world, holiness and confirmation of holiness in miracles.

In order to stress the feats of the saints and the miracles they wrought, efforts were often made to show the events from the Old Testament as less significant miracles in relation to the ones in the New Testament.

Štefan Zagrebec compared the miracle of Moses and the Burning Bush with the burning body of St. Laurence; he wrote that the saint who overcame the flames with the inner flame of his love of God was an example of a much greater miracle than a bush which burned, but was not consumed by the flames:

But I still *see a much more important and miraculous event* in today's St. Laurence the Martyr's transformation in the burning fire, all in flames, without suffering the smallest harm... (Zagrebec 1718:322).

The description of the burning bush is an expression of Štefan Zagrebec's imagination in which he describes not only the green leaves as undamaged, but also the entire bush becoming fresher and greener from the flames, in keeping with the mediaeval worldview that by passing through the ordeal of fire one emerges purified.

Hilarion Gašparoti draws the analogy between St. Paul and Lazarus in the form of competition with the model from the Bible:

St. Gregory the Pope... saying that the conversion of St. Paul was a greater miracle than the raising from the dead of Lazarus, confirms it in these words: since Lazarus was still in command of his reason, while Christ the Lord only raised his body from the dead. For his part, Paul was dead in his mind and God converted him to Himself (Gašparoti 1751:424).

We could say that miracles appeared when nothing other than a miracle remained, like a sudden paradoxical incision into everyday life: as when books fall into water and stay there for three days, and fishermen extract them from the water completely dry as they had just come from a library!

What is in question is literary text in which everything is possible, in which physical suffering is an illusion, while spiritual death represents the realistic danger of eternal suffering in Hell. The permeation of the two realities (the two worlds) keeps the reader and the listener in constant vigilance. A miracle can happen to everyone, because anyone can become seriously ill or find him/herself in a seemingly hopeless situation; miracles happen to people of all classes: a noble lady or a village woman, a baron or a beggar, a sinful woman or a chaste young girl.

The biographies of the saints — both male and female — provide an example and a model to be imitated:

Deeds are better than words (Kristijanović 1871:32).

They represent exciting, edifying and entertaining reading intended for the everyday life of all the social classes. Transformed by literary imagination, everyday life becomes worthy of man's hunger for poetry and eternity.

The desirable biography is the one which, by the aesthetics of the paradox which it comprises and in its Christian worldview, unites the two diverse worlds in the life experienced by an individual, a male or female saint. Sergei Sergeievich Averincev wrote that the world of the mediaeval Christian was filled exclusively with miraculous, new, incredible, unimaginable, shocking, unseen and indescribable elements: the dead come to life, the terminally ill become well, the sight of the blind is restored (Averincev 1982:164).

The biography of a saint unfolds in a vice, in the conflict between the two worlds: man lives in this world in order to prove his true place in the other, more sublime world.

The biographies of the saints counselled on the meaning of the present and the everyday as a transitional form of life, the scene of a battle to be won for the future i.e. eternal life. Everyday life had to be made sacred so that in this life man drew closer to the ideal of Christian perfection and sublime holiness.

Contrary to that, village life was quite different. Antun Kanižlić wrote (in 1759) about Jakob Rehm, the founder of the *Conferences on Conversations about the Virgin Mary*, set up as an antidote to peasant everyday life:

O, if one could only find more such Conferences! (...) But, O our shame and sins, others have sprouted not from God but from the Devil and his followers and from principles which are the very opposite of those behind the establishment of the Marian Conferences, particularly in those places where they have **feasts, banquets, harvests, crop-picking, bees, corn-husking, feather-picking bees, digging-up in the fields.** (...) **Don't they sing songs which are frivolous, damned and infernal?** (Kanižlić 1759:476).

The saints enjoy unutterable beatitude; they have withstood all tortures on earth because their hearts have burned *with the flame of the love for God*. The motif of the *cold heart*, which would produce many variations on the same theme in both oral and written literature, introduced into popular literature the exemplum of the Roman Emperor Germanicus, and the attempt made after his death to burn and bury his remains. Štefan Zagrebec narrates (and preaches) that the emperor's entire body burned up, apart from his heart which was thrown back several times into the flames without effect. All the doctors of Rome were convened and they established that the heart was full of poison:

(...) since the poison, cold by nature, did not allow the fire to consume it, they opened that heart and washed it in water several times, and threw it into the fire where it turned into ash just as the entire body had done (Zagrebec 1718:335-336).

The rejection by the flames i.e. the fact that the *cold heart*, the heart full of poison, did not catch fire, had at its core the motif of the mediaeval ordeal by fire and water, used to establish the guilt or innocence of an accused person. Štefan Zagrebec concludes his sermon about the life of St. Laurence, addressing the "Christian soul" with moral counsel in the form of the popular literary *prescription*, a paraphrase by which the abstract is made concrete with a pronouncedly edifying purpose. Moral Christian purity requires that the heart:

be opened with your tongue's knife before your confessor, and that it be washed repeatedly with your tears, washed with a contrite heart, washed with the intention of constant improvement, in a word, washed with repentance so that at your last hour you will be able to say as King David did: *You tested me with the fire and no evil forces were found within me* (Zagrebec 1718:336).

The "natural world" is, of course, identified as the historical world, while the narratives about the metaphysical world are also historical. Good examples stem from good works, so that Hilarion Gašparoti cites as a moral lesson the thought expressed by David:

With a saint you become a saint, while you become sinful with a sinner.

Among examples for this line of thought, there is a pronounced aversion toward the Jewish people in the explanation for St. Peter denying Jesus:

That knightly steadfastness of Peter would not have melted even in face of live coals or embers, **if he had not been associated with that sinful Jewish scum**; when you are with a sinner you become sinful yourself (Gašparoti 1761:196).

For the modern researcher, the antagonism towards Jews and towards women always emerges suddenly and unexpectedly in some naturalistic description or detail. Notwithstanding Christian teaching on the equality of souls:

the value and nobility of each soul,

one encounters intolerance towards the female gender because of its *collective guilt*.

While young, women are a source of temptation and sin, in old age they are a cause of unconcealed disgust. However, in Christian teaching, *eternal bliss* also appertains to those:

old broad-bottomed hags with gummed-up eyes.

In the social sense, the only characteristics which are near to women are those of the lowest stratum on the social ladder: the serfs. Potentially, *eternal bliss* can be attained by everyone:

... for which He (God) will not accept silver, gold nor wealth, so that in that case no poor man could buy it. It does not require wisdom, nor physical beauty, **for in that case those stupid serfs and old broad-bottomed hags with gummed-up eyes could not attain nor be granted eternal joy** (Zagrebec 1718:471-472).

In the lives of the saints the readership was not only educated with examples, but with direct, harsh lessons which gave order to and determined everyday life; to his wife, a husband has to be *fear and trepidation*:

A woman should tremble at her husband's footfall,
At his harsh word, she should fall to the floor.
If the husband's glance fall upon his wife,
From her great fear, her joints should dissolve.
She has always to be subservient to her husband,
To provide an answer to all his questions. (...)
When a woman weeps, she covertly digs a grave,

Finally the one she weeps for, she buries with a laugh.
(Knezović 1759:110).

The Love of God and the Fear of God marked the entirety of the Christian worldview. Štefan Zagrebec devoted a separate sermon to this lesson ("please heed me well"), with threats characteristic for the 18th century about what would happen to apostates who knew neither of love, nor of fear, nor did they adhere to the sacral calendar, paid no attention to the **saints and the saints' days**, days set aside in their honour; their place was in the inverted image of the Christian way of life:

If you do not keep my saints' days, nor honour my churches, *I shall behave amiss towards you*. (...) I shall bring poverty upon you, and with the blazing of the Sun I shall make your land barren and with fire will scorch and set ablaze all that you have and with innumerable other punishments, threatens the Lord God even today those who do not celebrate his holy days in the manner they should and do not keep his commandments the way they are obliged to (Zagrebec 1715:109).

In the literary genre of oral legends, numerous exempla motifs have been preserved until the present day from the sermons and biographies of the saints, teaching and threatening those who do not celebrate the saints. One such example is the recounting of *an authentic occurrence* which I recorded in 1987 in Cernik near Nova Gradiška — an exemplum about a woman who worked (ironed) on Sunday and in that way inflicted burns on the Mother of God:

It says that a woman was ironing when suddenly a woman all in blisters and wounds appeared before her. And she said: "Put down that iron!" And I, she said, am looking at her: "Goodness, what's happened to you?"

She did not know that it was an apparition, that it could be anything.

"You see, it said, what your iron has done to me?!"

And then, well, it disappeared. Then it all disappeared, she said, and then she used to talk about it (Zečević 1991:307).

This encounter with an apparition from the other world did not occur at a profane time but at a sacred time, on a Sunday, which the woman had disrupted by introducing a profane activity. Unlike in the oral legends, in the sermons about the exempla which were transmitted orally, first and foremost was the edifying lesson and the absence of fear in face of the "phenomenon", the "apparition". The fact that the woman recounting the legend had heard it from others, demonstrates that the religious edifying text read or heard in a sermon is recounted again and that, with its specifics of popular literary edification, it is part of oral literary repertoire.

The motif of the sin committed on Sunday appears as an exemplum in Elfrida Moser-Rath's book *Predigtmärlein der Barockzeit*. When a

woman put bread into the oven on a Sunday her hands were burned by "hidden heavenly fire" (Moser-Rath 1964:399).

However, the example of the burns appearing on the Virgin Mary instead of on the sinner is a rare one; the punishment is largely "inscribed" onto the skin of the person committing the sin. The realistic elements from everyday life contribute to the convincing quality of the whole and concretise the miracle; the appearance of the iron — the informant was thinking of an electric iron — is an example of the modernisation of oral legend i.e. modernisation of the exemplum.

The wounds which appeared on the Virgin indicate the edifying starting-point of the lesson: they are analogous to the widespread assumption about the wounds which Humankind with its sins always inflicts anew on Jesus.

Štefan Zagrebec presents the exemplum as literary confirmation of God's threat:

I shall deal amiss with you!

Rinaldus writes of one who ground flour from grain on Sunday, the flour burned, while his hand with which he turned the mill-stone on a Sunday, unceasingly of itself made circles like the mill-stone. (...) He mentioned another one whose face turned back to front when he wanted to go on a saint's day to till his vineyard (Zagrebec 1715:104-105).

In the first exemplum, the man is transformed into an automated 18th century toy, his hand turns of its own volition in the same way as in the above-mentioned example with the crucifix, in which the arm could "unscrew", fill the palm with blood and throw it into the sinner's face. In the second case, the face remains back to front like a mask, just as the man's intention (contrary to accepted order) was to till the vineyard *on a saint's day*.

The appearances of inversions are not rare in mediaeval literature; they are a sign of the interference of the Prince of Darkness and the sinner's abandoning himself to disorder, or infernal forces. Aron Gurevič cites an example — from the life of St. Remigia — in which a mill-stone starts to turn in the opposite direction (Gurevič 1987:84).

Unlike the punishment of giving birth in pain, a consequence of the expulsion from Eden, Mary, the pure Eve, gave birth as a virgin, without pain. Pain is eliminated from the lives of the saints because the value of corporeal life is abrogated, the body is deprived of its physical elements and serves for the realisation of spiritual, eternal life. Torturing of the body instructs on the conquest of pain through immeasurable love and spiritual joy. The death of a martyr does not indicate the greatness of the pain, but rather the greatness of the perseverance and rejoicing, the delight, the satisfaction and the promise of the joy of eternal life.

The life of the Virgin Mary and Jesus represented a model and prototype for writing about the lives of the saints, a source of inescapable analogy. The resurrection of Jesus is analogous to his birth. Antun Kanižlić (1759) writes in a dialogical form of brief questions and expansive answers that Jesus rose from the dead without the grave opening, analogously to the way he was born: "(...) *without bleeding*", without opening the womb of the Virgin Mary — "*clean of odour, beautiful and white*" (Kanižlić 1759:528). However, a realistic possibility does appear in the detail of her giving birth in the kneeling position:

The Virgin herself described to St. Brigitte the way [in which she gave birth]: I gave birth, as you now saw, kneeling alone in the stable praying with so much joy and gladness that I felt no difficulty nor pain (Kanižlić 1759:526).

Kanižlić also linked with the name of St. Brigitte the charming popular vision of the birth of Jesus. The newly-born Jesus came to his Mother's lap, which means that he was able to walk at birth:

Saint Brigitte says that the born Jesus came on his own to the lap of his sweet mother (Kanižlić 1759:529).

The birth of Jesus was analogous to the immaculate conception, which Kanižlić, like the majority of writers, compared with a ray of light:

Q. "How, then, was Jesus born to the Virgin?" — A. "In a very different way than other people, because he was born of Mary without any pain or sickness on her part, not opening her womb, he emerged from her in the way that a ray of sunshine goes through glass, which harms nothing, but remains pure and whole" (Kanižlić 1759:525-526).

The saints fight with internal and external enemies, physical and spiritual, and move from scene to scene, from victory to victory. They treat their bodies mercilessly, fighting a relentless battle on behalf of the eternal life of their eternal souls. Not only the saints are warriors; all men are soldiers, while life is an unending battle in which they are at war with the body, the world and the Devil.

The emphasis of the war-making significance of the Church was lost during the 20th century; instead, the need for dialogue with those who did not believe prevailed.

In 1788, during the restless times of preparation leading up to the French Revolution, Antun Ivanošić registered the phenomenon and activity which, analogously to travelling preachers, we could call *travelling atheists* in the Slavonian region (in Čađavica):

However, I am a living witness to how much those *negators of the soul* can cause upheaval in the mind of a simple man, for in the parish of Čađavica before I became priest there, a lot of trouble was caused by one such wicked disturber of the peace, who, travelling through the place mentioned, started a polemic in the evenings with the gathered villagers: — Do not believe what the priest tells you from the altar, it is all a barefaced lie and the concoction of his trade (...) (Ivanošić 1940:189).

Research into the Croatian popular sermons of the 18th and 19th centuries showed the theme of the biographies of the saints which were recounted as part of the sermons, but were also presented independently in lives of the saints collections. The temperamentally engaged, fiery 18th century preacher, Hilarion Gašparoti, published both biographies of the saints and sermons in his book. In *The Life of St. Jerome* there is an opposition between trivial literature, both oral and written, as opposed to the utilitarian part intended to edify and be followed in everyday life:

O, how much more we prefer to read and hear everyday stories and women's gossip, rather than holy and religious books, and Christian teachers whose teachings and sermons we reject (Gašparoti 1760:949).

Gašparoti's line of thought is preceded by an example — a letter of St. Jerome's who experienced a dramatic vision during an illness: the harsh Judge chastised him for reading a "pagan book", something by Cicero, but the reproof did not stop there, it transformed into physical punishment of the sinner, which is a characteristic of the drastic lessons of the old texts. The vision leaves proof — bruises and pain when the saint is awake:

Then he [the judge, D. Z.] ordered that I be beaten mercilessly, and I could only shout: Have mercy on me, Lord! Have mercy on me! (...) When I came to my senses, I opened my eyes full of tears from the pain and as even greater proof I noticed the bruises on my back and felt great pain in my body (Gašparoti 1760:949).

After this edifying event, St. Jerome turned to reading the Bible. Apart from beatings for their readers, sometimes the burning of the *harmful* books was also recommended.

The biographies of the saints represented a good book intended not only for parish priests as a foundation for compiling their sermons, but also something to be read by all strata of society for their edification and as an example to be followed. A book was not created to pass the time, just as, for example, preachers at the end of the 19th century referred to reading newspapers as a form of futilely wasting time:

Today the sinner says, I remember that last year I **spent the morning reading the newspaper**, had a greedy lunch at noon, played some game in the afternoon, went for a walk in the evening, spent time at night dancing at balls, but what good is all that to me now? (Foky 1853:35).

In this context, a good book was — an appropriate book which could be applied, primarily intended to be followed, imitated, and implemented in everyday personal life.

The biographies of the saints were written either in detail or in summaries, from birth until death, from pre-natal signs to the miracles performed after death, and represented a collection of exempla in a loose alliance or "interweaving" with the name of the particular saint. Hermann Bausinger points out that the exemplum derives from the centre of reality but is set and defined in relation to the forces of the afterlife:

(...) das Exempel wird zwar inmitten der Wirklichkeit, aber es wird von einer jenseitigen Macht statuiert (Bausinger 1980:210).

The exemplum had its function as a model, but also as a means of instilling fear:

Die Hand Gottes erweist sich in Wundern und Schrecken; das Exempel bezeugt *Vorbilder*, aber es dient auch der Abschreckung (Bausinger 1980:211).

The literary characteristics of the exempla in sermons and in the lives of the saints, about the activity of the saints — male and female — during their lives and after their deaths, can be encapsulated by the concluding observation of Frederick C. Tubach, the author of an important and expansive exempla index:

In short, the exempla material presented here reflects the tension between the written document and oral tradition, between the authority of religious dogma and the rich kaleidoscope of daily social and human concerns, between adherence to quasi-canonical exempla of religious virtue and the search for the unique anecdote. Divergent as this material may be in its content and origin, the exemplum is an attempt to discover in each narrative event, character, situation or act a paradigmatic sign that would either substantiate religious beliefs and Church dogma or delineate social ills and human foibles (Tubach 1969:523).

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"ČUDO" KAO KNJIŽEVNO ODREDIŠTE (SJECIŠTE)
U KOMUNIKACIJI IZMEĐU DVAJU SVJETOVA, NARAVNOG
I NADNARAVNOG, U ŽIVOTOPISIMA SVETACA 18. I 19.
STOLJEĆA U HRVATSKOJ KNJIŽEVNOSTI

SAŽETAK

Neizbježnost čuda kao književnog odredišta i sjecišta zbivanja u životopisima svetaca javlja se iz vjerovanja u bliski, trajni i neprekidni odnos naravnog i nadnaravnog svijeta, u nastojanju da se razrješavanjem nerješivog djeluje na svakidašnji čovjekov život. Čudo

postaje u kršćanstvu monopol svetaca; zahvaljujući magičnoj svijesti koja svecima dodjeljuje natprirodne sposobnosti, čudo se oslobađa konteksta poganstva (čarobnjaštva).

Nasuprot književnoj funkciji čuda u životopisima svetaca, kao i spomenutom odnosu čuda i čarobnjaštva, razlikuje se čudo kao **znak** i čudesno znamenje u Eevandjelju, u kojemu Isus **čini znak** svome narodu pa se ti znakovi ne mogu dijeliti od njegove Riječi naviještanja.

Analizom brojnih primjera životopisa svetaca, pretežno hrvatskih kajkavskih pisaca i propovjednika, pokazuje se pučka, popularna književna funkcija čuda i čudesnih zbivanja koja nastupaju kao neobični događaji i nadmoćni izazovi prirodnim zakonima i silama vlasti, poput naglog iskoraka u nesvakidašnje i ponekad avanturističko razrješenje nerješivih situacija.

Ključne riječi: religiozna književnost, biografije svetaca, propovijedi, uzori za nasljedovanje (*imitatio*), estetika paradoksa