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FOLK LEGENDS AS A LITERARY ORGANIZATION OF MAN'S
EXPERIENCE OF HISTORY AND NATURE

S u m m a r y

An analysis of folk legends recorded in the villages of Hrvatsko Zagorje starts from the following question: what is it that makes oral literature at all, or verbal art? The tendency towards describing works of oral literature from the point of view of their literary values, in order to determine the extent to which they are artistic, inevitably questions the autonomy of folk art that R. Jakobson and P. Bogatirjov had in mind when they compared written and oral literature and noted that the former was oriented towards individual speech (*parole*) and the latter towards language (*langue*).

In considering the artistic qualities of oral narration, the recorded oral text becomes the focus of our interest. When oral literature is viewed in the process of its realization (as against its potential existence), individual speech (*parole*) becomes our main concern, together with the set of norms and stimuli which govern the appearance of a work of oral literature.

The analysis of legends raises a fundamental issue: how can we distinguish the nature of literary information from the nature of ordinary, non-literary information? Literary science and scholarship is deeply interested in determining the distinction — both when it studies written and oral literature and when it deals with the transition area of popular literature (chap-books).

The borderline forms of oral narration raise the problem of distinguishing literary from non-literary information in an even sharper form. What is it that can be regarded as legend, and where does the literary effect of simple literary forms (*einfache Formen*) begin? The properties of legends (*Sage*) are frequently discussed in the light of folk tales or fables. Studies of the *Märchen-Sage* polarity point to the need to view simple literary forms in their relationship towards the more complex forms (which, because of their greater complexity, are less dynamic). This, however, is not so much an indication of the lack of autonomy of legends as a literary type, with its sub-types and groups, as it is an indication of the lack of autonomy of the methods with which research is conducted. A typology of legends cannot be made indepen-

dently of the answer to the question of difference between literary and non-literary information. This, in turn, opens up the problem of deciding which is the smallest literary unit which should be included in the typology of legends.

The paper also examines M. Lüthi's claim that a genuine legend (*»echte, ausgebildete Volkssage«*) is transmitted by word of mouth and that it must be born out of the joy of narration (*»Sie muss aus der Freude am Erzählen geboren sein — cf. note 19*). This view is contrasted with an opposite view expressed by Leopold Schmidt, who denies the existence of form for legends and claims that they have only content. But it was M. Lüthi's view that was adopted to describe the situation in the Croatian and Serbian linguistic area, where — because of the petrified views of traditional poetics — no attention had earlier been paid to legends (*Sage*), except for Maja Bošković-Stulli's important contributions.

Another part of the paper deals with the elliptical form of the legend which contains only two elements (e.g. *»The Stone Wedding-Party«*). Variant versions of *»The Stone Wedding-Party«* and of the legends describing the abolition of feudal serfdom and man's learning how to plough are analyzed in terms of Gaston Bachelard's analyses of poetic imagery. These legends are thus analyzed here as poetic images in which spatial imagination is realized. The grotesque elements in legends are illustrated with the example of a legend about a count who continued to kill people even after his own death, simply because people obeyed his last wish and let the cord on which the coffin was lowered into the grave stick from the grave. The count's relatives accused the peasants of having hanged him, and the cord was offered as material evidence in court (the relatives said that this was the rope with which the count had been hanged). The elements of the grotesque, as well as the mixing of living (organic) and mechanical (inorganic and alienated) worlds, are analyzed in accordance with Wolfgang Kayser's views of the grotesque.

The paper ends with a survey of situations and forms legends are encountered in the field.

(Translated by *Vlado Ivir*)