

## ORAL POEMS IN THE CONTEXT OF CUSTOMS AND RITUALS\*

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This text proceeds from the basic assumption that the oral literary forms which are born and endure within customs should not be observed independently from the particular custom to which they belong. Without analysis of the custom as a whole and identification of the defined place and role of the text within it, it is impossible fully to comprehend either the sense of the text, or its structure, symbolics, composition or other poetic characteristics. At the same time, oral literary forms often explain the meaning of the individual sequences and details of a ritual.

### I

Observation of oral poems from the perspective of text - verbal utterance - demands a method and system of evaluation different from the method and system of evaluation required by the description of poems within customs and/or from the perspective of performance. The question is: how

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can these two realities be brought face to face and how should the methodological cross-section be given prominence?<sup>1</sup>

From the informative aspect, the text of a poem is designated by its sense. However, many features which we attribute to individual poems derive from their use at the time when we encountered them (in performance, within a custom or ritual). And this is the source of the stratified relationship between *sense* and *meaning* in respect of the poems connection or lack of connection with performance and/or custom and ritual.

Definition of the terms *ritualistic* and *customary* poems imposes the prior attribution of the terms, *custom* and *ritual*. Some ethnologists active in Croatian ethnology, carrying on from Anglo-Saxon tradition, question the feasibility of use of the term *custom* as a (fixed) analytical category which can serve for the understanding of cultural reality (Supek 1983:25; 1987). Consequently, definition of the content and scope of the term *custom* and its relation towards the phenomenon of *ritual* also differs.<sup>2</sup> I shall be using both terms - *ritual* and *custom* - in this paper because there is a marked separation within the repertoire of sung poems of the mandatory groups which are performed in the context of *formalised actions* (Rihtman-Auguštin 1987:87), and those within such groups which are more firmly prescribed, particularly in relation to sung texts and concrete moments of performance. I am also using here the definition of the terms *ritual* and *custom* as they were defined by I. Lozica (1990). The author designates the term *custom* as "a traditionally conditioned shift within the everyday activities of a group", while he calls the actual performance of *custom* - or the performance part of *custom* - the *ritual* (Lozica 1990:30). In classifying *custom* and *ritual*, Lozica adheres to the categories which are applied in Croatian ethnology, dividing customs into *seasonal or calendar customs*, *life cycle customs* and *customs related to labour*. Despite the criticism which could be aimed at such a classification, it is applicable because it is based on the traditional material collected

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<sup>1</sup> This paper partly rounds out my study of questions related to the text of poems and their diverse contexts; I have written about the subject in a number of papers published to date in this journal:

- a) "The Functions of Oral Lyrical Poems. A Contribution to the Classification". *Narodna umjetnost* 30:303—325, Zagreb 1993.
- b) "The Levels of Classification. Oral Lyrical Poems Classification According to the Record and Function". *Narodna umjetnost* 32/1:55—67, Zagreb 1995.
- c) "Syncretic Performance. Concerning the Relationship between Words and Tunes in Performance of Oral Lyric Poems". *Narodna umjetnost* 33/1:171—190, Zagreb 1996.

<sup>2</sup> See published papers from the colloquium "Istraživanje običaja - pojmovi i termini" [Research Into Customs - Concepts and Terms]. *Narodna umjetnost* 24:13—130, Zagreb 1987.

primarily in the *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje* [Review of Folk Life and Customs] according to the instructions given in Antun Radić's *Osnove za sabiranje građe o narodnom životu i običajima* [Manual on Collecting Material on Folk Life and Customs] (1897).

*Ritual*, similarly to custom, is a formalised social and expressive phenomenon and, due to these features, tends to differ from custom (for, one asks, to which extent does a defined action have to be formalised for it to be denoted as a ritual and not as a custom!). It would seem that the possibility for clearer differentiation of these terms lies in the starting point of custom being in usual, beneficial actions, while that of ritual lies in expression of the viewpoints and feelings held in common by a group through an action which is symbolic in nature (again see Honigmann 1964, according to Povrzanović 1987:66—67). For example, symbolism is manifested in wedding rituals in specific, unusual patterns of behaviour (e.g. negotiations conducted at the entry to the bride's home, rotating the bride, for example, around a sieve, the use of various objects). All this is connected with belief in the propriety, and the benefit arising from carrying out set actions, when the actors themselves may not know - or have forgotten - their real meaning. One rarely encounters strict differentiation of ritual and customary poems in folkloristic literature; the terms usually being used as synonyms (and their appearance in pairs being extremely rare in ethnomusicological literature). The poems or tunes which are performed as part of customs or rituals are usually denoted as being ritual. There are articles in which the tunes and poems are differentiated in relation to the context in which they appear (either as being customary or ritual). It seems that the fact itself that some poem is frequently performed as part of a certain ritual and/or custom, does not also have to be sufficient reason for it to be denoted forthwith as being ritual and/or customary. It is quite clear that it is almost impossible to transfer and examine the basic characteristics of custom - formal nature, expressiveness and social character - and the symbolic system immanent to custom, to the field of literature or music. In other words, such analyses would definitely lead one far away from the establishment of the ritual or customary character of a song. However, it seems that a certain analogy in defining the terms ritual and custom, and their differentiation, can be found in stricter examination of the poem, or sung song, in relation to the frequency of performance, connection with ritual-customary context, concrete determination of the text and the moment of performance. It would seem that in order to denote a particular poem as being customary, it would be necessary that it appear frequently within custom (e.g. at weddings) at defined time intervals and be performed precisely in that ritual-customary context. As far as ritual poems are concerned, in addition

to the above, they would, for example, have to be performed only in the wedding ritual-customary context, at a precisely defined moment of the unfolding of a defined ritual connected with a precisely determined text. The majority of ritual poems are no longer performed today at weddings (having been most frequently noted down by collectors outside of the wedding context), but they should, nevertheless, be included in observation of the ritual-customary group of poems.

Depending on the inclusion of ritual-customary poems in living performance and on the definition of the terms ritual and customary poems, a number of groups of poems related to the ritual-customary context can be differentiated:

1. ritual poems which are performed today outside of, for example, the wedding context;
2. ritual poems which were once performed and still are performed today in the wedding ritual-customary context;
3. customary poems which were once performed and still are performed today in the wedding ritual-customary context;
4. poems which are customary today - within wedding ritual-customary context (as a substitute for earlier ritual customary poems) but were once non-customary - within the wedding context, but outside of the ritual-customary context;
5. non-customary poems today within the ritual-customary context (which were performed earlier outside of the wedding context).

It can be concluded here that the relationship between the entirety of a custom or ritual and its parts - poems in our case - is not at all accidental; the components are linked into a whole according to quite definite principles. The problem of definition of poems leads one to the conclusion that they depend on the entirety of the custom, and that the custom forms them according to itself. Poems torn out of their entirety - their custom or ritual - are no longer what they were within that entirety, but that does not mean that they have become completely free of its influence. It could be said that poems i.e. the parts, retain the characteristics of the totality within which we encountered them. We ask what the nature of that dependency is? What principles interlink poems and customs, and how do they form their own identity in forming the whole? The matter of connection of the totality of customs is posited as the interdependence of the text and its parts.

1. If the segments are linked in custom so that one derives from another, then each segment is equally conditioned both by following and previous segments. Consequently, they are not linked in a straight line, and each segment thus has both a formative and a decompositional function.

(It is only in some customs that the segments form a chain e.g. in various processions.)

It would seem that it is essential to research the entirety of the communications process in connecting poems (the texts of poems, verses, musical elements, performance, presentational, or other formal parts of poems and customs). However, this would be exceptionally difficult if we were to experience the folklore linguistic fact as an entirety with the corresponding extra-linguistic context. On the other hand, it is just that totality of the text of an oral poem which also conditions its sense. During the 1980s, some very interesting and stimulating papers were written by Russian authors: M. M. Plisecki (1982) and A. N. Rozova (1981), who drew attention to the relation between the text and the procession; and Pietro Clemente (1981)<sup>3</sup> who was one of the rare authors to draw attention also to the presentational elements in performance of texts during processions.

There are no oral poems existing outside of context. Should they exist, they would be only formal texts, but texts which are not appropriate to their natural situations. So there exists a body of recorded poems in manuscript and printed collections and poetry anthologies.

2. The text of a poem is revealed in the manner of establishing semantic relations between the parts of the whole. Consequently, what holds together the parts of the text can be analysed as connection through linguistic and also other means within the system of the melostrophe and/or within the custom. We ask ourselves what are the units which link various formal parts of the whole? What is their organisation and meaning? To what extent are they foreseeable? Do they appear in all texts, despite the conditions of performance?

Division by functional criteria (i.e. according to the function which poems have in customs) is one possibility; it points to the text/performance relationship.

Every custom can be observed as a unity of structure and content. So each poem, too, can be observed as a unity of structure and content. We can break down the custom into segments and observe the poem as a isolated segment.

Of course, customs exist in which the role of words is minimal - in some customs words are even completely absent - but there are those customs where the word is crucial and emphasised.

The firm link between words (text) and action (events) was most stressed in the more simple rituals which took place along with certain

<sup>3</sup> See also: D. Rihtman-Auguštin 1984:143–144.

shouts, cheering, utterance of certain formulae, expressing some wish or request (e.g. various types of *oath-taking* and the like).

Developed oral literary forms, primarily what can be called *poems of praise*, appeared in the complex rituals which probably commenced at a later time. The *koleda* processional poems are among the most interesting ones in this circle, and we will take them for purposes of illustration. Observing the winter and spring processions and the texts which appear in them as a whole, one comes to the following conclusion: a) perhaps the magical function - motivated or not - is more dominant in the texts of spring procession poems than in the *koleda* in the winter period; b) it would seem that the presentational elements are more stressed in the level of performance of the spring processions as a whole, while presentation is more stressed in the level of performance in the winter processions in the texts of the *koleda*. The description of customs and texts of poems relates mainly to the *koleda* processions and the *koleda* of the winter period. We can compare the customs of the spring cycle (e.g. the Ijelja, Kraljice/St. George's Day, Midsummer) and the texts of the songs which are their components part, in order to draw attention to the similarity and identical nature of the *koleda* and those poems. These customs are certainly primarily of interest to ethnologists, but their multi-layered nature allows for the possibility of their being dealt with by sociologists, psychologists, folklorists, teatrologists and others. In this paper, the position is folkloristic and departs primarily from the texts of the poems.

## II

It is assumed that the word *koleda* is etymologically linked with the word *calendae* which denoted the first ten days of each month among the ancient Romans. Some theories are also connected with the ostensible name of the Slavic deity, Koledo. However, sources show that the term is used in various regions in Croatia with various meanings. It is most frequently used as the term for songs sung in the procession which take place from Christmas to Epiphany, and the members of the procession who perform them are called *koledari*. The following terms are also encountered: *koleda* - and for a group of people, *kolendanje*, *kovindanje*, *koledari*, *kolendari*, *kolendani*, *kolijani*, *kovindanši*, *koledušnjaki*, *koleduš*, *fijole* and so on. A bonfire is also called a *koleda*: "They light *koleda* [bonfires] on the eve of St. Peter's Day and Midsummer Eve. The children jump about in honour of the saints." (Kožina, a village near Zadar).<sup>4</sup> Or, in the Konavle region, there is a saying: "A girl can go *kolendat* [take part in

<sup>4</sup> Nikola Bonifačić Rožin, ms. IEF, no. 260, collector: Šime Katić, 77 years of age.

the procession], but she cannot be given in marriage!"<sup>5</sup> Most scholars are unanimous in regarding the *koleda* poems as the most archaic types of preserved ritual poetry. V. J. Propp wrote that the *koleda* poems belong to "the most ancient forms of ritual folk lyricism" (Propp 1961:7). Franjo Kuhač, for example, wrote "*Koleda* are our oldest poems; they reach back to the pagan era of the Croats, Serbs and other southern Slavs, as to our other ritual songs" (Kuhač 1941:464). Together with the contention on the archaic nature of these poems, scholars often ask "when and where did the pagan and ecclesiastical elements first come together" (Milčević 1917:115).

Study of the *koleda* is not a simple matter, and it is a particularly arduous task if one wants to penetrate through the text of the poem into all that is magical, cult in nature, connected with Humankind's life in nature, the wish that the Earth and humans and livestock be fruitful, the need to seek protection against the forces of evil by giving up sacrifices, and giving gifts. As has been said, what we have today are only texts, such as they are, more or less complete, in which all these facts are identifiable, with an intermingling of the old and the new, so that it is difficult to identify the roots of magical meaning.

Numerous descriptions of customs show that there are twenty or more customs in Croatia which have processions as their composite parts. There are *two main groups of procession, those held in winter for: Saint Luke's Day, Saint Martin's, Saint Nicholas's, Saint Andrew's, Saint Barbara's, Saint Lucia's, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Saint Stephen's, Saint John's, Old Year's Day, New Year's Day, Epiphany, Mardi Gras, and so on; and those held in spring for: St. George's Day, May 1st (Majo, Filipovčice), Križarice (previously Ascension Day), Kraljice (on Pentecost), Prporuše, Ladarice (Midsummer) and the like.*<sup>6</sup>

Some authors also use the term *koleda* both for those poems which are performed in the processions of the winter and the spring period.<sup>7</sup> Some, on their part, regard only poems which are performed in processions which take place from Christmas Eve to Epiphany as being *koleda*. Poems from the first and from the second group have a special three-part composition: an introduction, central part, and ending, while they most frequently differ in their specific introductions and refrains (*koleda* or *lado*, for example). But the similarities are also pronounced. Christmas *koleda* and Saint George's Day poems, although their

<sup>5</sup> Nikola Bonifačić Rožin, ms. IEF, no. 386, collocutor: Pavo Šapro, born 1889.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to various descriptions of customs, exhaustive data can be found in Questionnaire IV (for the *Ethnological Atlas*), Zagreb 1967.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. see F. Kuhač cited previously.

beginnings differ, are strikingly similar in their central parts: almost in the same way, they praise the master, the host, the young man, the girl, wishing all the best for the land, people and livestock. We can go still further and point out more similarities - just in that central part - with weddings toasts and glass-raising in which the host, groom, bride and other are toasted in almost the same way. This similarity between one genre and another show that the *koleda* (and other poems) were sung to one and the same individuals, so that the praises had to be based on known and in many way limited poetic means.

Another interesting type of song appears - sometimes these were also ballads - which was also sung in the *koleda* processions but which has nothing in common with the *koleda* type other than its refrain: *koledo, koledo*. Firstly, I shall quote the beginning of the poem about Ivan Karlović (Karliban):

Lijepo ti je pogledati, koledo koledo,  
kraj kovilja u bosilje, veselo, veselo,  
tu se biju dvije vojske, koledo, koledo,  
turska vojska i kavurska, veselo, veselo.  
Pred turskom je Hasan-paša, koledo, koledo,  
pred kavurskom Karli-bane, veselo, veselo.

[It is lovely to take a look, *koledo, koledo*,  
Beside the feather grass in the basil clusters, merrily, merrily,  
Here two armies make battle, *koledo, koledo*,  
The Turkish army and the Infidels, merrily, merrily,  
Hasan-Pasha leads the Turks, *koledo, koledo*,  
Karli-Bane the Infidels, merrily, merrily.]

(Delorko 1956:74)

With this example I shall mention one more of the series of variants about a hero called Vid (perhaps Vid Maričić). There is a well-known example which was also performed in *koleda* processions and begins with this verse:

Vojevao beli Vide, koledo!  
Tri godine s kleti Turci  
a četiri s crni Ugri.

[White Vid waged war, *koledo*!  
Three years against the damned Turks  
And four against the black Magyars.]

(Karadžić, V. 1989, No. 164)

Some researchers regard this poem as an "ancient *koleda* ritual" poem, and say that this is a classic *koleda* poem in which the "ancient Slavic deity of light - Vid, Svantovid, the equivalent of Dionysus - is concealed but clearly visible in the anthropomorphic hero and warrior" (Krnjević 1987:301). Others present variants of the poems in which Master Vid appears as someone who, because of illness, takes refuge in the mountains for seven years. (the Hvar variant - see: Delorko 1979:49—65). In a ballad which is nearest in motif to the Hvar variant mentioned, the hero is Vid Maričić (the Banija region variant - see: Delorko 1979:59—61), who also lies ill in the



mountains while a fairy keeps him informed of everything which is taking place at his court during his absence. According to this poem and some others - very similar in content - from various Croatian regions, this Vid could very probably be the Vid Maričić about whom legends say that his court was in Modrića, near Jesenica in the foothills of Velebit Mountain. He is reputed to have had nine daughters who all married far afield. His court collapsed - the ruins can still be seen - because Vid's descendants fled to the islands to get away from the Turks. An oral poem from Lovinac in Lika mentions Vid Maričić as the master of the Velebit mountains: Mile, and Mala [Small] and Velika [Large] Vrbica.

A znadeš li Vide Maričiću,  
da je Mila cesarova bila,  
i Vrbica, Mala i Velika.

[And don't you know, Vid Maričić,  
That Mila was the Emperor's,  
and Vrbica, Large and Small.]

(Delorko 1979:64)

Otherwise, Vid Maričić is also known as a *serdar* [military leader], or someone who had received special recognition from the Venetians for his success in battles against the Turks from the Ravni Kotari region inland from Zadar. We cannot be sure, of course, if this Vid - Maričić or not - - elbowed out from these poems some earlier Croatian folk hero. The singers and/or narrators themselves are quite indifferent to the names of their heroes and easily replace them with others. Connecting Vid Maričić with the Slavic deity Svantovid is perhaps straining credibility too much. We certainly could not define this poem - and others of the type mentioned - as ritual *koleda* poems. Even if we heard them in some *koleda* performance, that would not mean that they are *koleda* poems or songs, but merely that the *koledari* singers were performing them as part of their procession, including them for singing and entertainment purposes, and not in order to fulfil some ritual-customary observance.

The *koleda* are a completely different type of poem with marked *three-part composition*, having as their primary purpose praise of the host and wishing him all the best, health to all members of his household, a rich harvest, and healthy and fertile livestock. The *koledari* singers are rewarded for their efforts and they express their thanks, as can be seen in the third part of the song. They recite or sing a curse, if no gifts are forthcoming! In these songs again, we cannot identify *koleda*.

The *koleda* processions are events in context. When I gave detailed descriptions some time ago of *koleda as texts in processions*, I perused a great deal of both manuscript and printed material and tried to show, on the one hand, what a classical *koleda song* looks like recorded outside of custom. On the other, I endeavoured to show how it functions within custom (the *koleda* procession) - the way in which the entire context acts

upon it, and the way in which it acts on the procession itself.<sup>8</sup> At that time, I was interested in presentation within customs and that situation which pointed to the stage characteristics of this custom in keeping with theatrical practice. I stressed the aesthetic dimensions of the presentation within the *koleda* procession, shown in the most pronounced manner in the performance of the text of the *koleda*. Although subject to variation, actualisations and improvisations, the text of the *koleda* essentially determines the *koleda* processions as a presentational act. I showed how the performance of the text is full of theatrical signs; I searched for them and thus tried additionally to show that theatrological consideration should also be given to some other folklore forms. In the paper being referred to, I presented numerous notations of texts, pointing out their three-part composition: *the introduction* (the arrival and announcements of the *koledari*), *the central part* (the utterance of good wishes to the host and asking for gifts in return), and *the expression of thanks* (for the gifts) or *the curses* (if no gifts were received).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See: Perić-Polonijo, "Koleda - tekst u ophodu" [*Koleda - Text in Processions*]. *Dani hvarskog kazališta* XI:358–397, Split 1985.

<sup>9</sup> Below is just one example from the village of Rudani near Žminj (Istria):

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Gredu kolejani,           | [The <i>koleda</i> singers are marching, |
| oj fiole, fiole,          | Oh, <i>fiole, fiole,</i>                 |
| stanite na noge,          | Get up on your feet,                     |
| novo lito gre!            | New Year is coming!                      |
| Pasali smo poli dol,      | We passed through the valley,            |
| videli smo zelen bor,     | And saw a green fir-tree,                |
| pod njim vezan beli konj, | A white horse tied beneath it,           |
| zlatnom uzdom pouzdan,    | With a secure golden braid,              |
| i z misecom potkovan.     | With horseshoes of moonlight.            |
| Našli mužu vrata,         | We found for man a door,                 |
| oj fiole,                 | Oh, <i>fiole,</i>                        |
| tako Bože zlata,          | So Lord of Gold,                         |
| fiole, fiole,             | <i>fiole, fiole,</i>                     |
| stanite gori,             | Stand up,                                |
| novo lito gre!            | New Year is coming!                      |
| Ko ćete ča dati           | Whatever you will give,                  |
| doba van se stati.        | It's time to get up.                     |

|                         |                                       |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| U vašem vrtu venke,     | Willow trees in your garden,          |
| tu su dobre ženske.     | And fine women here.                  |
| U vašem vrtu puži,      | Snails in your garden,                |
| tu su dobri muži.       | Fine men here too.                    |
| U vašem vrtu jedan cer, | A bitter oak in your garden,          |
| Bog vam živi vašu hčer! | May God give your daughter long life! |
| U vašoj bačvi vina,     | Fine wine in your barrels,            |
| Bog vam živi sina!      | May God give your son long life!      |

|                       |                              |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Kačke, kačke, kačkice | Tubs, tubs, little tubs,     |
| tu su pune bačvice.   | There are full barrels here. |

### III

Within the framework of Croatian oral lyricism - similarly and almost the same as in other Slavic countries - *two groups of ritual poems* are usually distinct: those connected with the *calendar or seasonal cycle* and those which are part of some customs in the *life cycle*. *Koleda* examples belong to the former group while *laments or dirges* and some *wedding songs* have their place in the second group. The examples of laments and wedding farewell songs can also show the similarity of one genre with another.

Dirges have their special place as part of funerals, they are connected with an exceptionally significant event in family life, and are, by definition, ritual in relation to other types of dirges, or, more precisely, laments, which have more of a personal connotation (e.g. the lament of a mother whose son is leaving to do his army service) or and even broader *national* connotation (such as the laments of an entire people over their unhappy destiny).

Among the life cycle customs, apart from those connected with death (and birth) the most significant are wedding customs, and, as part of them, rituals which characterise certain ritual songs. Consequently - death and weddings. Dirges for the dead and for tearful brides have family connotation: funeral songs divide the family into the living and the dead, while wedding songs divide the bride's kinsfolk from those of the groom. Funeral and wedding rituals are analogous in certain of their characteristics, and quite contrary in others: a wedding - life, a funeral -

Oj firole, firole!  
Reka mi je vaš peteh  
da imate dobar špek;  
reka mi je vaš kopun  
da imate pun kasun.  
Stani babo na stolicu  
hiti doli klobasicu!  
Ko ćeš jenu, ko ćeš dvi,  
kolejani gredu tri!  
Oj firole, firole!  
Ako ćete ča dati  
doba vam se stati,  
ako ne ćete niš dati,  
morete i spatii.

Kadi vam je ognjišće  
da bi k letu vam bilo smetlišće!  
Bog s vami,  
Ne znalo se za vami!

Oh, *firole, firole!*  
Your rooster told me  
That you have good ham;  
Your capon told me  
That you have a full larder.  
Climb up, old hag, on the chair  
throw down the sausage!  
One if you like, or two,  
*Koleda* singers go in threes!  
Oh, *firole, firole,*  
If you plan to give at all  
It's time to get up,  
If you're not giving anything,  
You might as well sleep.

Where your hearth stands  
May it be a rubbish dump by New Year!  
God be with you,  
May nothing of you be known!]

Recited by Jure Rudan (30 years of age)

See: Nikola Bonifačić Rožin, 1953, ms. IEF, no. 118.

- death; wedding joy - a funeral - mourning; a wedding - youth, a funeral - age; the separation of the deceased from the living - is marked with sadness, but the encounter with the dead - is marked with joy; a similar situation arises in wedding songs which sing about the departure of the bride from her parents' house - expressing sadness - and the encounter with the groom's house - where joy is shown. Both these events occur within a rite of passage: the deceased and the bride cross from one group of kin to another and in fact take on the role of intermediaries in that transition. The majority of recorded dirges refer to dead males (father, husband, father-in-law, brother, son) who are lamented by females (daughters, wives, daughters-in-law, mothers, sisters). Information also exists about the so-called "black", "mourning" or "reverse" *kolo*<sup>10</sup> round dances being performed to funeral songs. The division into male and female territory is also significant in this context. Although all human beings die, the death of a male in a patriarchal community, particularly if he is the head of a household leaving behind a widow and children who are not provided for, has much more significance than the death of a woman. So the most frequent protagonist in funeral songs is a male, while the female usually predominates in wedding songs - the bride (and, in general, the mother - mother-in-law, sister-in-law on the husband's side). In patriarchal communities, it is the woman who crosses over from her family to another, and not the man. In the funeral songs, the female widow figure is passive while that of the bride at weddings is active. There are sources and notations of songs which show how the women denote themselves by putting on a head-scarf. In wedding songs this is a white scarf symbolising her being handed over to her husband and her transfer to his family; the widow's black scarf denotes the loss of her husband. While the bride loses her family by marriage, the widow's loss of her husband in that environment - means that she has lost everything. Analogously to the bride, by transfer to the world of the dead, the deceased person loses his living kinsfolk. Oral poems often mention the analogy with marriage in words such as, for example, that he *married the black earth and green grass*; his "bride" is Death who appears in female form.<sup>11</sup>

Grief and joy are two opposing feelings which combine in certain funeral and wedding songs. In principle, funeral songs are sad. However,

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<sup>10</sup>*The Reversed Kolo* - was danced in the opposite direction to that which was danced at festivities and at weddings (it was also connected with other customs: turning clothes inside out, and the like. On this point see: M. Matićki, *Dvori samotvori*. Belgrade 1979:11).

<sup>11</sup> See: Vuk St. Karadžić, *Život i običaji naroda srpskoga*. [Ethnographic Papers] 1957:130.

some also express joy because of the meeting between the deceased and the dead, while wedding songs which are joyful, in principle, sometimes express sadness because of the separation of the bride from her parents and their home.

Both groups of songs are rich in figurative speech: *the grave* is not a grave but a *court*, the deceased is described as having prepared himself for a wedding. Here one encounters a discrepancy between text and context, between the words and what they denote (meaning and reference). A replacement has been made and instead of the term funeral the wedding term is used.<sup>12</sup> This process is literally employed in funeral songs: Death and everything associated with it is not directly named; there is a divergence between the words and the actual phenomena to which they relate. The explanation for such phenomena should be sought in the *magical function* of the text of funeral songs. The basic function of ritual funeral songs is for magic to ensure a safe transition of the deceased into the other world.

It should be emphasised here that this phenomenon is not identical with other phenomena of figurative speech in other lyrical poems and songs. Merry wedding songs are full of metaphorical expressions: the bride can be called a *branch of lilac* just as the deceased may be referred to, for example, as a *fir-tree*. The same process of metaphorisation is found in both songs - human beings being identified as flowers or trees. However, when the (professional) mourner wails her lament for the deceased before he is carried out of the house, when his departure is compared with departure for a wedding, the function of this metaphorisation process differs. The actual phenomenon is replaced by its antonym - the *magic function* of the process is present in funeral songs, and thus, this is the function of identification of the funeral with a wedding. When the mourner addresses the deceased and asks if he is so well dressed because he is leaving for a wedding, no ironical effect is intended; instead this is necessary so that the deceased's soul will be protected from demons. The magical laughter has the same function together with the intentional omission of mention of the word death. So, the mourner speaks of life. The use of interrogative sentences is also one of the processes used to distance the events from reality - the descriptions are included in the questions. Certain animals, too, (hawks, for example)

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<sup>12</sup> Even today such figurative expressions can be heard in the context of lamentation. A colleague of mine, Ivan Pažanin spoke to me about the funeral of his 72 years old relative Svetin Anđelić - Turko that took place in Vinišća near Trogir on 4. November 1996. His widow expressed her grief with the sentence: " Watch, my Svetin, how many wedding guests came to you", followed by his maid of honour who kept saying "This is his last wedding".

and objects (for example, swords) with phenomena (such as the Sun) have cult meaning. The Sun is often mentioned in funeral poems, dirges are recited only during the day from dawn to sunset. The Sun is the symbol of light and often also appears in wedding songs, associating in some examples with the bride who shines like gold or like the Sun; other examples mention the "golden thread" which "unwound from the clear sky" (from the Sun), which is connected to God and good fortune. Just as gold and the Sun are associated with the deceased and the Kingdom of the Dead (in heaven), so the same terms in wedding songs associate with the bride and God (the Kingdom of Heaven). Funeral songs, of course, also speak of the lack of light - of darkness and gloom; they link darkness with the underworld. I would also like to mention that there are songs in which light and darkness are used to provide opposing images.

The *parallelism* which I am drawing attention to is a process which appears generally in lyrical poems but can be regarded as a *specific process* in funeral songs, while *similes*, *antithesis* and *hyperbole* which can also be used - and are - do not fall into this category in funeral songs.<sup>13</sup>

It should be emphasised that identification of the deceased with the groom in funeral songs has a *magical function*, while such identification in examples of ballad songs which are not ritual in nature causes an *ironical effect*.

And finally to put a question - what does everything that has been said concerning the problem of the relationship between the texts of the poems/ songs and the customs and rituals within which they were created mean for their classification?

I shall mention once again *M. J. Propp* who laid down four criteria for establishing the specifics of genre: compositional unity, function, manner of performance, and musical structure (Propp 1976:41). If we set aside the compositional unity and the function, we see that the compositional unity points to the relations between elements within the text, while function indicates the relation of the text with something outside of it; the first criterion concerns syntax, and the second semantics.

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<sup>13</sup> For example, hyperbole from a funeral poem: *Još da može sestra zboriti/ ja vas ne bih iskitila/ da je zala crno more/ da je knjiga ravno polje/ ja vas ne bih iskitila...* [If the sister could still talk/ I would not garland you/ If the hall was a black sea/ If a book was a flat field/ I would not garland you...] Variants of hyperbole are found not only here but also in many other poems, collective and individual laments and love songs, and in other poetic and prose genres.

A second example relates to the aforementioned points of *contact between weddings and funerals*. For example, some ballads speak of a young man "who married the black earth and the green grass"; or, of a young man who had been killed, who had fallen in love in a foreign country with a girl "from whom he could not bring himself to separate" as in the *bugarštica* ballad, *Marko Kraljević and His Brother Andrijaš*, etc.

It is the second criterion, the criterion of function, places the emphasis in analysis on the relation between text and context (one could say from the situational context as far as the cultural context). Here we can speak of various contextual levels as they are interpreted by various authors. A. Dundes, for example, speaks of text, texture and context (which I have already mentioned in papers cited earlier) and refers to the specific situation in which an individual text is performed. To this author, *text* is the recitation or singing of individual versions of poems, stories, sayings etc.; *texture* is the linguistic expression: accent, voice pitch, intonation, onomatopoeia etc. According to Dundes, *through analysis* one arrives at folklore structure (we would say - structure of the composition, topic, content) while *analysis of texture* uncovers linguistic structure (we would say - linguistic style structure). *Context* is the social situation mentioned by Dundes, in which the folklore text is realised. That social context, for example, the structure of the audience, influences the shaping of the text and the texture (Dundes 1964:251–265). R. Abrahams (1976) in fact conceives a higher, more abstract category derived from a greater number of contextual definitions (Dundes calling the contextual definitions function). Both these criteria also indicate two diverse approaches to analysis of genres: the structuralistic which places the emphasis on analysis of the text, and the functional which concentrates on the relation between text and context, in the broadest sense. P. G. Bogatyrev pointed out, as seen in papers cited earlier, that the markedly traditionalist nature of ritual poetry is conditioned primarily by the link between the text and reality at the moment of performance (Bogatyrev 1971:30), while D. S. Lihačov drew attention to still one more significant characteristic of ritual poetry: "Picturing and commenting on the present, ritual poetry cannot have constant text to the extent that other folklore genres do. Unchanging text exists only to the extent that the ritual itself is unchanging. Constancy in text is found in relation to events which are largely deprived of individual variations" (Lihačov 1972:284–285).

What does this show? On the one hand we have the inconstancy or changing nature of the texts of ritual poems, while on the other one sees a pronounced constancy of context. The ritual itself contains a pattern which is repeated, and in this respect alone, as has been mentioned, segments of the ritual are repeated as are the constant contextual situations in which, for example, funeral songs are performed; at the same time, these are situations in which the individual variations are minimal. Taking into account both the criteria mentioned and the example of the dirge, we could say that the dirge as a ritual poem shows stability on a semantic level, while it is unstable at the syntactical level. In other words, the semantic elements from which it is comprised are constant, while their

connection is subject to improvisation. It is also important to mention that the funeral poems which accompany the ritual are strictly distributed within the flow of the ritual itself and they can be classified by this criterion, or according to where and when they are performed: "over the deceased at home", "when the deceased is carried out of the house", "when he is being read the farewell" (the requiem) and "over the grave". Therefore, there are a number of contextual situations within the framework of the ritual in which certain funeral dirges are performed (the case being the same with other ritual poems in other rituals, as we saw, for example, in the wedding rituals). The *primary function* of such genres is *magical* and not *poetic*. Because of this magical function, the objective is that the funeral dirges ensure the deceased a proper transition into the world of the dead; thus, as has been shown, it uses figurative speech, while the text itself is prone to improvisation. Weddings, too, provide an opportunity for improvisation with the process of loss of the strictly prescribed rituals. In the older strata of Slavic oral lyricism, weddings were occasions for sad farewells, sad enumeration of woes, complaint and - quite literally - even dirges.<sup>14</sup>

When non-ritual dirges (laments) are in question, improvisation is almost complete, there being various occasions for lamentation without any limitation (imposed in ritual laments by the ritual itself). The composition of non-ritual laments is varied. Such laments are primarily emotional reactions to personal misfortune, grief and tribulations.

Setting out from the organic link between poems and rituals, it is important to bear in mind not so much the generality of motifs in the diverse genres of ritual (and customary) poetry, as to study the transformation of the ritual act in the poetic theme, taking into account the interweaving of actual events in life with the psychological and poetic functions conditioned by such interweaving.

Since as early as the 19th century, an opinion has existed that lyrical poetry "was born" under the aegis of ritual poetry. Support for this can really be found, among oral literary forms connected with weddings, for example, and there is an entire group of texts which show Humankind's inner world and its relations towards events. But these poems should not be grouped with those which have no obvious connection with them, whose essence is far from lyrical.<sup>15</sup> For example, when a bride asks her friends to

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<sup>14</sup> Speaking of Russian folklore, folklore scholars have shown that laments are a composite parts of wedding customs and rituals. (See, for example, Propp's classification in: Propp 1976.)

<sup>15</sup> For that very reason, the view in Soviet folkloristics was that ritual poetry should not be regarded as lyricism and thus should not be classified as oral lyrical poetry. For them, this would have been the aftermath of the influence of art literature types on



help her to pick flowers, then that it a poem which is performed only at weddings. There is also a school of thought that customary lyrical poems are necessary in rituals in order to comment on them. However, here the question could be: how is it possible, for example, that one and the same poem is performed at various weddings and at various moments of the ritual? The answer would be: because that song does not contain a certain "hammered out" ritual activity. It could, let us say, only show a symbolic act of transition of the girl from her maidenly environment to that of a married woman; or it could be a poem of praise which now praises someone else, such as the parents, with the same means; while on some other occasion the object of praise could simply be the head of a household visited with some processional poem.

In defining the genre composition of customary oral poems it is important also to take into account the dramaturgical essence of the ritual.<sup>16</sup> This complex demand can show us how individual genres carry within themselves a number of pronounced dramaturgical elements, while others have fewer of them and in others still they are almost undetectable. With the help of such a principle of classification it is possible to set apart oral lyrical poems which lack such elements, or oaths, *koleda*, poems of praise and toasts, and reproaches for weddings which those elements are much more distinct.

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folklore and/or oral literature. The Soviet folklorists supported a different classification of ritual poetry, the purposeful-magical function in the shaping of reality. For example, wedding poetry as part of ritual poetry also contains, as a whole, elements of epic poetry and drama, but definitely would not be classified within epic poetry or drama. It would be logical for ritual poetry, and thus wedding poetry for example, to be inferred from the primary classification. Consequently, Soviet folklorists divided wedding folklore and/or oral wedding poems into poems which are strikingly ritual and those which are lyrical. (See, for example, the work of N. P. Kolpakova 1962, 1977 and J. G. Kruglov 1978, 1982.)

<sup>16</sup> For more on this point, see Ivan Lozica's aforementioned book on folklore forms in the Croatian theatre (1990).

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## USMENE PJESME U KONTEKSTU OBIČAJA I OBREDA

### SAŽETAK

Promatranje pjesama iz perspektive teksta (verbalnog izričaja) zahtijeva metodu i sustav vrednovanja koji će biti drukčiji od metode i sustava vrednovanja što ih nalaže opis pjesama unutar običaja, odnosno iz perspektive izvedbe. Pitanje je: kako sučeliti te dvije realnosti i kako istaknuti metodološki presjek?

U obavijesnom pogledu tekst pjesme je određen smislom. Međutim, mnoga obilježja što ih pripisujemo pojedinim pjesmama proizlaze iz upotreba u kojima smo ih zatekli (u izvedbi, unutar običaja). Otuda proizlazi slojevit odnos smisao/značenje s obzirom na vezanost i nevezanost pjesama uz izvedbu (običaj).

Svaki običaj možemo promatrati kao jedinstvo strukture i sadržaja. Tako i svaku pjesmu možemo promatrati kao jedinstvo strukture i sadržaja. Možemo razgraditi običaj na segmente i pjesmu promatrati kao izlučeni segment.

Pošli smo u ovom radu od osnovne pretpostavke da se usmenoknjiževni oblici koji nastaju i traju unutar običaja ne smiju promatrati neovisno od običaja kojemu pripadaju. Ponekad, bez analize običaja u cjelini i pronalaženja određenog mjesta i uloge teksta u njemu, nije moguće u potpunosti shvatiti ne samo smisao teksta nego ni strukturu, simboliku, kompoziciju i druge poetske osobine teksta. Istodobno, usmenoknjiževni oblici često pojašnjavaju značenje pojedinih sekvenci i detalja obreda.