

MAJA BOŠKOVIĆ-STULLI'S CONCEPTION OF THE HISTORY OF ORAL LITERATURE, OR ON THE PROBLEMS OF LITERARY-HISTORICAL SYSTEMATIZATION IN ORAL LITERATURE

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EVELINA RUDAN

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb

The expression “the history of oral literature” contains certain aporias that are rarely encountered in other expressions where “history” is one of the elements. These aporias are evident in two connections: the one that links history with oral literature, and the one manifest in the term “oral literature”. The latter was previously addressed by W. Ong (1982), while the former primarily pertains to the fact that true history of oral literature is elusive. The resolution of the latter issue revolves around our ability to date it. The only chronologically accessible aspect in the context of oral literature is its recorded form. Thus, every history of oral literature is essentially a history of records and their context, to the extent that the context of the record is attainable. This paper explores the concept of literary history that Maja Bošković-Stulli implicitly or explicitly established in her work *Usmena književnost* (Oral Literature) (History of Croatian Literature, vol. 1) and the way that this history aligns with her ideas about the literary-historical basis of oral literature.

Keywords: history of literature, oral literature, methodology, conception, periodization, genre

INTRODUCTION

Maja Bošković-Stulli wrote her study on oral literature as part of the comprehensive literary-historical edition *History of Croatian Literature*, published in five volumes, during

a period when new historicism was becoming very influential, that is, in the 1970s. From that perspective and based on the influence that new historicism and cultural materialism would later have, it might be expected that this paper should address and problematize issues of literary history in general, not just the history of oral literature. This would also involve posing questions that have been intensely debated over the last 40 years (or in our case, the last two decades) regarding the history of literature as a cultural practice that “mediates, produces, and discloses power relations within its corresponding cultural, social, and ideological environment” (Žužul 2019: 15). However, it seems that this can be partly seen from a somewhat different perspective, especially considering the controversies and challenges that arose during the systematization of the history of oral literature even before that.

PROBLEMS OF LITERARY-HISTORICAL SYSTEMATIZATION IN ORAL LITERATURE

The expression “the history of oral literature” contains certain aporias that are rarely encountered in other expressions where “history” is one of the elements. These aporias are evident in two connections: the one that links history with oral literature, and the one manifest in the very term “oral literature”. The term “oral literature” has long been accepted as such, not only in Croatian folkloristics,¹ nevertheless, if we consider the roots of the words, at first glance and without deeper reflection, it is easy to recognise the oxymoronic nature of the term. It identifies the subject of our study (literature), while the adjective “oral” evokes that which is spoken and created and transmitted through speech (although later it may not be transmitted solely through speech). By this logic, the adjective “oral” describes a subject whose root term was devised to describe a reality that is fundamentally different, or rather completely contrary to what it is attributed. Ong wrote about this aporia (albeit in English terminology, the opposition is between oral versus written, not oral versus literary, as it is in Croatian but the difference is insignificant here).² Both Maja Bošković-Stulli

¹ P. Sébillot was probably the first to use the term “oral literature”, in 1881 (cf. Bošković-Stulli 1983: 42) as the Arnhem Congress recommendation mentions “experts in oral literature” (cf. *ibid.*: 19, 44). American folklore studies frequently use precisely that term, for example, A. Dundes: *Metafolklore and Oral Literature Criticism* (cf. Dégh, 2001: 469), and H. Jason: *A Multidimensional Approach to Oral Literature* (cf. Bošković-Stulli 1983: 34, 45). The term was also in use among older Russian folklorists (Yuri Sokolov criticized it for providing only a technical characteristic of the concept) (cf. *ibid.*: 45). In Croatian scholarly circles, the term was introduced in the second half of the 1960s (cf. Petrović 1965: 221–233) and established in the early 1970s (cf. Kekez 1972: 69–75). J. Kekez prefers it over the term “folk literature”, mainly because the term “folk literature” implies a collectivist conception (Kekez 1986: 142). Bošković-Stulli advocates for this term, citing somewhat different reasons, mainly focusing on the transmissive and performative character of oral literature (Bošković-Stulli 1983: 52).

² The Croatian term *književnost* “literature” comes from the word *knjiga* “book” and it equally covers literature that was published/recorded on clay or stone tablets as well as literature that was published in the last decades, for example, on a blog (neither one nor the other form of writing is connected with books). In addition, the term lyric poem has long since ceased to refer to songs performed on the lyre, so the problem

and Josip Kekez advocate for the term “oral literature” and consistently apply it in their works, although their reasoning for their choices is somewhat different. Bošković-Stulli's reasoning is primarily transmissive in nature, while considering ontological reasons, whereas Kekez's reasoning is mostly ontological, as he considers the transmissive nature of the choice and rejects a collectivist conception. Folklorists and philologists educated in Croatian literary and folklore study circles still use the term today.

Therefore, when I refer to this aporia, I do not do so with the intention of changing the term, but rather to emphasize the peculiarities of the subject itself, which then influence the other connection I am discussing: the connection between history and oral literature. Here, the aporia arises from the fact that oral literature, and orality in general, is organized based on entirely different foundations – foundations that we, who are accustomed to written systems, cannot easily decipher. When we contemplate them, we do so from the perspective of literacy. We produce systems that contemplate oral works because oral organization does not recognize systems, in our written sense and manner of organizing systems, which can only exist in writing.

Oral literature, within its system (which we will refer to as a system for lack of another term), does not establish points of historicity in a manner similar to the written form. Those who participate in the process of its creation often do not remember when an individual oral literary work originated,³ nor do they consciously identify the genre it belongs to in terms of its development (in other words, there are no procedures that could be successfully compared to the needs of written literature to invent new possibilities, for example, for the novel and its “modernization”). The awareness of genres themselves is entirely different from written ones (even from the standpoint of the science that describes them).⁴ When oral literature self-reflects on genres, it does so in small segments (the storyteller will say “Oh, but that's a legend”, about a tale about fairies just to distinguish it from a tale about witches, and yet even this specific example of genre self-reflection emerged in the interference with written culture). However, it is difficult to establish from such data exactly when the distinction between these two types of stories in oral tradition began, whether it is specific to certain communities or an occurrence that can be discussed on a broader scale (e.g. Croatian oral literature in general). One of the reasons why we cannot make comparisons is because researchers used to treat metanarrative elements differently than

is not so much in the naming, it seems to me, as in a certain inability of the community immersed in the written culture to understand the ways of functioning of the oral, and I believe that Ong's mention of that aporia was actually motivated by the possible and long-lasting blind spot that written culture had in relation to oral culture, especially in philology. More about this discussion in Rudan 2022.

³ Potentially, in authentication formulas within the genre of narration, or as narrator's comments during the storytelling situation, either before or after the actual text. However, on the one hand, the function of such comments is not to place them in a specific diachronic paradigm, and on the other, this information does not tell us when the oral literary fact originated, but rather when a specific narrator heard it. See Rudan 2016: 46–61.

⁴ What scholars of oral literature treat as lyric poetry (using an analogy with written forms) is always performed in sung form in natural storytelling situations (except for prayer/songs that can also be recited), and narrators typically recite it only at the researcher's request.

they do today. Those changes are sometimes visible even within the work of a single researcher.⁵ There are not always definitive points within the subject itself that researchers can latch onto, there are places that could place a particular work into a specific diachronic sequence, which is a crucial point for any attempt to organize it historically. When I say, “not always” and “they often do not remember”, I am suggesting that there are indeed some oral literary works that do include temporal data (to a lesser or greater degree of precision). For instance, this includes epic poems about certain battles (which we then at least know were composed after those battles, although we cannot always date them precisely) or historical legends featuring a central figure like Franz Joseph, and for these, we can know that they were told during his regency or more often later (when there was some temporal distance that provided the opportunity to “mythologize”⁶ him more easily). Furthermore, oral literary works are subject to a process that could be called “contemporizing”. For example, in more recent versions of the “Snow White”, the young king, who goes hunting with a gun and on a horse in older accounts, upon discovering Snow White, makes a telephone call and goes to his office (Marjanić 1997, IEF rkp 1608: 44 and 45).⁷ From this variant we can easily determine that it originated after the introduction of the telephone. However, there are oral literary forms such as proverbs (as illustrated by Šabić 2000: 213) or even certain nonsense nursery rhymes that are much more difficult or even impossible to place within a specific time frame, even when considering formal, linguistic, and stylistic features, along with the assistance of other disciplines such as historiography, textual criticism, stylistics, comparative linguistics, dialectology, and cultural anthropology. Sometimes, even having the entire analytical apparatus at our disposal, it is impossible to determine the origins of songs with certainty. The song/prayer “Sveti Petar u raj gre” (Saint Peter Goes to the Heavens) recorded by Jakov Volčić in the early 19th century (HNPIKO 1997: 419–421) and its version recorded in 2001⁸ differ to some degree only in dialect (one was recorded in northern Istria, and the other in central Istria), although the latter, more recent version, is even longer. Moreover, difficulties of establishing when the oral texts were produced are confirmed by experts such as Ivan Slamnig, who, given his particular interest in poetry and his outstanding results in metrical research, would likely be able to solve this issue if his knowledge were sufficient to tackle the problem. However, even he, in his *Antologija hrvatske poezije od najranijih zapisa do kraja XIX. stoljeća* (An Anthology of Croatian Poetry from the Earliest Records to the End of the 19th Century) (1960), said that the oral poems he selected and included in his anthology are not ordered chronologically because it is “quite a delicate process to date the origin of folk songs and relate it to a specific period”.⁹

⁵ M. Bošković-Stulli also reported on such changes in her own work, see Bošković-Stulli 2002: 49 and 50.

⁶ On Zagreb traditions about Franz Joseph, see Marks 1996: 154–164.

⁷ Similar approaches have also been observed in oral stories of other literatures, for instance, cf. Biti 1997: 26 and 27.

⁸ Personal notes. Narrated by Kate Kuhar, née Lovrinčić, born in 1924 in Žavori, recorded in 2001.

⁹ Unlike them, Nikola Miličević and Antun Šoljan in their *Antologija hrvatske poezije od XIV. stoljeća do naših dana* (Anthology of Croatian Poetry from the 14th Century to the Present Day), published six years

However, even when we somehow manage to date certain instances, problems do not end there. In fact, the history of oral literature is essentially the history of records of that oral literature, which means that dating those records serves as a temporal reference point for literary historians, including oral literature historians. Records attest that these specific units existed at the time of the record and must have existed for some time before they were recorded. Otherwise, they would not have been considered relevant oral literary facts. However, records do not reveal how long they had existed before them, nor whether they were captured at the end of their oral relevance or at their peak. In this context, by oral relevance, I am referring to a situation in which an oral literary unit is performed (narrated, sung, presented, spoken) in so-called natural storytelling situations (arising from the storyteller's and recipients' needs during spontaneous storytelling situations within the oral community)¹⁰ or whether it was performed once and for the purposes of the researcher, while it had disappeared from oral communities a long time ago (e.g. the storyteller heard it last in their youth).¹¹ At first glance, one might say that this problem is somewhat constructed, as it seems characteristic of the present time, and thus previous historians might not have perceived it as an obstacle. However, examples like "bugarščica", whose time of oral relevance has long passed (the last fragments were recorded on the island of Krk at the beginning of the 20th century), confirm that the issue of oral relevance is not insignificant, even for earlier periods. Yet, even without such confirmation, the functioning mechanism of oral literary communication gives us reason to assume its significance. Furthermore, the challenge lies in finding reliable references that adequately document this issue. More often, we may come across comments from casual or intentional collectors and researchers who (as time has shown, erroneously)

later, attempted to chronologically order them, but this categorization did not prove to be a successful solution: they divided oral poems into two groups (the first from the 14th and 15th century, and the second from the 16th to the 18th century), but the first group included "bugarščice" recorded by Petar Hektorović and Juraj Baraković. In the second group, they included poems of undetermined time of origin, for which M. Bošković-Stulli assumes are probably from the 19th century (Bošković-Stulli 1967: 248), and the authors dated them to the second half of the 18th century due to, according to their words, special interest in oral poetry that existed at the time. Although M. Bošković-Stulli, as can be deduced from her text, considered the inclusion of "bugarščice" from Hektorović and Baraković in the first group as a mistake, it could be justified, given that anthologists assume that these "bugarščice" must have existed for some time before they were recorded, and thus they were placed in a period earlier than the date of their record. However, there are no valid reasons for placing poems in the second group, so Bošković-Stulli's conclusion seems well-founded and reasonable, and at the same time serves as yet another confirmation of the difficulties of chronological categorization of oral literature: "I am discussing the chronological division of poems because I see a fundamental problem in the mistakes that occur: it is impossible to consistently classify folk songs, except for the relatively few from known older sources, chronologically similar to some foreign anthologies" (Bošković-Stulli 1967: 248).

¹⁰ By the term "oral community", I certainly do not mean a community that does not communicate by writing, but a community in which a certain number of forms circulate orally among certain members of the community.

¹¹ For example, a charm known under names like *Sv. Martin* (St Martin) (in Istria) or *Jedinstvo* (Unity) in other parts of Croatia, was recited (spoken) by the bedside of the dying person for an easier death (cf. Rudan and Tomašić 2019).

conclude that particular units or genres are no longer orally relevant.¹² Sometimes such a conclusion arises from demonological legend traditions (or belief narrative traditions) being seen through the lens of “enlightenment”. In the case of other genres, we may often encounter the idea of preserving “folk treasure while it still exists”. Such notions have been rooted in the romantic perception that oral literature, heritage, and folk treasures in general should be elevated to a special status. Croatia’s recording practices can trace their first explicitly stated call to Maksimilijan Vrhovac’s letter to priests in 1813, despite the fact that “except for paremiological treasures, literature contains information about nearly a thousand records of Croatian folk literature until the end of the 18th century” (Botica 2000: 143). From that letter onwards (even though the letter did not receive a significant response), collectors and researchers embarked on fieldwork with the noble aim of gathering what could still be salvaged. This approach was undertaken under the assumption that oral literature was on the brink of disappearing. Of course, some variants were disappearing, and even entire subtypes (like the above-mentioned “bugaršćica”) were fading from active and passive repertoires. Certain genres (such as epic poems) no longer held oral relevance, but this perspective ignored new possibilities (such as transformations of old genres – for instance, demonological traditions featuring the return of the dead that would shift borders between lands (cf. Rudan 2011) may not be as relevant anymore, but new variations involving material and customary changes have emerged. In those variants, the dead no longer return to shift borders but instead appear as young girls trying to hitchhike and stop drivers).¹³

This example leads to another question regarding the organization of the oral literature history: which materials, artifacts, or data should be included in its overall description within specific periods. There is a tacit assumption in overviews of contemporary literature that oral literature should not be represented. For instance, “Panorama književnosti XX. stoljeća” (A Panorama of 20th-Century Literature) edited by Vlatko Pavletić (1965) does not contain a chapter on oral literature, and even in literary histories that cover the contemporary literature period we learn nothing about what happens to oral literature during the same period (at best, we might read that certain oral literary elements influenced a certain poet or writer).

There are two possible explanations for such a state of affairs: the first is a tendency “that so often appears in practice, where literary histories start with ‘literacy’ – whose only value is that of being a monument – and then continue with a narrower selection of works of artistic value” (Solar 1985: 55). This tendency reveals that oral literature is given importance only in being a monument, despite declarative or assumed claims about its value within the folk spirit. The second tendency is that “Literary history thus creates a ‘quality’ of literary chronology, and such ‘quality’ arises from the assumption of develop-

¹² Comparing an example of folk healing he personally witnessed when recording Glagolitic manuscripts, Rudolf Strohal states: “Recently, at the same time, the role of the healer is slowly disappearing”, however the “recently” is still ongoing (cf. Rudan 2016).

¹³ Personal notes, March 14, 1999, Balići; May 20, 2000, Jušani.

ment or decline, progress or regress, 'condensing' or 'dilution' of literature over time" (Solar 1985: 62). Although written literature can also experience "condensing" and "dilution", it is still assumed to have a certain progressive development. On the other hand, judging by the treatment of oral literature in literary histories, this development is assumed, not always fully acknowledged, and it tends to be non-progressive or regressive. In other words, just as written literature is assumed to "grow", "develop", and "strengthen" along the timeline from a historical point (the beginning of literacy) onwards, oral literature is assumed only to "weaken", "diminish", and "disappear" from that same point onwards. The logic of the division between a pre-literate and literate culture supports such an approach, if not always consciously. However, when discussing oral literature, this logic is not very helpful or very meaningful. This is due to the simple fact that we can only work with those forms of oral literature that have been actualized within the literate period. Here is how Gajo Peleš restates Felix Vodička's triads:

- 1) Artifact, perceptibly accessible, stored, and established message.
- 2) Author, historical moment, actual context of creation.
- 3) Concretization and the actual moment of reception.

"These elements are distinguishable in every valid interpretation of literary texts, but they are almost evenly represented in a historical approach" (Peleš 1996: 155). Vodička's triad will be applicable to the extent allowed by the specificity of the material (regarding the absence of authors, the rare possibility of determining precise circumstances of creation, mostly dealing with messages stored in a medium different from the original source, lacking the ability to verify the moment of actual reception but with the potential to confirm its occurrence). It can be applied to oral literature histories, and to some extent, national literature histories that have incorporated oral literature.¹⁴

MAJA BOŠKOVIĆ-STULLI'S CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

Due to her extensive, thorough, and successful engagement in the study of oral literature, which included field research, working on classification, participation in international committees for certain genres, and more, Maja Bošković-Stulli was considered an ideal scholar to compile a modern independent history of oral literature within the framework of the project *Povijest hrvatske književnosti* (History of Croatian Literature) vols. 1-5, 1974–1978. The first book of this project is titled *Usmena i pučka književnost* (Oral and Folk Literature),

¹⁴ Due to limitations of space, a chapter dealing with the methodologies through which oral literature was represented in selected examples of national literary histories (Jagić 1953; Medini 1902; Vodnik 1913; Ježić 1993; Barac 1954; Barac 1954a; Barac 1960; Frangeš 1987; Novak, S. P. 1996; Jelčić 1997), as well as insights into other works that addressed this topic (e.g. Banov 1996; Kekez 1997; Botica 1997; Botica 2000), Čubelić (1972, 1986); and more recent ones like Sunara (2021), along with references to the latest histories of oral literature (Dragić 2008; Botica 2013), will be published in an anniversary collection dedicated to Maja Bošković-Stulli.

but the histories of these two literary categories are only combined in the title; in all other aspects they are independent works by individual authors. This was the first time that *folk literature*, which Divna Zečević wrote about, appeared in Croatian scholarship.

As for oral literature, considering some predecessors (such as the above-mentioned Radetić, and even more extensive sections dedicated to the history of oral literature in works like Jagić's history), M. Bošković-Stulli's work might not have been perceived as pioneering. However, her conceptual approach made it so. Although her work appeared about a hundred years after Ivan Radetić's (1879) *Pregled hrvatske tradicionalne književnosti* (Overview of Croatian Traditional Literature), she briefly mentioned Radetić in her discussion of oral literature (Bošković-Stulli 1967: 237-260), characterizing it somewhat unfavourably among the other works she mentioned:

However, I will still mention some attempts, which are nothing more than informative compilations and are now very outdated, but they are still of general interest for the history of the study of Croatian oral literature [...] (ibid.: 242)

It is precisely in this discussion that the author provided guidelines, or rather methodological instructions on what an independent oral literature history should look like, what it should encompass, and how it should be presented in relation to written literature, in much more detail than the space in the actual history allowed her or than she estimated was necessary for the history itself. At the very beginning of the discussion, she discounted two demands in writing the history of oral literature that had been proposed by other scholars, one due to an imprecise exposition, and the other due to the inability to methodologically follow it through. The first demand was that oral literature be incorporated into the history of written literature, as "the idea of a national literary history from which oral literature would be excluded cannot be defended in any way" (Petrović 1972: 224)¹⁵ and it was not disputed by Bošković-Stulli. What was problematic about that demand, in her opinion, were explanations that did not sufficiently consider differences between written and oral literature: "According to some texts by Petrović and Slamnig, it seems that, in their opinion, the difference between these two forms of literary creation is very relative and actually insignificant" (Bošković-Stulli 1967: 238).¹⁶ The second demand referred to periodization, which she claimed should be distinct for oral literature. Using a proposed periodization, she demonstrated and exemplified how it was misguided and added:

Moreover, any other attempt to classify the entire oral literature into periods by mechanically following literary-historical periodization would be equally misguided. Most importantly, by fragmenting and unnaturally dividing oral literature in this way, the fundamental goal discussed by Petrović, Franičević, Petré, and others is not achieved.

¹⁵ In her discussion, Bošković-Stulli cites Svetozar Petrović and adds: "[...] in this regard, the particularly highlighted and ahistorical presentation of oral literature, even if it is within the same literary history, is equated with exclusion in Petrović's context" (Bošković-Stulli 1967: 238).

¹⁶ In the following text, she demonstrated it on Antun Šoljan's work and some texts by Ivan Slamnig (cf. ibid.: 239).

Oral literature does not organically fit into the currents of national literary history by such means; it continues to remain a foreign entity within it. (ibid.: 240)

The solution she proposes (taking into account elements that had already been incorporated into the history of written literature, thus making a separate periodization unnecessary) had been employed partially before, but sporadically in literary histories. However, it seems that she offers this solution for another reason, beyond just methodological consistency. This reason is rooted in the need to place proper emphasis on the second word in the expression “oral literature”, that is, literature itself: “Thus, that part of oral literature became a legitimate fact of written literature through the act of recording and publishing (without, however, disputing its previous original oral form)” (ibid.).

At the time, she was carefully adhering to the advancements of international scholarly thinking and drawing on her own fieldwork experience, which most other historians and scholars who addressed this issue did not have. Therefore, Bošković-Stulli was already aware of at least some implications (and complications in terms of establishing the historical framework for oral literature) of the performance context of oral literature. This awareness is evident, for example, in her history when she discusses the problem of Alan Dundes's concepts of text, texture, and context, or when she examines the intensified understanding of folklore as a communicative process in the works of Dan Ben-Amos (cf. Bošković-Stulli 1978: 13–16). She suggests:

Our oral literature should be organically integrated into the history of national literature by following, first and foremost, fixed literary texts and portraying their presence and the way they influenced the literature of their own time as well as later periods. Additionally, of course, one should thoroughly investigate the influence on existing oral literature in the works of individual writers. The impact of oral literature on the general literary movements of a specific era should be examined, too. The efforts related to recording, publishing, studying, and criticism of oral literature in different periods should be outlined in broad strokes, as these are all literary facts of their time. (Bošković-Stulli 1967: 240)

These suggestions appear very reasonable, and Bošković-Stulli adhered to them in her history. However, it seems that such history would primarily be the history of the way oral literature was accepted in written literature and a history of the way its records were accepted along with the publications within the circles of acceptance that would derive from these sources. In such a history, as I have already mentioned in the introduction, we would not gain more comprehensive information about its life in its so-called natural contexts, nor would the mechanisms of the way it functioned be sufficiently clarified, except perhaps for the declarative, convenient, but worn-out and overused synecdoche of transmission “from generation to generation”.¹⁷ Bošković-Stulli is aware of these issues and thoroughly analyses the consequences of the fact that oral literature is literature in a different medium. She advocates for a comprehensive and independent literature history

¹⁷ The Croatian idiom literally translates as “from knee to knee”.

in which the specificities arising from the medium could be more thoroughly examined, precisely described, and clearly presented. In particular, she emphasized the distinction between oral literary forms and written literary forms, a distinction that stems from the specific characteristics of the medium, the mechanism of creation, origin, and existence of oral literary forms:

Works of oral literature are subject to the influences of time and environment, changing their characteristics, historical themes and characters, their current context, yet they also contain extraordinary stability in their fundamental structures. Nevertheless, in oral literature, due to the way it functions, there are very enduring fundamental constants that preserve the main types of oral literature with barely noticeable changes, the rules of its poetics, fundamental themes, plots, and motifs. [...] In order for oral literary forms to replace the stylistic expressions of individual creators, it had to develop systems of its own styles and stable endurance, so typology of its basic forms is of great importance in oral literature. [...] Therefore, it is necessary, as already mentioned, to classify this material typologically and within the framework of its genres, so one could examine the historical and literary influences and changes of the material itself. (Bošković-Stulli 1967: 243, 244, 245)

Despite an emphasis on the importance of typological classification and determining changes within these genres, in her history Bošković-Stulli provides only a theoretical framework for genres (explaining why she uses the term “genre” rather than the term “type”)¹⁸ with an overview of literary theories about genres in general, not specifically for each individual one. This was impossible in that subsection for methodological reasons that had been explained in the two introductory chapters (to which that subsection belongs). The approach where she would independently present genres did not appear in her remaining text (its implications, however, are partly visible in smaller segments and in the periodization arrangement). In the conclusion of her work, Bošković-Stulli explains the absence of such an approach by stating her intention to include it in the second book of the series:

Taking the same perspective on oral poetry as in this exposition, but including a significant change in outlook which will focus on presenting genres in their historical development and recent forms – this will be taken up in the second part of the history of oral literature. It is planned to supplement and continue everything that has been said so far, but due to the difference in approach, which will no longer be directly tied to the history of Croatian written literature, it will be presented separately. (Bošković-Stulli 1978: 323)

¹⁸ “We have opted for the term ‘genre’ rather than the term ‘type’. There are several reasons for this choice: the term ‘genre’ increasingly prevails in international folklore terminology. In the Croatian literary language, the word ‘type’ refers to many different meanings, which somewhat hinders its specific terminological use. [...] for us, ‘genre’ and ‘type’ are synonymous, but the use of the term ‘type’ could suggest that individual types are subordinate to the three modes conceived as superior and unchangeable entities (i.e., epic, lyric, and drama), which will not be the case in our presentation. Therefore, we have abandoned the term that could lead to such a conclusion” (Bošković-Stulli 1978: 22).

Even though the second part of the historic overview with this specific focus had never been published, Bošković-Stulli mentioned that she already had a foundation for such an approach in some of her previous works.¹⁹

In her discussion, the author emphasizes another unique characteristic of oral literature – the variants it consists of, using a somewhat poetic formulation (otherwise quite uncharacteristic of her serious and meticulous scholarly style):²⁰

And yet, if we wish to portray oral literature as an art of words with its own value, then we must pay the greatest attention and love to the phenomenon of variants; we should discover artistic beauty in their creative changes of the same type of poem or story; we should not direct literary interpretation only towards one permanently written text, but compare that fluid multitude, that untamed kaleidoscope of variants, with ever fresh and surprising transformations of the unfamiliar and sometimes accidentally familiar immediate pattern. [...] I consider researching variants from the perspective of the innovations that arise within them a distinctive literary approach, specific to oral literature. It will have to come to the fore in the historic overview of that literature. (Bošković-Stulli 1967: 246)

Bošković-Stulli consistently employs this approach in her history, citing examples such as different versions of the song about St Nicholas, which she compares and examines across various recorded oral variants (from different regions, some of which she presents in their entirety, others in fragments, and some are simply mentioned), as well as in relation to Glagolitic texts, other genres, and even visual media like frescoes (cf. Bošković-Stulli 1978: 84–88). Another instance involves a song/prayer about St Catherine (ibid.: 92–99) and the theme of Christ's Passion within oral variants, where she traces the style from medieval Glagolitic texts through records of oral variations to those from the 20th century (as seen in the well-known poem "Na Kordunu grob do groba" (On Kordun, there is grave next to grave) (ibid.: 125–132). These examples, distributed across different periods (these examples are found in the chapter "Srednjovjekovna književnost i usmenoknjiževna tradicija" (Medieval Literature and Oral Tradition), represent only a portion of instances within her work.

Another important question that she discussed in her essay is that of national frameworks for presenting literature. Due to the specific socio-political and territorial context of the period, this issue, which is already specific to oral literature, had to be specially considered for these additional reasons. Under the specific factors within the context of oral literature, I refer to what the author defined as follows:

¹⁹ The concept of history that traces the development of individual literary types (and genres) was also presented in the latest *Povijest hrvatske usmene književnosti* (History of Croatian Oral Literature) by Stipe Botica 2013.

²⁰ The mildly poetic formulation in this case is probably partially caused by (I assume) previous experiences in which scholars that were unfamiliar or distant from oral literary expression had to prove the importance of variants even using aesthetic categories. This is likely why Bošković Stulli quotes Benedetto Croce; in order to more easily convince those who observe variants in this context that they are not always applicable (cf. Bošković-Stulli 1967: 245).

Oral literature and folklore in a broader sense have certain dual characteristics: on one hand, for various reasons, romanticism uncovered certain features in them that are unique to a particular people, to the specificities of their traditional culture, and to their mentality (if we strip away the veil of mysticism of these understandings and past exaltations, then there remains a considerable amount of truth in them). On the other hand, oral traditions easily cross linguistic boundaries and create mixed transitional zones around borders, forming their own regional characteristics, either within a single people or in zones that encompass parts of several neighbouring peoples. (Bošković-Stulli 1967: 249)

In the text, she emphasizes specific connections between oral literatures in areas where Slovenian and Croatian traditions intersect. She also establishes a strong mutual connection between

[...] the oral literature of Croats and Serbs; it extends across a common language and, furthermore, as a result of numerous migrations in the past and intertwined historical contacts, it was formed through such mutual interconnection which prevent it from being separated into two entities. (Bošković-Stulli 1967: 250)

Although she later mentions that arguments against overlapping, appropriation, and inaccurate representation – which often occurred when oral literature was presented separately – would not be sufficient for such a shared history “unless the oral literature material objectively suggested similar conclusions” (ibid.: 251), I am under the impression that this explanation of hers was partly the result of dealing with the socio-political and territorial organization of the country she lived in, and even more so, the time (the discussion was published in 1967).²¹ I would be inclined to believe that this laid the groundwork for advocating that:

[...] if we are talking about the history of a national literature, in our current consideration of Croatian literature, then we need to establish more precisely how oral literature should be included in this work. Our entire presentation so far has sought to demonstrate that oral literature, despite all its specificities, is an integral part of the artistic literature of every nation. If we were to now exclude it from national literatures and declare it extraterritorial, we would deny it the fundamental sense of our previous presentation, separate it from literature, and create a “state within a state within it”, as Šoljan expressed it in a somewhat different context. (ibid.: 252)

²¹ This is also demonstrated by the note in parentheses in the main text of the discussion after explaining what such a history of Croatian oral literature should look like: “[...] as its basic subject of presentation that should encompass the products of oral literature that have been recorded in the Croatian territory and the literature related to them – leaving the boundaries free” (Bošković-Stulli 1967: 253); “It is certain that these nationalist interpretations are possible in this context. They are, as we have already stated, possible within any framework, both narrower and broader. The most important approach is that they should not exist – the author’s scientific responsibility and freedom should be separated from a nationalist spirit” (ibid.). Such emphasis on something that would otherwise be assumed (because scientific responsibility and objectivity should inherently account for this) and the emphasis on “leaving the boundaries free” from within the context of oral literature was certainly a reflection of the *Zeitgeist* and was motivated by reasons beyond oral literature, serving as a message to those who might have had concerns, fears, or interpretations that an independent national history of oral literature would be perceived as a political threat.

Given that her history of oral literature was indeed written within the framework of the history of the national (Croatian) literature, she naturally followed this latter concept of an independent history of national oral literature. She pointed out those places, connections, and points of intertwining with other oral traditions whenever they existed while staying within the methodological boundaries of a historical overview. This included records that originated in Croatian oral traditions outside of Croatia. However, earlier independent histories of oral literature could have more completely encompassed oral traditions within the borders of Croatia itself (which were often neglected when there was too much reliance on Croatian-Serbian connections, as those connections were mainly strong in Štokavian regions due to fewer linguistic barriers and closer borders), namely the traditions that emerged from Čakavian and Kajkavian dialects. In her discussion, Bošković-Stulli addressed this issue, which was, of course, also connected to the special status of epic poetry (which, in its most famous forms, predominantly originated in the Štokavian dialect). This is not surprising, considering that epic poems, beginning with Alberto Fortis's record of the ballad "Asanaginica" resulted in a European infatuation with the Morlach, leading to Parry and Lord's insights into the Homeric question, spreading the fame of South Slavic oral traditions far beyond their geographical boundaries. In this relationship with epic poetry (elevating it at the expense of other genres), there are various responses to its acceptance within the older periods of our oral literary scholarship. One of these perspectives is certainly, I dare say somewhat harshly, the provincial need to believe that, if the world recognized it as interesting, it must indeed be good. Bošković-Stulli's research on oral prose demonstrated that the paths of recognition can also flow in the opposite direction, meaning that the world can recognize as interesting what our scholars too determine to be such. However, getting back to the discussion of oral literature history by M. Bošković-Stulli and the third part of her overview, she further elaborates how this historic overview should be conceived (although I have already mentioned all the main points in my previous explanations). Novelty²² in this part of the discussion is her emphasis on the need to begin with an overview of general problems which would include:

[...] the historiography of our science of oral literature: the history of its recording, publication, study, and literary-critical interpretations, as well as the presentation of views on oral literature in different historical periods. Additionally, it should provide a general overview of the development and changes in oral literature throughout history, along with the influence that the social environment had on it, including the most recent period, its current fate, and future perspectives. (Bošković-Stulli 1967: 255-256)

However, Bošković-Stulli's theoretical ideas, as implemented in the actual history, work somewhat differently. In the general section, which is presented as two chapters in her history ("Što je usmena književnost" (What is Oral Literature) and "Iz povijesti istraživanja

²² The exploration of the need to specifically investigate popular literature and its relationship and boundaries is also a novelty, and one that overlaps with oral literature, which is not of interest to us here, but has been realized by Bošković-Stulli's co-author Divna Zečević (1978). Bošković-Stulli would revisit this issue in more detail in her study "O pojmovima usmena i pučka književnost i njihovim nazivima" (On the Concepts of Oral and Folk Literature and Their Names) (Bošković-Stulli 1983: 5-114).

usmene književnosti” (From the History of Oral Literature Research), the historiography of Croatian literary science is not presented. Instead, it is interwoven into the second part with loose periodization. The general overview of literary-theoretical frameworks of oral literature, mostly from the previous century, is presented in the first chapter, and the foreign history of oral literature research is discussed in the second chapter. I mention this not only to emphasize the changes that have occurred in fundamental principles and later practices, but also to highlight that this history had not completely succumbed to the fact that “the idea of literary-historical research does not necessarily directly include the idea of how to shape the results into a historical concept” (Solar 1985: 49), nor had the “crisis of certain ideas about the history of literature” been ignored (ibid.: 48), although here, this crisis is specific to oral literature history. The reasons why Bošković-Stulli provides this overview lie in the need to emphasize the uniqueness of the medium in which oral literature is created, along with all the implications that arise from it, which are either explored or at least mentioned in relevant and current literary-theoretical frameworks. In the first subsection, “Dva aspekta: usmena komunikacija i pisani književni oblik” (Two Aspects: Oral Communication and Literary Form), of the first chapter, “Što je usmena književnost” (What is Oral Literature), the author provides an overview of scholars who explored these peculiarities. The exploration begins with the foundational article by Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev, “Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity”, which draws on the analogy of folk literature works to language (langue) and speech (parole), or potential and realization. It extends through Ben-Amos’s harsher positions (and the even harsher ones expressed by R. A. Georges) It also encompasses Dundes’s levels of context, texture, and text. However, in all these theories, the author aligns with those aspects, or parts, where unique mechanisms of oral tradition are evident, while discarding any elements that could in any way disregard the literary nature of oral tradition in focus throughout her history. Thus, she refers to Radoslav Katičić’s text about language having a creative aspect, “while in non-literary use, it is more instrumental” (Katičić as cited in Bošković-Stulli 1978: 11), and this concept will be applied to the language of oral literature as well. While discussing Dundes’s levels, which, in their third part, context, posed somewhat of a threat to that literary nature, she concludes:

The analysis at the level of context, and partly during textural dramatization, is not possible without observing the communicative event itself, the act of narration or singing in an authentic social setting. The analysis at the level of text and linguistic texture, however, can be conducted separately after recording or while transcribing the recording, by applying methods from literary science. (ibid.: 17)

In the second subsection, as previously mentioned, she provides a general overview of the issue of genres. In the third subsection, she deals with another important characteristic of oral literary production: formulation. In the fourth subsection, under the straightforward title “O kontinuitetu i vrednovanju” (On Continuity and Evaluation), she examines oral literary phenomena and forms in terms of their reception and aesthetics. She concludes:

It is necessary to strive, as much as possible, to understand the artistic functions of folklore texts in the natural context of their authentic performances. But it is equally natural

for us to experience these texts and to find meanings in them that can be revealed thanks to our overall literary experience [...] (ibid.: 48)

Furthermore, I would add that, for a more comprehensive understanding of the artistic functions within that natural context, it would be necessary to explore the aesthetic criteria of the narrators in these natural narrative situations, which, to the best of my knowledge, have generally not been extensively studied, even in more recent times. While such criteria have been only occasionally mentioned, they have been regularly distorted through the prism of the researcher's own perspective. Although exploring what has passed is no longer possible given that we can only partially reconstruct it (we can assume that what was deemed beautiful and important within the oral communication chain remained so; however, I believe this is not as straightforward). Even contemporary fieldwork does not fare much better, and it would be intriguing to discover which specific elements in an oral literary unit the narrator and their recipients do consider beautiful.²³

In the second chapter of that first general section, there is an overview of mainly international scholarship, showcasing the origins of the scholarly endeavour itself and particular theories, such as migration theory, which had lasting implications on the study of oral literature.

The second part of the history is divided into four subsections, according to periods: "Srednjovjekovna književnost i usmenoknjiževna tradicija" (Medieval Literature and Oral Literary Tradition); "Usmena književnost u renesansnim i baroknim odjecima" (Oral Literature in Renaissance and Baroque); "Od prosvjetiteljskih do narodnoprporodnih vidika usmene književnosti" (From Enlightenment to National Revival Perspectives of Oral Literature); and "Usmena književnost u hrvatskom narodnom preporodu" (Oral Literature in the Croatian National Revival). These sections appear under the common title "Hrvatska književnost od starih književnih odjeka i prepletanja do bilježenja i istraživanja" (Croatian Literature from Old Literary Echoes and Interconnections to Recording and Research). It is evident from the general title, as well as from the specific subtitles and the text itself, that the focus of the history in this second part is on:

- 1) The history of recording (circumstances of their creation, the individual as collectors, researchers, and scholars), their reception in written literature and the science of oral literature (as well as worldwide reception when applicable);
- 2) Their reception in written literature, interconnections and intersections with written literature in both directions;

²³ The need for such research was also prompted by a remark that I heard from a storyteller about the beauty of a comparison that to me seemed extremely unattractive and boring (worn out, actually), or a metanarrative comment from another storyteller about the beauty of the song "Tri Marije" (Three Marys) (some of its versions are mentioned by Bošković-Stulli 1978). I do not see why it would not be possible to examine such viewpoints expressed by storytellers, or at least consider them when they are offered, if it is already possible to inquire about, for example, when they heard a certain story, or to respect such spontaneous remarks they provide.

- 3) Comparison of variants of those examples that have entered history due to either the way they had been received by the audience or due to their aesthetic relevance (often both);
- 4) The significance of oral literature in specific periods and the way it had been treated by scholars and the public;
- 5) Echoes and influences that the foreign concepts of oral literature in different periods had on Croatian scholars (the first two chapters of this historic overview will be a valuable source for future histories of oral literature of the 20th century);
- 6) To some extent, where the scope of material and information allowed, she also discussed the context in which specific units of oral literary units were created.

An overview of genres that would focus “on presenting [them] through historical development and in historical forms” (Bošković-Stulli 1978: 323), as well as Bošković-Stulli's intention to publish this in a separate second book on oral history, as I mentioned earlier, would not come to fruition. However, her book *Priče i pričanje: stoljeća hrvatske usmene proze* (Stories and Storytelling: Centuries of Croatian Oral Prose) (2nd edition, 2006) was realised as such a type of literary history for oral prose genres, and in the latest history of oral literature, published in 2013, Stipe Botica presented the history of oral literature organized by types.

In the end, it is worth to revisit a distant beginning. When *Povijest hrvatske književnosti 1-5* (History of Croatian Literature, 1-5) was published, the journal *Croatica* and its editorial team organized a thematic issue about this significant publishing project (*Croatica* 11-12, 1978). Ivo Frangeš (1978: 250-255) and Josip Kekez (1978: 255-263) wrote about the first book, which included the historical study by Maja Bošković-Stulli and the study of popular literature by Divna Zečević. Both Frangeš and Kekez emphasized the importance of the two studies, with Kekez being slightly more restrained in his praises (as he had expected the history by Bošković-Stulli to include the 20th century to a greater extent), while Frangeš was more approving. Both agreed that these books deserved to be published separately, with Frangeš noting it as the only drawback (which was not the authors' fault) (Frangeš 1978: 255). However, I would like to point out Frangeš's unreserved enthusiasm, particularly because his area of expertise was not oral literature, but rather modern Croatian literature. I mention Frangeš's enthusiasm because it seems to partly stem from the momentousness of the literary-historical endeavour that Maja Bošković-Stulli and Divna Zečević successfully undertook. Additionally, the selected material enabled a deeper understanding of the “social aspect” of literature on the one hand, and the aesthetic relevance of the chosen material on the other. Frangeš dedicated a portion of his enthusiastic analysis to Hektorović's inclusion of bugarščica about Kraljević Marko and his brother Andrijaš, implicitly considering it as a “pars pro toto” example, which seems to be an implicit allusion to the perspective according to which both he and Bošković-Stulli read literature, which is the perspective influenced by the Zagreb Stylistic School.

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KONCEPCIJA POVIJESTI USMENE KNJIŽEVNOSTI MAJE BOŠKOVIĆ-STULLI ILI O NEKIM PROBLEMIMA KNJIŽEVNOPOVIJESNOGA USUSTAVLJIVANJA USMENE KNJIŽEVNOSTI

U sintagmi povijest usmene književnosti postoje određene aporije na koje u drugim sintagmama u kojima je jedna od odrednica povijest teško možemo naići. Aporije su se smjestile u čak dvije veze: onoj koja povezuje povijest i usmenu književnost i onoj unutar samog termina usmene književnosti. Ovu drugu davno je prije tematizirao Walter Ong (1982), a ova prva tiče se ponajprije toga da je stvarna povijest usmene književnosti nedohvatljiva jer bi za njezinu dohvatljivost bila nužna mogućnost stvarne kronologije. Jedino što je kronološki dohvatljivo kad je riječ o usmenoj književnosti – jest zapis. Tako da je svaka povijest usmene književnosti zapravo povijest zapisa i njihova konteksta, onoliko koliko je kontekst zapisa dohvatljiv. U ovome radu istražiti će se koju i kakvu je koncepciju književne povijesti Maja Bošković-Stulli eksplicitno ili implicitno uspostavila u svome djelu *Usmena književnost* (PHK, knj. 1) i na koji način ta povijest odgovara njezinim postavkama o književnopovijesnom usustavljanju usmene književnosti.

Ključne riječi: povijest književnosti, usmena književnost, metodologija, koncepcija, periodizacija, žanr