

# Lowbrow Skepticism or Highbrow Rationalism? (Anti)Legends in 19th-Century Croatian Primers

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*The article discusses one of the numerous intersections of orality and literacy in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century in Croatian society. More specifically, it focuses on the orality of Croatian primers published from 1779 until the start of World War I and the issue of the primers' implementation of narratives which are today considered characteristic of oral communication and labeled as pseudo-, negative-, anti-legends (Dégh & Vázsonyi 1976). Looking into the issue of marginality of (anti)legends in the folklore collections and folkloristic research, and after discussing differences and similarities between (anti)legends published in primers and documented in folklore collections of this and the following period, the article discusses the question of whether their inclusion in long 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatian primers was the implementation of lowbrow skepticism or the intrusion of highbrow rationalism, or both.*

In their discussion of inequalities echoed in the voices of the founders of modern critical thought, Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs recently noticed that today it is a commonplace “not only of histories that focus on transformations of the world associated with the production and reception of printed discourse, but of far more sweeping lines of social, cultural, philosophical, and cognitive theory, to contrast the printed word with the spoken word, literacy with orality” (Bauman & Briggs 2003: 13). Quite the opposite can be said of the status of orality and literacy in folklore studies. The days when the followers of the Finnish school belittled the literary tradition are long gone. The Romantic conception of folklore in which the poems and tales collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were seen as messages from the ancient times when the life and oral traditions of the people had not been influenced by print, literature, reading and writing (cf. Åpo 2007: 20), is now replaced by the notion of merging of literacy and orality, which has become an indisputable principle of rigorous folklore research.

The idea that orality and literacy intersect across ages, cultures and societies has become widely known since the 1980s and the works by Jack Goody (1987), Rudolf Schenda (1997, 2007), Eric Havelock (2003) and others, but, as seen in the quotation from Briggs and Bauman, has never gained general acceptance. Nevertheless, even Walter Ong's famous book *Orality and Literacy* (1982), where orality and literacy are seen as polarities, emphasizes their interconnections. Although Ong's starting point was the opposition between literacy and orality, he states in his concluding remarks that “the orality-literacy interaction enters into ultimate human concerns and aspirations” (Ong 1982: 179). He views literacy and orality as different cognitive and cultural spheres, but he nevertheless develops the notion of secondary orality which is “based permanently on the use of writ-

ing and print, which are essential for the manufacture and operation of the equipment and for its use as well” (Ong 1982: 136–138).

Following the idea that instead of the orality-literacy opposition we can only speak about the constant merging of orality and literacy, this article will focus on the orality of Croatian primers in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, i. e. primers published from 1779 until the start of World War I. For the purpose of this research, primers will be defined as books used in first grades of elementary education to teach children reading and writing.

Primers are not a random example. They were chosen primarily because, paradoxically but pragmatically, they employ orality in order to spread literacy. In fact, it can be said that primers as such are a link between orality and literacy. Or even more radically, a primer is a precondition for literacy.

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Ever since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, primers have had a crucial role in teaching literacy in Croatian society. Since that time, the rules of reading and writing have been taught in primers. The purpose of a primer is to instruct people how to transform sounds into letters, the spoken word into the written. But the reality is that during this process it is the letters that are primarily transformed into sounds, or the written words into the spoken word, rather than vice versa. Even today the alphabet, syllabarium and texts from primers are typically spoken, or rather, read aloud, oralized in the process of instruction. From this perspective, it could be said that the graphemes printed in the primers are decoded factually as phonemes. Letters in primers are literally printed to be pronounced, and words or sentences to be spoken.

The orality of primers was even more significant in the past. The variety of fonts and types, characteristic of 19<sup>th</sup> century primers is, as Patrica Crain stated about *The New England Primer* (used from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century), “a reminder that the primer was introducing the alphabet into nonalphabetized culture and to a nonprint audience” (Crain 2000: 42). Sometimes the alphabet and syllabarium served only as “exercises in pronunciation, quite separate from meaning” (Crain 2000: 43). Quite similarly, words and letters printed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatian primers were primarily supposed to be spoken, verbalized, and the syllabarium was often learned with no reference to meaning.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that in the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatia, reading instruction usually precedes writing instruction. The principal goal of primary school education was learning how to read. Therefore, many pupils completed elementary school with very limited reading skills (Wölfl 1879: 538) and with almost no knowledge of writing. Many different documents suggest that the majority of people who completed elementary school during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century could no more than sign their name (Gross & Szabo 1992: 98–99). Not to mention that, for most readers at the time, reading aloud was the norm. Instruction in reading was in fact instruction in speaking written words.

Primers from the 19<sup>th</sup> century also abounded with orality on a higher, discourse level. Thus, dialogic texts, and narratives familiar to the readers from the oral communication were common in primers. As opposed to the tractate literature focusing on moral instruction, rules and formulas to be learned by heart (Jembrih 1994: 31), which was dominant before the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatian primers preferred tales and

dialogic texts rather than formulas and rules, in accordance with the new conception of childhood which emerged during the Enlightenment and partially during Romanticism (cf. e.g. Cunningham 1995). Tales and dialogues were included in these primers with the intention of teaching children “useful and crucial everyday truths, principles and rules of life” (Helfert as cited in Basariček 1895-1906: 150).

Some of these tales, which meant to teach children useful and crucial everyday truths, principles and rules of life, were taken from or inspired by the patterns and forms characteristic of oral communication. It may seem curious that today’s epitomes of oral narratives, such as jocular tales, tall tales or magic tales, were not included in these primers. It was not until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the romantic concept of folklore as a survival from a distant national past was generally adopted in the Croatian cultural sphere (cf. Bošković-Stulli 2006: 86–102), that these narratives were incorporated into Croatian primers. Nevertheless, almost all Croatian primers from the long 19<sup>th</sup> century included at least one narrative that could be connected to oral belief narratives, or rather, in most cases a negation or distortion of the belief narratives.

The oldest among these narratives is the one about little Franz (Francek, Franjo), first published in a primer dating from 1779 and republished several times in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this tale Franz alarmed his father: “Fire, fire!” after he saw a reflection of the Sun on the surface of the lake and his father demonstrated to him that what he had seen was actually a reflection. The father also warned him: “My son! The reflection is just an illusion. Therefore you need instruction of wise men, to learn not to believe everything you see, but to use your reason instead” (*Abc* 1779:40–41). This tale is also one of the first Croatian articulations of the view according to which the seriousness of the elementary school should be employed “to eradicate this fault [i.e. superstition – M. H.]. This difficult feat cannot be accomplished by any amount of moralizing or persuasion as to the opposite, for young people believe folk traditions more than school, it can be done by employing irrefutable arguments of natural history. [...] One means to achieve this end, then, is for the children to realize, based on the laws of nature, which acts people and nations can and which they cannot carry out using their physical forces” (Klobučar 1869: 181-182).

Tales like the one about Franz can also be found in other Croatian primers from the long 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the Franz tale is related to the one about a boy who was frightened by servants who told him various scary stories, especially popular in primers dating back to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, a primer published in 1852, contained a tale about a man who believed that he was pursued “by a ghost, possibly even the devil himself” (*Sto* 1852: 32), only to realize at the end that he was “pursued” by a hawthorn branch which got stuck to his cloak. Another primer from the period contained the tale about Rožalija who, having heard somebody scratching at the door at night, immediately thought that it was her dead cousin trying to talk to her (cf. *Kratka* 1840: 42; *Male* 1843: 35). In yet another primer published several years later, a tale about Rožalija’s namesake, Ružica, appeared, who, thought that the scratching was a “hobgoblin” (*Pripovjesti* 1846: 21). In both tales, in the morning the protagonists realized that it had, in fact, been a dog. In addition to these, a tale from a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century primer should also be mentioned, in which a boy called Božidar goes to a neighbor’s house one evening, where people were sitting, spinning yarn and “talking about hobgoblins” (Šulek

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the following tales: *Imen* 1823: 56–60; *Kratka* 1840: 42; *Male* 1843: 35; *Sto* 1852: 15–16.

1850: 58). Suddenly there was a rattle, and everyone fled because they were afraid. Only Božidar, who had a progressive parental education, went to see where the noise was coming from, and laughing uproariously caught the “hobgoblin by the horns”, brought it “down the stairs” where the gathered crowd found out that it was a “goat who had escaped from the barn and went to the attic” (Šulek 1850: 58).

In the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, elementary school primers used such tales to demystify, denounce and/or rationalize folk beliefs; but sometimes they also cumulatively presented examples of the so-called *superstitions* (cf. *Druga* 1860: 157–158) without a coherent storyline, and, more commonly, stories within stories (cf. *Druga* 1860: 166–167). The tale about a boy who got frightened of his own shadow having ruthlessly stolen a bag of walnuts – appearing in one of the primers – is in fact a story within a story that a father told his daughters when he found out that “Luca the servant told them tales about bogies”, in order to convince them that someone “with a clear conscience has nothing to fear; fear is only for evil people” (*Druga* 1860: 166). Explicit moral teachings like this one are found in many narratives of this type. For instance, in a 1902 primer, a version of a tale about a man who died of fear because his cloak got stuck to a grave, which was very popular in Croatian literature of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was framed by the comment that “in the ancient times even intelligent people believed all sorts of things. They believed in the wrong gods, specters, werewolves, elves, witches and soothsayers. And when an accident happened they would say that it was because of this or that, refusing to believe the real reason why the accident happened” (*Čitanka* 1902: 80). Similarly, in a bilingual Italian-Croatian primer (cf. *Zabava* 1849: 19), the central tale which was described as literally true was contrasted with “foolishness” about incubi, the dead, witches, dwarves etc. Just as in the above mentioned tale prompted by Luca’s tales (1860: 166), the readers were called upon to use their common sense and moral superiority: “Be good and have a sound good-night’s sleep: goodness frees you”, and only evil-doing and remorse can cause you to fear (*Zabava* 1849: 17–19).

Some of these tales were based on oral narratives which folklorists frequently refer to as mythical or demonological legends, narratives which, according to the classical definition of the genre, deal with a supposedly true encounter of ordinary people with supernatural forces (cf. e.g. Bošković-Stulli 1975: 130; Dégh 2001: 51), incubi, fairies, the dead, etc. The content and form of the tales about Ružica and Rožalija who got frightened (cf. *Kratka* 1840: 42; *Male* 1843: 35; *Pripovësti* 1846: 21) as well as the tales about the man who got scared in the forest (cf. *Sto* 1852) and the brave Božidar (cf. Šulek 1850) problematized this type of tale. In this sense, these tales published in primers can be taken as an argument in support of the claim, thus far only sporadically researched in Croatia, according to which in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century tales were told to children and adults alike. As summarized by Geoffrey Summerfield, in most pre-written oral traditional narrative situations, there was no firm distinction between the children and the adults of the audience: they all sat, or stood, commingled and united in a shared experience (Summerfield 1984: 244). As claimed by Ariès (1989: 176), children used to be part of the adult world, and would thus hear tales that are today classified as purely adult tales (cf. Hameršak 2009: 243–246).

On the other hand, some of abovementioned tales which were also published in primers, those about boys (cf. *Imen* 1823: 56–60; *Kratka* 1840: 42; *Male* 1843: 35; *Sto* 1852: 15–16) or girls (cf. *Druga* 1860: 166) whom maids scared with tales about ghosts, specters, the Bogeyman, did not problematize telling legends. Given that these tales

were critical of the instruction methods used by maids, it may be assumed that they were disapproved of for the same reasons that John Locke mentions in his famous treatise on education from 1693: "But even then, and always whilst he is young, be sure to preserve his tender mind from all impressions and notions of *spirits* and *goblins*, or any fearful apprehensions in the dark. This he will be in danger of from the indiscretion of servants, whose usual method is to awe children, and keep them in subjection, by telling them of *raw-head* and *bloody-bones*, and such other names as carry with them the ideas of something terrible and hurtful, which they have reason to be afraid of when alone, especially in the dark" (Locke 1909–1914: 138).

The narratives that Locke criticized are usually classified as fairytales in the literature, but it is a moot point whether they were in fact fairytales.<sup>2</sup> At the time when Locke published his *Thoughts Concerning Education*, Ruth Bottigheimer claims, there were no folk tales about the rise (and sometimes, as in Cinderella, first the downfall and then a rise) on the social scale with the help of a miracle, which is today synonymous with a fairytale.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Bottigheimer believes that "when John Locke inveighed against servants who filled their young charges' ears with tales about fairy beings, he was not talking about fairy tales with plotted texts and Aristotelian beginnings, middles, ends [...]. Instead, the tales Locke meant were tales about fairies, hobgoblins, Robin Goodfellows, and imps, creatures whose doings explained events in the reader's or listener's daily life, such as lost keys or dry cows" (Bottigheimer 2005: 2), in a word – legends.

Still, it seems that Locke's admonition did not refer to legends. In fact, Locke explicitly mentions servants who "awe children, and keep them in subjection, by telling them of *raw-head* and *bloody-bones*, and such other names" (Locke 1909–1914: 138), which means that his remark about narratives intended for children and with a specific educational goal – should be considered as possibly referring to tales, narratives or most often the shorter narrative fragments frequently called warning tales in folkloristics rather than to legends, which did not specify the receivers' age.<sup>4</sup> According to Marc Soriano (1969: 27), warning tales are one of the few oral forms which were meant exclusively for children even before the advent of written children's literature and that (which is particularly important with regard to the referent of Locke's admonition) they were used to scare them.<sup>5</sup> Descriptively, these are tales such as the one in which a 19<sup>th</sup> century character of popular children's educational tales would tell his sister: "Katinka, beware, do not go too close to the old town. Sometimes the Lady of the Tower appears there. She is not very nice to children, and she could do something unpleasant to you!" (Schmid 1892: 12). This is the type of tale about which we know, when we reach a certain age – as Katinka said – that they "were made

<sup>2</sup> Locke's stories are connected with fairytales by, e.g., Cross 1997: 19; Hameršak 2004: 33; O'Malley 2003: 18; Sky 2002: 373–374.

<sup>3</sup> Truth be told, the similarity between the stories that Locke talks about and fairytales is not an entirely modern deduction – it was mentioned by Tomislav Ivkanec, the author of the entry entitled "Fairy Tale and Tale" published in the *Pedagogical Encyclopedia* in the 19/20th century. Ivkanec believed that the opinion that "stories induce fear and superstition in children [...] cannot be applied to all stories", but only to those that "imprint on the children's soul the fear and superstition, and do not let children sleep peacefully, which primarily refers to stories that mention phantasms, ghosts, dead people and other types of bogies used to scare disobedient children (Ivkanec 1895–1906: 349).

<sup>4</sup> In Croatia, Evelina Rudan (2011) has recently written about oral tales, narrative fragments and warnings used to discipline children.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on warning tales see Soriano 1972; Tatar 1992: 30–50.

up for disobedient children, so as to keep them away from the old tower, because a rock might fall off and kill them" (Schmid 1892: 12). In a word, these are narratives, or more frequently short warnings which the adults use to appease a child "telling him: this one will bite you, that one will eat you, I will call a dog, there comes the chimney sweep, you will be swallowed by the dark, the Bogeyman will come" (Prestini 1887: 374).

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All of the abovementioned tales published in primers explicitly or implicitly included another legend or a warning tale framed by an explicit rational explanation of a supposedly supernatural experience. All of them also contained a moral about the harmful effects of oral belief narratives (in the broad sense of the term: legend, warning tale etc.) on everyday life and worldview. Moreover, all of them started or ended with lamentations about the destructiveness of oral belief narratives. Therefore at first sight it would be reasonable to assume that these tales used the rationalist matrix of primers, or in other words - highbrow culture. However, the problem with such a view of oral legends and especially of warning tales – which were, at best, considered belief narratives only by their receivers (children), and not their senders (adults) – was that they did not belong exclusively to the highbrow domain. For instance, in his famous monograph on Poljica (Dalmatia) the Croatian ethnographer Frano Ivanišević wrote that various types of magic and soothsaying were referred to as "šurke babe Jurke" ('old woman Jurka's tales'), i.e. old women's tales (Ivanišević 1987: 627).<sup>6</sup>

From this emic skeptical perspective, which is, truth be told, rarely mentioned in older ethnological and folklore studies texts, it is no wonder that the founders of the performance-centered approach to legends, Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, noticed "a whole group of well established legends that are built up against commonly known and confirmed belief concepts with the intent to discredit them" (Dégh & Vázsonyi 1976: 112). These legends are usually called anti-legends, negative legends, pseudo-belief-legends, transition forms, mixed forms, corruptions, travesties and can have various social functions, such as: educational, ritual, fear-stimulating (Dégh & Vázsonyi 1976: 112–113). In this article they will be designated as (anti)legends. The prefix **anti** is used to show that these tales, at least in the context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatian primers, should be seen as a relevant and distinct class of texts. On the other hand, this prefix is written in parenthesis to reflect the claim of those approaches to legends which rightly insist that questioning the belief or the truth is in the core of the genre (Dégh 2001, Oring 2008 etc.)

According to Dégh and Vázsonyi, the main subject matter of (anti)legends is the difference in reality values (Dégh & Vázsonyi 1976: 112). Of course, this difference and its negotiation is characteristic of legend telling in general because "the question of belief-nonbelief is an active problem in any community where legends are told" (Dégh & Vázsonyi 1976: 109). Exactly because of that, negotiation of this difference can be observed and interpreted on different levels. The question of belief or disbelief can be observed on the level of interaction between the teller and the audience, on the level of personal

<sup>6</sup> Milan Lang, the author of the ethnographic monograph on Samobor (small town near Zagreb) from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was somewhat more reserved than Ivanišević with regard to the issue of the skepticism of the folk. Lang believed that "people who do not believe any of this are but few in our country: there are much fewer of them among the common folk, and more of them among the gentry" (Lang 1992: 932).



attitudes, individual variations etc. In the case of an (anti)legend it is expressed by the narrative content itself (Dégh & Vázsonyi 1976:112–113). The (anti)legend itself is an articulation of this question.

Of course, the fact that the above mentioned tales which were included in primers have had their oral counterparts does not guarantee their oral background. The fact is that orality and literacy merged in various ways throughout history. Legends about saints entered the oral repertoire from sermons and religious books (cf. e. g. Bošković-Stulli 2006: 23), and according to some authors fairy tales (or at least the rise and restoration of fairy tales) derived from written (print and manuscript) culture (cf. e. g. Bottigheimer 2009).

On the other hand, the fact that (anti)legends came into the analytical focus of folklorists only recently (cf. Dégh & Vázsonyi 1976: 112) may suggest that the same, printed-oral, pathway of dissemination could be assumed for (anti)legends as well. But the observation that folklorists have only recently focused on (anti)legends does not support the conclusion that (anti)legends were not part of oral repertoire in the past. As Dégh and Vázsonyi point out: “The folklorist has been acquainted with negative legends; he has not paid much attention to them” (Dégh & Vázsonyi 1976: 112).

For this construct of the interdependence of the research interest and the written source of a phenomenon to collapse, it will suffice to consider the impact that the research perception of traditional culture had on, for example, studying oral narratives in Croatia. As is well known, in the course of history folklorists preferred certain genres and ignored others. The same was true in Croatia. In the words of Ivan Lozica: “The history of reception and research of oral tradition of the South Slavs, starting with Fortis to this day, is a history of favoring specific oral genres, particularly epic ones. Although important collectors (primarily Vuk Stefanović Karadžić) edited collections containing an equal distribution of other oral genres, the epic has remained to this day the indisputable archetype of Yugoslav folklore (at least in areas where Croatian and Serbian are spoken). The reasons for this are manifold – heroic themes played an important role in the creation of national myths during the formation of Balkan states, the foreign reading and scholarly audience was fascinated by the picturesque exoticism of the Morlach and highland mentality, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century interest of researchers in the epic technique was instrumental in familiarizing the world with the Yugoslav epic poetry” (Lozica 2008: 116). An entire array of factors, including epistemological success stories (the research by Albert B. Lord and Milman Parry), political movements (the creation of national states in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), styles (Romanticism), and ideological poetics (Balkanism) thus had an effect on what we today consider and study as the network and hierarchy of oral genres. As Renata Jambrešić Kirin warns, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century “native and foreign folklorists, under the influence of the predominant views about South Slavic epic folklore space, searched for the oldest and the most beautiful epic songs, and ignored fairy tales, tales and legends” (Jambrešić Kirin 1997: 53), not to mention (anti)legends.

If we generalize, until recently folkloristics “selected those utterances (and genres) as its subject whose dominant function was artistic, or those utterances whose composition or linguistic structure was such that (after they were taken from their original context by writing them down) they could be interpreted as poetic, literary texts” (Lozica 2008: 124). Until recently folklorists ignored, for the subject of this article important levels and forms: metafolklore, metanarration in folklore and folklore forms based on metanarration. Assuming the simplicity of oral narratives, focusing on texts and their aesthetic features and

an “objective” message of the tale, prior to the 1970s folklorists usually created a collection of folk narratives which, as Barbara Babcock-Abrahams puts it, “consisted of texts which record little more than narrative content and, all too often, [gave] only a skeletal plot summary of that” (1976: 178). The interest in performance and the presence of the theoretical folklorist in the field challenged this approach and introduced metanarration (which is in the heart of such forms as (anti)legends) as a relevant field of inquiry.

Beside that, when in the 1970s a more complex and flexible approach to folklore was applied to folklore genres and folklore in general (Ben-Amos 1971, Dundes 1980), unconditional belief was no longer recognized as the constitutive feature of the genre and, consequently, the rationalization of a belief was no longer recognized as a sign of genre destruction. Or as Linda Dégh and Andrew Vászonyi put it some time ago: “The idea that, prior to modern industrialization, values expressed through folklore were unanimously accepted by individual members of the society would support the contention that legends must be believed. Contrary to this folklorists now know for sure that there are and always were individuals of ‘rational mind’ opposed to the belief in supernatural or uncommon events” (Dégh & Vászonyi 1976: 113).

In fact, it should be said that folklorists know it for sure only recently, after they have undertaken an in-depth historical research of this subject. An example of such a research is Timothy Corrigan Correll’s (2005) close reading of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Irish ethnographic records. His research demonstrated that skepticism and its articulation in (anti)legends was quite common among Irish tellers of traditional narratives at that time. In his own words: “traditions of belief and traditions of disbelief were competing discourses that came into collision, interpenetrating and modifying each other in a dialectical relationship that informed individuals as they negotiated their own attitudes about the fairies and fairy healers” (2005: 1). No such research was conducted in Croatia, but a preliminary glance into the ethnographic records from the same period (late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century) supports the conclusion that popular skepticism, as well as (anti)legends were common in Croatian society at the time.

For example, as it has been said, some Croatian ethnographers from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century also insisted that not all members of a researched community believed in popular belief narratives. Here is how Frano Ivanišević describes the classical, ideal narrative situation where tales are told at the table, during the winter at dinner or during a journey: “Everybody is silent as if they were dead, they are listening to the storyteller and looking him in the eye. At the end, when he is done, some may say: ‘I wonder whether this is actually true?’ – He replies: ‘People would not tell it if they had not heard it and seen it.’ – ‘To make something like this up is easy, I do not believe you, friend’ they might protest. – ‘Why don’t you go and ask whether it is true!’, the narrator would retort” (Ivanišević 1987: 519).

Other 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatian manuscripts and printed collections of folk narratives also suggest that skepticism was part of the traditional worldview and that (anti)legends were told at that time. In other words, these collections, albeit rarely, did contain tales similar to those published in primers, aimed at rationalizing and demystifying popular beliefs. Open skepticism toward traditional tales and beliefs is, also seen, for example, in an (anti)legend which Rudolf Strohal recorded in Lika (Western Croatia) at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century “exactly” as it was told by a twenty-one-year-old (Strohal 1904: 233, 250–251). This is a version of a tale that was also popular in children’s literature of the time (cf. e.g. Stojanović 1879: 74; Turić 1885: 131) about a young man who went to the cemetery to



remove a cross from a grave, but literally died of fear while doing so. “At the cemetery, as he was driving the cross into the grave, it caught his cloak, and when he wanted to get up, something pulled him back into the grave – it was his cloak – and he fell flat on the ground, dying of fear” (Strohal 1904: 251).

Even earlier records of (anti)legends also exist. For example, a young student of medicine Ivan Lovrić, in his prompt and polemical 1776 answer to Alberto Fortis’ famous *Viaggio in Dalmazia* (1774), mentions a haunted house in the Dalmatian hinterland and a brave man “who was not so superstitious. One day he went to visit the house, infamous for night noises made by ghosts. Near the house he found a pit which was in fact a hidden entrance to the house. He also found some ropes tied to different objects and set up so as to make noise” (Lovrić 1948: 166). Examples of exploiting folk beliefs like the one described by Lovrić were frequently published in the popular and scholarly press of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus in 1838, *Ilirske narodne novine* reported of a furrier’s apprentice who convinced some superstitious people from the town of Sisak that an eerie noise and the sound of breaking dishes were in fact made by a ghost (as cited in Bošković-Stulli 2006: 91). In his monograph about Slavonian folk customs published in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Luka Ilić Oriovčanin, a priest and an ethnographer, in the chapter on werewolves mentioned the case of a boy who “used to put resin on his teeth to blacken them, to make them look like metal [...] in order to get a girl – when he could not convince her to take him for love, to do it for fear” (1846: 296–297). Ilić Oriovčanin also wrote of a man “from the neighborhood” who, posed as a “werewolf”, and would come every night “to see a woman who still lives there, tempting her, knowing full well that her husband was not home” (Ilić Oriovčanin 1846: 297). I heard a similar tale in 2002 in Pakovo Selo. However, in that version, the tale was interpreted humorously as an attempt by the unfaithful wife to make adultery look like a rape.

Ivan Lovrić was an intellectual dedicated to the ideas of the Enlightenment, which might, at first sight, make us classify his *Note* about a false haunted house as the product of highbrow rationalism. But such a classification is quite problematic on several levels. Firstly, even during the Enlightenment in Croatia, folk practices were often repudiated by using these practices themselves (cf. Bošković-Stulli 1978: 222). Antun Matija Relković’s decasyllabic epic poem *Satir iliti divji čovik* (1762) is perhaps the most famous example of the selective Enlightenment approach to traditional culture in Croatian literature. For example, on the one hand, Relković in his *Satir* condemns the *kolo* wheel dance saying that the songs sung in the *kolo* are used to glorify Prince Marko, whom he considered a Turkish minion. On the other hand, in the second edition of the *Satir*, Relković uses folk poetry, more specifically the poem “Piju vino dva Jakšića mlada” (Two young Jakšićs drinking wine) that is used to show the reader the woman’s role in preserving or destroying a family (cf. e.g. Dukić 2004: 33). Secondly, the fact that Lovrić’s (anti)legend about friars may be oral in origin is supported by many correspondences between the narrative that appear in his *Notes* and the field notes from Sinjska krajina from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Bošković-Stulli 1967–1968). Thirdly, Lovrić contextualized his paragraph about the haunted house with the formula “people say” which is characteristic of legends in general.<sup>7</sup> To be more precise: “People say”, Lovrić wrote, “that similar things are done by friars whenever someone dies and leaves nothing to them” (Lovrić 1948: 166). There-

<sup>7</sup> For an exhaustive analysis of authentication formulae see Rudan 2006.

fore it seems more appropriate to label Lovrić's "report" about the haunted house not as a highbrow rationalist intervention in popular belief, but rather as a highbrow rationalist appropriation of popular skepticism.

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The above mentioned 19<sup>th</sup> century records of (anti)legends, as well as the proposed interpretation of their invisibility or even neglect in the older folkloristics research, suggests that (anti)legends published in primers could be interpreted as highbrow rationalism appropriations of popular skepticism, or more precisely, as just another example of oral forms and popular practices being regulated by the practices and forms coming from the same oral context. This appropriation, of course, meant the introduction of new functions, as well as an emphasis on certain aspects and features of oral (anti)legends.

Generally speaking all, both oral and printed, (anti)legends mentioned in the article suggest that instruction was one of the functions of this class of narratives. Demonstrating that the encounter with a supposedly supernatural phenomenon could in fact be explained rationally, (anti)legends taught their listeners how to overcome similar situations without fear of the supernatural, i.e. without deadly consequences. However, (anti)legends from the Croatian elementary school primers and children's books from the long 19<sup>th</sup> century had an additional function. Thus, the tale about the man in the forest, rather than ending with a remark about the inauthenticity of the supernatural in general, which was, according to Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsony (1976: 113), characteristic of this type of oral (anti)legends, ended with the observation that, when a "reasonable man" heard rustling he would "touch to see what it was, saving himself such horror and torment" (*Sto* 1852: 32–33). Similarly, tales about Ružica (cf. *Pripověsti* 1846: 21) or Božidar (Šulek 1850: 58) also highlighted the ignorance of its heroes. And Franz, in a primer first published in 1779 and republished several times until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, was reminded by his father that "the reflection can trick you many times, and this is why you need the instruction of wise men, to learn not to believe everything you see but to use your reason instead" (*Abc* 1779: 40–41). Highlighting ignorance was apparently part of a strategy to explain to the child readers (i.e. learners) a particular misconception by using a tale (example), but also to put forward the general deduction about the dangers of ignorance. It was this deduction which could compel children to learn.

It is of importance to notice that a relevant number of (anti)legends published in primers demystified knowledge or experience of the world acquired outside the school, emphasizing that hobgoblins were a thing you could **hear** about "from foolish people" (*Pripověsti* 1846: 21) and that clever people **do not tell** tales about them (cf. Šulek 1850: 58). In addition to Rožalija and Božidar, other protagonists misled by storytelling include various tales about scared boys, for instance, variants of the narrative about a boy who, fearing a chimney sweep, climbed a tree, all because the tales **told** to him by a servant left an imprint on him (cf. *Imen* 1823: 56–60; *Sto* 1852: 15–16), or variants of the narrative about a boy who after **hearing** tales "would scarcely dare go to sleep, looking all around him in the dark, fearing he would see something. [...] He dreamed several times that he saw a ghastly ghost, and then he would wake up" (*Male* 1843: 35; cf. *Kratka* 1840: 42).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> All of the emphases in this paragraph are mine.

It is unclear whether the emphasis on hearing and telling i. e. narration was part of the oral tradition of these tales, or whether it was a later addition to serve the primer. In the existing recordings of oral (anti)legends about a man who died of fear when going to the cemetery, his leaving for the cemetery is usually motivated by a bet, while in the published children's versions the standard motivation was to demystify tales told while spinning yarn.<sup>9</sup> However, a bet was not necessarily the only motivation in the oral articulation of these tales. The sheer number and variety of living practices does not allow for any final conclusions to be based on the necessarily selective records. It is entirely possible that narration was the driving force in one of the countless non-recorded versions of the (anti)legend about the "hero" at the cemetery, especially in view of the fact that it is a common motivational factor in oral traditions (cf. Bošković-Stulli 1967-1968: 348). However, it is also entirely possible that the emphasis on narration in the tales published in children's publications was an editorial practice, especially if we take into account that the editors were anyway given to such "editing" of oral narratives. Still, regardless of whether the emphasis on narration was a result of the editors' work or not, the fact remains that it was narration rather than a bet that moved the story forward, as such being an illustration of a metafolklore (cf. Dundes 1979: 52-58) or, to be more precise, a metanarrative (cf. Bošković-Stulli 2002: 47-64) prescriptive practice, which was (as I have tried to show) first promoted in the primers of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and later in children's magazines and collections.

Based on the idea that tales had a powerful influence on children (which was the foundation of the very endeavor to provide children with useful and life-saving truths, principles and rules of life through fictional plots), (anti)legends published in 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatian primers thus – beside the content – criticized also the act of narration, beside the belief also the performance.<sup>10</sup> (Anti)legends published in primers included at least fragments of metanarrative frames and forms of oral performances, which were out of interest for generations of folklorists, because primers defined narration as a socially relevant and creative act. It is precisely for this reason that primers can be seen as a relevant but, presumably because of their highbrow nature, unjustly ignored material or source of insight into the complexity, dynamics and history of folk narratives.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For the motivation of the narrative about the man who died at the cemetery in Croatian children's collections and magazines of the 19<sup>th</sup> century see, e.g. Stojanović 1879: 74; Turić 1885: 131. For the motivation of the oral variants of this narrative cf. e.g. Belović-Bernadzikowska 1899; Bošković-Stulli 1967-1968: 348; Čitanka 1902: 80; Devčić 1887; Dolenc 1972: 140; Marks 1980: 245; Strohal 1904: 250-251.

<sup>10</sup> One of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatian primers (cf. *Slovnička* 1853) used a very particular technique when criticizing the authenticity of folk narration. One of the tales in the primer went against the legend that a man could "find money by digging for treasure at midnight in some places" by a tale about a man who, misguided by the legend, started digging for the treasure one night and saw a "child who bore a candle", and the child advised him that if he wanted to get rich he should go home and work from dawn to dusk. "And lo and behold – that man really did this and from that time on he was never bored, he became much healthier and merrier, never again thinking about where he could dig out money" (*Slovnička* 1853: 57). In a word, the belief in the legend about a buried treasure was neutralized by using a message from a dead child, and dead children, according to another legend, appeared to the living at night. To my knowledge, this is a solitary example of using one folk belief to neutralize another, i.e. by controlling an undesired content by using a related content, rather than just form.

<sup>11</sup> I am grateful to Mateusz-Milan Stanojević and Ivona Grgurinović for their help with my English.

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## **Pučki skepticizam ili elitni racionalizam? (Anti)predaje u hrvatskim početnicama 19. stoljeća**

*Marijana Hameršak*

U članku se na primjeru hrvatskih udžbenika za početku obuku u pisanju i čitanju, koji su objavljeni u razdoblju od 1779. godine do početka Prvog svjetskog, raspravlja o razinama i implikacijama pretapanja usmenosti i pisanosti u dugom 19. stoljeću. Radi se o udžbenicima koji su, kako je to razvidno već iz njihove tipografske opreme ili žanrovskog sustava, nasljeđovali značajke i obrasce usmene komunikacije. Sprega pisanosti i usmenost u udžbenicima za početnu obuku u čitanju i pisanju temeljila se na okolnosti da je zadatak tih udžbenika bio opismenjavanje nepismenih, dakle, prevođenje usmenosti u pisanost. Paradoksalno, ali pragmatično, udžbenici za početnu obuku u pisanju i čitanju oslanjali su se na usmenost da bi širili pismenost. Ostavljajući interpretacije i artikulacije ove razine povezivanja usmenosti i pisanosti, članak se usredotočuje na pitanje reprezentacije usmenih žanrova u tim udžbenicima. Za razliku od bajki ili šaljivih priča koje u udžbenicima iz danog razdoblja nalazimo tek u tragovima, u gotovo svakom od tih udžbenika nailazimo na barem jednu predaju ili priču upozorenja, preciznije: negativnu, pseudo-, anti-predaju (Dégh & Vázsonyi 1976). Na temelju osvrta na razloge sve donedavne nevidljivosti (anti)predaja u folklorističkim istraživanjima, kao i na temelju sličnosti i razlika između dokumentiranih usmenih (anti)predaja i (anti)predaja objavljenih u udžbenicima za početnu obuku u čitanju i pisanju, (anti)predaje objavljene u udžbenicima u članku se tumače kao oblik implementacije pučkog skepticizma, ne tek puko nametanje elitnog racionalizma. Time se hrvatski udžbenici iz dugog 19. stoljeća prepoznaju kao relevantne publikacije za interpretaciju složenosti, dinamike i povijesti folklornih formi, a (anti)predaje kao makar u tom korpusu distinktivna i relevantna vrsta priča.

