

A HIDDEN POT OF CHARM SCHOLARSHIP: THE HISTORY OF CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON CHARMS IN CROATIAN FOLKLORISTICS

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The paper offers an overview of critical reflections on charms in Croatian folkloristics and related disciplines (literary theory and history, paleoslavistics). By highlighting the most important steps in the institutionalization of folklore research in Croatia we are showing the status of verbal charm both in the process of field research and the critical reflection. The most important contribution of Croatian scholars is classification of verbal charm as an oral rhetorical genre, which offered the possibility for different methodological approaches to the study of charms.

Keywords: charm, Croatian folkloristics, folk belief, folk prayer, rhetorical genre

There is a long history of recorded verbal charms in Croatian culture before the official institutionalization of ethnology and folkloristics: from medieval Glagolitic codices and manuscripts to texts recorded during the Croatian National Revival in the 19th century. The first scholarly reflections on the subject appeared in the second part of the 19th century, when the great ethnographic collections were made. Charms were regularly incorporated in the sections concerning folk beliefs and superstitions while scholars themselves were influenced by the ideas of Enlightenment. The landmark publication of Croatian ethnology and folkloristics was *Osnove za sabiranje i proučavanje grade o narodnom životu* (*Questionnaire for Collecting and Studying Material on Folk Life*, 1897) by Antun Radić. From that point onward it is possible to trace changes in the scholarly approaches to the subject of charms, charmers and charming. The first decades of the 20th century saw an increased interest in publicizing material from old manuscripts and the methodology was dominated by textual and philological criticism. In the second half of the 20th century charms were recognized as one of the rhetorical genres, along with counting-out rhymes, tongue-twisters, curses, blessings and toasts. This important innovation paved the way for many different methodological approaches: from rhetorical criticism and stylistics to pragmatics. The classical folkloristic approach continued to be

fruitful, especially in the research of the folk prayer as a genre which incorporated most of the traditional charm motifs and strategies. Besides offering a historical review, this paper tries to trace the influence of international charm research on Croatian folklorists. Although a reversal of influence did not occur, current charm scholars could benefit from insights into the relatively rich tradition of Croatian research on charms, charmers and charming.

RECORDS OF OLD CROATIAN VERBAL CHARMS: A SHORT HISTORY

Before discussing beginnings of institutionalized folklore research in Croatia, we will provide a short history of the most important records of Croatian verbal charms before the 19th century. As far as it is known the earliest recorded charm in Croatian language comes from the late 14th century. It was found in the Croatian Glagolitic breviary-missal (*Code slave 11*, Bibliothèque nationale de France) by Valentin Putanec, who offered the first philological analysis. The charm could be classified as an apotropaic charm against snakebite. It was written subsequently in the calendar at the bottom of the month of April, probably in the 14th or 15th century (Putanec 1962: 409). This is Putanec's reading in modern Croatian:

U ime Oca + i sina + i Duha + Svetoga. Amen. Šita + šita + šita +. Zaklinjem vas zmije Bogom živim, budite pokorne meni sluzi Božjemu /ime/ kao što je pokoran vosak ognju, a oganj vosku.

In the name of the Father + and of the Son + and of the Holy + Spirit. Amen. Šita' + šita + šita +. I charge you snakes by the living God, be obedient to me, servant of God /name/, as wax is obedient to fire, and as fire is obedient to wax.

Putanec tried to solve the meaning of seemingly nonsense opening formula *šita, šita, šita* by offering two possible explanations. The one explanation is that it is derived from Latin phrase *sit ita* (*May it be so*), which in itself is a paraphrase of word *amen*. The other explanation is that the formula comes from Vulgar Latin charm formula of enhancement: *cito, cito, cito* (Putanec 1962: 410).

The most important medieval amulet recorded in Croatian language dates from the first half of the 15th century. It is written in calligraphy on a large parchment, probably in Istria. The amulet was often analysed by many Croatian and international scholars (cf. Pantelić 1973). It contains prayers that

seek peace and protection from the evil spirits followed by the long exorcism, seeking help from all celestial powers, angels and saints (Štefanić 1969: 180). The next and the visually most beautiful part of the amulet is the apocryphal legend of St. Sisinnius, known in many European traditions (cf. Passalis 2014). It is interesting that two Croatian scholars (Štefanić 1969: 181; Kekez 1993: 9) noticed counting-out elements in repeating the name (or names) of the Saint at the beginning of the legend: *Sveti Sisin Sisinov, Sikinor, Sikisanov, Têodor* (*Saint Sisinnius, Sissinios, Sikinor, Sikisanos, Theodor...*). Štefanić connected this feature with medieval usage of name endings in a cantillating manner.

The next three collections represent the most important material for studying old Croatian charms and for tracing linguistic and other elements which survived to modern times. One important scholar was first to publicize this material – it was Rudolf Strohal who tried to connect interest in old literary material with the interest in contemporary folklore research. The first collection is the oldest known Croatian collection of charms and it probably dates from the same time as the Amulet of St. Sisinnius. The collection was found by Strohal in the Archive of Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (today Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts) and contains remedies, prayers and bewitchments written in Glagolitic letters on ten parchment folios. At the front page of the first folio there are notes which indicate that the owners of the folios were members of the Benković family. Father Matija started writing, probably in the 14th century, his son Ivan, the priest, continued writing, and the third author was most likely Matija's grandson and Ivan's nephew Antun (Strohal 1910: 121). Vjekoslav Štefanić, Croatian scholar who later dealt with this manuscript, opposed the idea of Benkovićs being the writers of the booklet (Štefanić 1969a: 169). Judging by the linguistic traits, the manuscript was made somewhere in the Croatian Littoral. Strohal believed that the major part of magical formulae comes from old Bogomil books, relying on the fact that many charm texts are accompanied by signs and citations that are today unintelligible. The charms found in the manuscript vary both in structure and in function, but all show great similarities with later records, inferring that the majority of charm formulae were formed in the Middle Ages (cf. Ćupković 2010).

*The biggest number of charms and folk prayers with charm elements before the institutionalized collecting of verbal folklore are found in manuscript notebook known under the title *Razgovor od vetra i dažda i nižita i sičca* (The Talk of Wind and Rain and Demons), made by Glagolitic priest² Anton Brzac somewhere in the area of Istria and Croatian Littoral at the end of the 17th or at the beginning of the 18th century. Diseases are shown in this manuscript as evil spirits that attack the human body and torture it in many different ways (Strohal 1910: 153).*

We will end this short overview with a booklet from the town of Sali on Dugi otok written in the 18th century. The booklet contains records made by an unknown Glagolitic priest under the title *Ovo su versi ot husov, zavijač i gusinic i oda svega, ča čini zlo žitku čovičanskomu* (*These are the verses of bugs, worms and caterpillars, and of everything that causes harm to human life*) (Bonifačić Rožin 1963: 204–205).

BEGINNINGS OF INSTITUTIONALIZED FOLKLORE RESEARCH

The 19th century is considered to be the beginning of institutionalized folklore research. This corresponds with the interest in gathering folklore which emerged in the pre-Romantic period (cf. Botica 2013: 64, 67). The formal year which marks the beginning of the Croatian national revival is 1835, but even earlier there are already the first field collections mostly done by Roman Catholic priests of the Zagreb diocese. The bishop of Zagreb, Maksimilijan Vrhovac, issued a circular letter in 1813 to all the “spiritual shepherds of his diocese” calling them to collect folk treasure (proverbs and folk poetry in particular). The letter, printed in Latin, motivated early field collectors and very soon first collections of popular songs and toasts emerged (Bošković-Stulli 1978: 277–279; Botica 2013:70).

The letter was re-published (with a Croatian translation) in 1837 in journal *Danica*, which was one of the key publications of the Croatian national revival. The call is now addressed to all patriots, with an emphasis on collecting folk poetry in accordance to Herder’s conception of folk poetry (Bošković-Stulli 1978: 276; Botica 2013: 76-77). As a result, most of the researchers during the 19th century focused on lyric and epic poetry and fairy tales. Charm collections and studies were unsystematic and the genre was not recognized. The common trait of all early field research is that charming is seen as a part of folk beliefs or folk medicine. Early collectors were often influenced by ideas of the Enlightenment so they saw this practice as pure superstition. Similar situation occurred with belief legends.

A good example is the first Croatian ethnographic collection (Botica 2013: 77), made by Luka Ilić Oriovčanin and published in 1846. He was a Roman Catholic priest born in Slavonia (the Eastern Croatian region) who was highly involved in the Croatian national revival. As a contributor to *Danica* and other important journals of the period, he published literary, ethnological, archaeological and historical papers. His papers published in *Danica*, concentrated on folk customs in the region of Slavonia, had an important role in the construction of the national identity (Tomašić Jurić 2014: 83). The already mentioned

circular letter of bishop Vrhovac probably motivated his interest in folkloristics and ethnology.

His ethnography is divided in two parts: the first is concentrated on folk customs and the second on folk beliefs, proverbs, riddles, games etc. Ilić Oriovčanin offers interesting data on charming and on the belief in the magical power of the word. As an illustrating example, he uses a charm procedure with an apotropaic effect which should be done by a young child in order to preserve healthy teeth. There is other information about charming but it is always treated as a folk superstition. The genre of verbal charm is also recognized in the sections on belief legends about supernatural beings (fairies, witches, werewolves, nightmare, plague etc.). When he describes these folk beliefs, Ilić Oriovčanin does not hide his distrust in the stories which he labels as superstition (Tomašić Jurić 2014: 160–161).

The first attempt to instruct potential collectors in systematic folklore research was the *Questionnaire*³ composed in 1850 by Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski and published a year later. Among his other contributions, Kukuljević Sakcinski is famous for being the first Member of Croatian Parliament to hold his speech in Croatian, instead of Latin, which he did in 1843. Out of the 26 questions for field researchers, two (19 and 21) show the possibility of recognizing charms as an independent genre, but are still tightly related to folk beliefs. These two questions aim to gather information about fantastic, demonic and mythological beings and creatures (fairies, witches, elves etc.), personified phenomena (death, nightmare, plague etc.) or natural phenomena related to weather (clouds, thunder or hail). The experience of consequent collectors showed that these phenomena are tightly connected with belief legends and with the practice of charming, even up to early 21st century (Rudan 2011; 2016; Rudan Kapec 2010).

The central figure of the Croatian national revival, Ljudevit Gaj, was also involved in early folklore field research as he passionately recorded folk poetry, proverbs and belief legends (Bošković-Stulli 1978: 287). Among his manuscripts, unpublished during his lifetime⁴, there are *Questions (Pitanja)*, which he designed as a young man in 1818. They should serve as a reminder for potential collectors of what they should look for when in the field. The biggest part of the 73 questions concerns with the history of his hometown of Krapina. Among other subjects, Gaj is particularly interested in old Slavic mythology and beliefs (Gaj 1973; Šešo 2006: 12). Again, verbal charms are not mentioned as an individual and separate genre. Although not published in the 19th century, and therefore without direct influence on researchers of the period, Gaj's Questions are nevertheless considered one of the cornerstones of Croatian folkloristics (Bošković-Stulli 1978: 290).

Founded in 1842, Matica hrvatska (Latin: Matrix Croatica) is the oldest Croatian cultural institution. It became the cornerstone of folklore research in the second part of the 19th century, especially in collecting resources in the field. In 1877, Matica issued *Poziv za sabiranje hrvatskih narodnih pjesama* (*Call for collecting Croatian folk poetry*) which was published in all Croatian contemporary newspapers. The call was a beginning of an initiative which resulted in a large number of contributors (Šešo 2006: 14). Although it was not explicitly concerned with verbal charms and the process of charming, some of the contributors (e.g. Mihovil Pavlinović) added some types of verbal charms and folk prayers to their collections, namely those which, in their opinion, had strong lyrical elements.

Towards the end of the century, the Academy of Sciences and Arts issued the Call for Folkloristic Collection (1895) with the goal of founding an annual journal that would publicly present results of field research on a more modern basis. Again, two questions (now out of 12) deal with charming practices, which are primarily seen as a folk healing devices. Question number 9 is concerned with folk medicine, but it makes an explicit distinction between healing which uses remedies and the one which uses verbal charms. In question number 12, a similar distinction is made between fortune telling and charming, with additional remarks concerning the context (losing personal objects, falling in love etc.).

Questionnaire (Foundation) by Antun Radić (1897)

Antun Radić is considered to be the father of modern Croatian ethnology. He obtained this title mostly because of his highly influential *Questionnaire* which was published in 1897 under the full title *Osnove za sabiranje i proučavanje grade o narodnom životu* (*Questionnaire for Collecting and Studying Material on Folk Life*). It contains the most systematic and detailed instructions for folk collectors to date. It was to be used by all those who wanted to present their research in the newly founded Academy's journal. The charming practice is mentioned many times. Radić is mostly concerned with the distinctions and similarities between healing and charming, so many instructions and comments aim to make the distinction (if possible) between these two practices (Radić 1897: 25). Charming is seen as a part of folk belief, such as charms connected with the deceased (Radić 1897: 60), but Radić explicitly states that there is no strict borderline between poetry and belief (Radić 1897: 64). Josip Lovretić (1902: 150) later made a similar statement in his ethnography.

Radić instructs future collectors to pay special attention to people with special powers in the communities, charmers being one of them (Radić 1897: 68). Concerning the function of charming, Radić makes an implicit distinction

between charming, seen as a healing device, and different practices of bewitching and enchanting (Radić 1897: 69), though many of the latter are now also treated as charms. Collectors were also instructed to gather prayers taught outside the church (Radić 1897: 70). The result of this instruction are records of many charms spoken or recited as prayers.

From the contemporary point of view, it is very interesting to notice that Antun Radić had very strong ethical principles. For instance, he instructs collectors not to deceive their informants and always reveal the true motive of their research. When it comes to dealing with secrets that informants are not willing to share, he leaves it for the collector to decide how to approach the problem (Radić 1897: 74). When analysing ethnographic contributions made in the following decades, it is clear that the collectors followed the instructions.

Zbornik za narodni život i običaje (Collection for the Folk Life and Customs)

The journal was established in 1896 under the title *Collection for the Folk Life and Customs of South Slavs*, and it still published, using the shorter, above-mentioned title. Radić's Questionnaire was published in the second volume, which resulted in continuous large- and small-scale ethnographic contributions from all Croatian regions, other South Slavic countries and South Slavic communities in other neighbouring countries.

The most important large-scale ethnographies from the first decades of the 20th century originally published in the journal were later published separately. Such are the ethnographies by Josip Lovrečić (village Otok near Vinkovci in Slavonia), Frano Ivanišević (area of Poljica in Dalmatia) and Milan Lang (town of Samobor near Zagreb). They followed principles stated in the Questionnaire very faithfully⁵ so we can survey them and look for information on charms and charming practices at the turn of century. Along with the first publications of charm collections from earlier periods (Strohal 1910), these are the most precious sources for contemporary charm scholars.

Antun Radić's implicit dichotomy between charmers (*bajalice*) and sorcerers (*vračare*) was often explicit in these ethnographies. Sorcerers were seen as people who use special powers to affect nature and other people, in both a positive and negative manner. Charmers were always seen as folk healers. We can find many valuable pieces of information on charmers, especially regarding their status in the local community. Charming practice is often very precisely described with the emphasis on the secrecy of the process. Many charm texts were recorded during these investigations but it is obvious that some collectors were not always certain if they got the "right stuff", being aware of the importance of keeping charms secret.

Besides large ethnographies, *Collection for the Folk Life and Customs* continuously published so-called smaller contributions that contained all folklore genres, including records of charms and charming practice. However, it should be noted that the genre still did not gain its independence because, again, it was tightly connected with descriptions of different folk beliefs.

MODERN FOLKLORE SCHOLARSHIP (1960s AND 1970s)

The journal continued to fulfil its mission in the following decades but folkloristics was not yet established as a discipline. This would start to change after the Second World War when scholars started to adopt different theoretical perspectives, mostly Structuralism (cf. Lozica 1979; Marks and Lozica 1998). The study of folklore continued to be intertwined with the study of literature, but during the 1960s, the prevalent term *folk poetry* (*narodna književnost*) started to lose its prestige and was very soon replaced with the still functional term *oral literature* (*usmena književnost*). The focus on orality as a defining media of both creation and the transfer of verbal folklore meant that the collectivistic conception is slowly being abandoned.

Instead of searching for great national narratives in epic poetry, scholars became free to explore other areas of word art. The first monograph which offered both an anthological collection and a systematic scholarly survey of previously neglected forms was *Narodne drame, poslovice i zagonetke* (*Folk Drama, Proverbs and Riddles*) by Nikola Bonifačić Rožin (1963). It was also the first folkloristic monograph that showed the diachronic continuity of verbal charms and related genres, especially counting-out rhymes, blessings and curses. It has to be said, though, that it was very modest, just a couple of pages towards the end of the book. Bonifačić Rožin (1963: 203) states at the beginning of the section that these genres were seldom published but that they are nevertheless much known among folk. He does not give any umbrella term for these genres (term *rhetorical* (*retorički*) is never mentioned) but he considers the use of irrational words as their common trait, along with the ceremony of motion during the recitation.

In the book's appendix, Bonifačić Rožin (1963: 352) emphasises the novelty of publicising "counting-out rhymes and similar folk literary genres extending to folk prayers and verbal charms". The monograph was the first to offer insights into then contemporary records, coming from the biggest 20th century collection of folk prayers (over twelve hundred records, among which we can find charm-like prayers⁶ and full charms). This collection was compiled by friar Jeronim Šetka and submitted to the Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1954.

Besides field and compilatory work, he also published an important and well-documented study about the diachronic continuity of interweaving religious and folk practices (Šetka 1970). Although folk prayers are the central object of this extensive study, it nevertheless offers many valuable comments and comparative insights concerning the practice of charming and related folk beliefs.

The pioneer work of Bonifačić Rožin soon received recognition by peer scholars who further explored genre similarities between verbal charms and other so-called minor or simple folklore genres. The first Croatian folklorist who used the umbrella term *folk rhetoric* (*narodna retorika*) was Tvrtko Čubelić (Nikolić 2015: 168). In his book *Usmena narodna retorika i teatrologija* (*Oral Folk Rhetoric and Teatrology*) (1970) he published a selection of rhetorical and theatrical genres accompanied by an introductory study on oral folk rhetoric and teatrology. Čubelić's premise is that besides established genres of oral literature, such as poetry, folk tales, proverbs and riddles, there are texts whose primary features are rhetorical delivery of a certain thought and the persuasion in its credibility (Čubelić 1970: XIX). In Čubelić's conception of oral rhetorical genres, persuasion is the basic component. Following this concept, he offered an implicit four-part classification of rhetorical genres.

Čubelić's decision to use the terms *rhetoric* (*retorika*) and *rhetorical* (*retorički*) can be seen as way of establishing continuity with Ancient rhetoric. However, his understanding of rhetoric was narrowed to the "art of oratory", or in Cicero's view as the art of speaking accommodated for persuasion (*ars dicendi ad persuadendum accommodate*), which in turn caused unnecessary equation between the concepts of oratorical practice and the poetics of folk rhetorical genres. Some of the subsequent scholars of oral rhetoric (e.g. Dragić 2006; 2007b; Botica 2013), fully or partially influenced by this concept, found it necessary to argue the distinction of rhetorical genres using Ancient rhetoric (with a focus on practical side, i.e. oratory) as the ground (Nikolić 2015: 169).

In his introductory study, Čubelić talks about five rhetorical genres: toast, swearing (*zaklinjanje*)⁷ (this is an umbrella term for verbal charm, curse and oath), praise, counting-out rhyme and mockery rhyme. When discussing ritual swearing, he insists that the basic component of persuasion is more emphasized than in toasts because charming seeks trust and affection from the listeners. This is a good illustration of how Čubelić does not differentiate between *belief* (a component which can be shared by the participants in the communication) and *persuasion*⁸ (rhetorical procedure which uses both rational and emotional means to gain recipient's acceptance of a certain idea or claim) (Nikolić 2015: 170). Regardless of that and other similar methodological flaws, Tvrtko Čubelić greatly contributed to Croatian folkloristics with his introduction of the umbrella

term *oral rhetoric* and by insisting that rhetorical genres should be studied as equals of the long established folklore genres.

Maja Bošković-Stulli, the most important Croatian folklorist of the 20th century, did not use the umbrella term *rhetorical genres* in her history of Croatian oral literature (1978) but she nevertheless dedicated considerable attention to rhetorical genres both in the continuity of the records and their interference with the written literature (Nikolić 2015: 170). The charms were mostly discussed in the section on the medieval epoch where she presents information about the most important records of verbal charms before the Renaissance, following the work of Bonifačić Rožin.

SCHOLARLY WORK OF JOSIP KEKEZ

Josip Kekez (1937–2003), professor of oral literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, was the scholar whose research of Croatian oral rhetoric was without doubt the most continuous and the most fruitful. His influential synthetic treatise *Usmena književnost (Oral Literature)*, published for the first time in 1983⁹, offers comprehensive synchronic and diachronic insight into Croatian oral literature. In the section dedicated to oral rhetoric, Kekez establishes the most systematic classification of rhetorical genres to date. His subsequent papers and books will affirm his position as the most important researcher of Croatian oral rhetorical genres (Nikolić 2015: 171).

Following the pioneer work of Bonifačić Rožin and Čubelić, Kekez highlights late scholarly interest in oral rhetorical genres. He finds the main reason for that in the previous classification approaches that treated rhetorical genres as either poetry or narrative. His firm belief is that language in verbal folklore (or oral literature in his approach) is capable of producing genres that share certain poetic elements different from lyrical, epic or narrative genres. Kekez (1998: 160) defines oral rhetorical genres as text texts that: a) persuade somebody, b) are used for speech exercise or c) are a verbal creation aesthetically built on asemantic language features. Although influenced by Čubelić's view on Ancient rhetoric, his authorial approach relied on the contemporary structural stylistic framework. For Kekez, the stylistic features and the communication effect of oral rhetorical text are considered to be inseparable. This insight led the path for further theoretical research that focused on the performativity of folklore texts (Nikolić 2015: 171).

Kekez (1998: 161) treated verbal charm as a prototypical rhetorical genre that relies on highly functional power of persuasion in order to protect a person from a disease or to expel it. He further states that charm is a form of folk magi-

cal medicine where poetic word is a remedy. In Kekez's view, the strength of persuasion is the primary condition for any charming procedure and therefore the rhetorical component becomes especially emphasised. It is interesting to notice how this insight on importance of rhetorical aspect is very similar to the approach of contemporary international scholars on charms, charmers and charming (e.g. Passalis 2012; Roper 2003).

Kekez discusses the neglect of a diachronic account of recorded Croatian verbal charm before the institutionalised folklore research in his book *Prva hrvatska rečenica (The First Croatian Sentence)* (1988). He argues that the long tradition and the secretiveness of performance caused strong similarity between medieval and contemporary records of verbal charms (Kekez 1988: 35). The rhetorical argumentation of using religious authority is seen as an important component of persuasion, immanent to the genre of verbal charm (Kekez 1988: 36–37). Stylistic similarities of verbal charms and counting-out rhymes are discussed in his book on counting-out rhymes *Naizred* (1993). These relations are clearly visible in the group of texts labelled as “holy numbers” (*sveti brojevi*) or “Unity” (*Jedinstvo*). Starting from establishing the oneness of God, these texts with charm function in most cases reach the number twelve or thirteen by repeating all the previous elements. From the emic perspective, they are mostly seen as prayers.

Kekez made an important classificatory innovation in his treatise *O govorničkim oblicima (On Rhetorical Genres)* (1996) where he further elaborated ideas from his previous studies. The curses and blessings are now treated as rhetorical genres (previously he considered them to be paremiological genres), and verbal charms are considered to be tightly related to curses (Kekez 1996: 288).

Working consistently under the structuralist paradigm and immanent approach to literature, Kekez's theoretical work on verbal charms and related genres is by far the most elaborate and continuous in Croatian folkloristics. His legacy is clearly visible in all subsequent research of oral rhetoric and verbal charms, especially those concerned with stylistic and pragmatic aspects.

CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP: STATUS OF VERBAL CHARM AS A GENRE

In his *Hrvatska usmenoknjiževna čitanka (Reader of Croatian Oral Literature)* (1995) Stipe Botica followed Kekez's definitions and classification system of oral rhetorical genres. This was the first case of rhetorical genres to be presented in a folkloristic anthology under a separate section, titled *Retorički oblici (Rhetori-*

cal Forms). In addition to Čubelić's and Kekez's insistence on the persuasive component, Botica emphasises the achievement of desired effects by text and by art of speaking (Botica 1995: 261). When speaking about particular genres, he uses both performative and structural criteria. Verbal charms are described as a mixture of religious invocation and magical formulation with a strong component of secretiveness (Botica 1995: 267–268).

In his recent *Povijest hrvatske usmene književnosti (History of Croatian Oral Literature)* (2013), Botica pays considerate attention to rhetorical genres (pp. 475–488) acknowledging that these genres are probably the most underrepresented in Croatian publications. In his description of this group of genres, he emphasises “magical word power” and epideictic style of speaking, especially in the case of toasts. Verbal charms are described both theoretically and by highlighting the most illustrating examples (pp. 480–484). Expelling of evil eye (*uroci*) is seen as a central motif of Croatian verbal charms (Botica 2013: 483).

Synthetic overview of Croatian oral rhetoric in Bosnia and Herzegovina was made by Marko Dragić (2006). He directly repeats Čubelić's approach using the concept of Ancient rhetoric and expanding this with comparative insights from old Middle-Eastern civilizations. Similar though more elaborate approach was used in his electronic handbook of Croatian oral literature (Dragić 2007b). His special interest in verbal charms and related folk prayers as an original creation of Croatian traditional culture can be traced back to the collection of folk prayers *Duša tilu besidila (Soul spoke unto body)* (1997). His more recent work (Dragić 2007a; 2011) attempts to establish a classification system of verbal charms, combining emic and etic approaches with an emphasis on verbal charm as a part of traditional culture, not just aesthetically and pragmatically interesting part of verbal folklore.

Renewal of interest in verbal charms among Croatian folklorists during the past two decades is visible in publication of ethnographic collections focused on folk prayers (Dragić 1997; Jurić Arambašić 2001; Marks 2011). Some of the accompanying folkloristic studies (e.g. Marks 2011) can be viewed as short histories of records of verbal charms and related genres, while others (e.g. Jurić-Arambašić 2001) emphasise popular religious aspects. Verbal charms are also discussed in relation to magical formulae in Croatian belief legends (Marks 2007) or more generally as a type of traditional verbal magic (Vukelić 2014). In his doctoral dissertation, Davor Nikolić (2013) used a phonostylistic approach in the analysis of oral rhetorical genres but verbal charms were left out of direct focus due to the interest in contemporary field records. The proposed classification system which distinguishes phonosemantic genres (counting-out rhymes and tongue-twisters) from pragmasemantic genres (curses and blessings) views verbal charm as a transitory genre, sharing elements from both groups. Further

outlined research is focused on pragmatic and rhetorical argumentative aspects of verbal charms and other rhetorical genres.

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Two centuries after bishop Vrhovac's call it can be concluded that verbal charm is a recognized genre of Croatian folkloristics and related disciplines. First systematic accounts and analyses came from paleoslavistic and mediévistic background using philological approach that were later incorporated in folkloristic studies. The second part of the 20th century was especially fruitful bringing structuralist stylistic insights that are still influential in contemporary Croatian scholarship of the subject. Classification of verbal charm as part of the group of oral rhetorical genres can be seen as the most fruitful innovation. Although it lacked international impact, mainly due to publishing in Croatian, it can still serve as an important and potentially valuable theoretical framework in the research of verbal charms. Symbolically, the recognition of verbal charm, both as folklore and literary genre, is the entry "Basma" (Verbal charm) in *Croatian Literary Encyclopaedia* (Endstrasser 2010: 120). The entry summarises studies of previous Croatian scholars and combines philological, literary and folkloristic approach, affirming verbal charm as a recognizable and valuable element of Croatian oral and literary tradition.

NOTES

¹ The formula šita, šita, šita should be read as if it is written in English like *shitta, shitta, shitta*.

² Glagolitic priests (Croatian: *popovi glagoljaši*) were Roman Catholic priests who used Old Church Slavonic language and Glagolitic script in the liturgical worship. They were active in Croatian territories from 9th to 19th century. Although constantly attacked by the Latin priests, they were granted formal permission by pope Innocent IV in the 13th century to continue their liturgical practices. After this permission their activity spread over Croatian coast and hinterland leading to production of numerous Glagolitic manuscripts (liturgical books, homilies, breviaries, Biblical excerpts etc.) (cf. Bratulić 2005). *Misal po zakonu rimskoga dvora* (*Missale Romanum Glagolice*), printed in Glagolitic script in 1483, is the first printed Croatian book and the first missal in Europe not published in Latin language or in Latin script.

³ Full title in Croatian: *Pitanja na sve prijatelje domaćih starinah i jugoslavesne povēstnice* (*Questions for all friends of friends of domestic antiquities and Yugoslavian history*)

⁴ Unpublished manuscripts of Ljudevit Gaj were collected and published in 1973 by Nikola Bonifačić Rožin in the book *Gajuša*.

- ⁵ Lovretić's ethnography was originally conceived before publication of Radić's Questionnaire but it was adapted to the Questionnaire's principles when published in the *Collection for the Folk Life and Customs*.
- ⁶ Charm-like prayer is the term we gave to folk prayers which resemble the verbal charms or share some common elements. This sub-genre deserves further research because it is relatively well documented in ethnographic collections.
- ⁷ Croatian word *zaklinjanje* (swearing, binding oneself by oath) shares the root with the noun *kletva* (curse) and the verb *zakleti se* (to take an oath).
- ⁸ This miscomprehension is clearer in Croatian, where word *belief* (*vjerovanje*) and word *persuasion* (*uvjeravanje*) share the same root, which is word *vjera* (*faith, trust*).
- ⁹ The treatise was part of the third edition of the editorial handbook *Uvod u književnost* (*Introduction to Literature*) and it was republished in its two subsequent editions (1986; 1998).

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