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PLANTS AND HERBS IN TRADITIONAL SERBIAN CULTURE

Handbook of folk botany



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SACRED AND DEMONIC TREES IN SERBIAN FOLKLORE TRADITION

ABSTRACT: The paper analyses the beliefs and legends related to the cult of trees in Serbian traditional culture. It especially focuses on the notion of *senovitost* as a quality of tree inhabited by a soul or spirit and those the rulers of which are thought to be various mythical beings (witches, fairies etc.).

KEY WORDS: cult of trees, sacred tree (*inscription*), witch, fairy, belief, legend, traditional culture

In Serbian folk tradition, the honouring (cult) of trees is especially reflected in the belief in their unique magical power, most commonly manifested as *senovitost*. One of the first to define this notion was Vuk Karadžić: *it is said that amongst big trees (beeches, oaks etc.) there are some sacred ones, that contain such power within, that those who cut them die immediately or stay ill for many years until death* (Караџић 1972: 318). Therefore, the presence of some supernatural power makes certain trees (not all) dangerous and tabooed. In his research, Veselin Čajkanović relates *senovitost* to the trees' belonging to *some soul*¹ (for example fruit and vines planted on graves) or to some *good or evil demon* by *possibly being the home, temporary or permanent, of a demon or deity*. He claims that some types of trees (elm, ash, fir and pine) *belong to fairies*, while elder and walnut are always associated with evil demons. On the other hand, some trees are related to deities only: oak to the thunder god, hazel tree and lime tree to some great female deity (Чажкановић 1940: 113-115).

However, after analysing wider ethnographic material, much more complex system of ideas and beliefs presents itself. A common motif that occupies the central place in beliefs and legends, no matter which type of trees is in question, is definitely the taboo of desecration (felling the whole tree or breaking/tearing off any of its parts etc). In our ethnological literature this is explained in the following way: *it is believed that under a certain tree a man can stay and get ill* (Ђорђевић

¹ In philological discussions, as well, the notion *senovitost* is connected to the notion *soul*; see Maretić 1882: 18-19.

1901: 145), and: *People believe that there are trees which ought not to be felled. If they are, usually the one, who did it, comes to grief* (Ђорђевић 1985: 138).

What can be seen in all of the mentioned claims are the remains of animistic perceptions, according to which *a contact with a tree was imagined as a contact with its soul (spirit) that found its home within it, so the desecration of a tree was interpreted as an insult to the spiritual force that pervades it* (Bandić 1980: 242).

In Serbian folk tradition it is especially forbidden to fell (or in any way desecrate) trees, that are, within a certain community, treated as sacred – *inscription (signature, chrism/sacred tree, prayer, worship tree)*.² According to ethnological definitions, an *inscription is a sacred tree, the bark of which is inscribed with a cross* (CM: 189); *a place of cult with a sacred tree, stone pillar or cross where prayers take place during the votive days* (CMP: 188), or *a tree that, during the rites of a village patron saint's day and cross bearers*³, *has the quality of a holy place/sanctuary* (Тодоровић 2005; Зечевић 2008: 869-889). Only certain types of trees can have this role, most often oaks and elms, which are considered to be sacred and tabooed (Чајкановић 1994/4: 47, 206-207, 209), while increased incidence of oaks for this purpose is explained by them being originally dedicated to the ancient Slavic thunder god – Perun (Чајкановић 1940: 113; Зечевић 2008: 876-878).

However, apart from inscriptions, the holiness of which is clearly marked by their outside appearance (already mentioned inscribed crosses on the barks during the rite of cross bearers every year), there are also trees that are thought to be special and tabooed, but from completely different reasons. In most cases these are the trees that are *homes* or meeting places of certain mythical beings, or those who are given demonic features as a result of beliefs that they are connected to the chthonic world and evil (*wicked*) forces in general. Most ethnographers do not provide precise definitions on how to recognise such trees. Instead, they cite local legends about certain trees to illustrate those beliefs. Latest ethnological research on this issue conclude that *a potential home or meeting place of demons or supernatural beings in general* is most often considered to be a tree that distinguishes itself from others by its *position, size and appearance* (Bandić 1980: 244).⁴

² There are numerous legends about the punishment that reaches those who disobey these prohibitions. See more: Ђокић 2013 (in press).

³ Most commonly *patron saint's day* is defined as a day celebrated by an entire village, as a unique social and cult community, in the memory of the *votive day* – usually a day when some misfortune occurred in the village: burning, flood, extinction. So, on that day people remind and pledge themselves to celebrate and pray to God (Недељковић 1990: 89-92).). Cross bearers are the participants in the village *patron saint's day* and they visit fields and crops moving alongside area of farm and carrying a cross, see: Недељковић 1990: 127-130, 141-142. The most complete description of this rite so far is given in: Тодоровић 2005.

⁴ Concepts about mythical beings (or evil forces) residing in trees which differ from others by certain features (**crooked, dry, lonely**) can be found in folklore traditions of other Slavic people as well (CД II: 54).

Precisely one such tree (*crumpled tree*), widely known in the area of Levča, separates itself from others by its unusual appearance. It is *round shaped and does not grow*.⁵ For that reason it is considered to be a *tree of death* and it must not be touched; it is forbidden to break its branches because, according to the inhabitants of the region, that would lead to some misfortune for anyone who did it: they would become crippled (lose an arm or a leg) or would shortly die (Марковић 2004: 85-86, number 96, 97). Due to the evil force it possesses, some call it magical, and others *evil* or *vicious tree*. The strength of the beliefs in its demonic nature can even be seen in the near past when a local road was built around it due to the fear of removing it (Марковић 1995: 17).

Differences from the usual shape of trees can also be found in a legend from Bosnia, which says that people used to *entrust themselves* to a **crooked fir tree** by throwing branches next to its trunk and saying: *I give you branches, crooked fir, so that I do not have backache or headache*. However, one man burned a bunch of branches there, so as a punishment, he supposedly *lay in bed for half a year* (Пећо 1925: 377). In the above example there is an implicit belief that all diseases are *reflected* in the tree and when a dangerous illness enters the tree, *it becomes all crooked* (Петровић 1940: 43). Therefore, the tree is marked as *demonic (belonging to fairies)* and it is suitable for evil forces to act through it (Раденковић 1996: 221). These are the demons of diseases that people chased far away by sacrificing branches to the tree in return.

The trees that grow near water, which is considered to be a boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead, have a similar status. This is especially true for willows⁶, considered to be sanctuaries of deceased souls, especially of those who did not pass away in a regular way: **wretched souls** of people, who as beggars or day labourers *died on roads and paths, gather* under willows, while **evil souls, such as vampires, werewolves etc. hide** under weeping willows⁷ (Вишекруна 2008: 132).

⁵ According to the scientific explanation, it is a sort of dwarf wild apple tree, probably brought from the Caucasia. It occasionally grows yellow fruit similar to apples, but its peel is very rough and the leaves are green the entire year, which is why it contains higher amounts of fat, sugar and alcohol and it does not freeze. /<http://www.rekovac.org.rs/index.php?module=Vesti&action=vest&record=33/>

⁶ Slavic people see a willow as the axis of the world, or the mediator between the worlds of the living and the dead, most probably because it usually grows near water, which enables the relation to the dead (Менцел 1996: 31-34). In Slavic folk culture it is attributed with ambivalent qualities: on one hand, it symbolises fast growth, health and partially fertility, while on the other, it is considered to be in relation to demons (devils and fairies stay on it) and diseases (fever) were symbolically passed from men onto it in using charms (CM: 99-100).

⁷ It is believed that *the evil ones* live under weeping willows (Чажкановић 1994/4: 84). In Gruža, weeping willows are planted only by the water and on cemeteries (Петровић 1948: 333), which also confirms their primeval bond to the *other* world.

So, trees can have demonic qualities, or be considered *shadowy*, ether for their unusual appearance or their connection to the chthonic world. As the previous examples show, they were thought to be sanctuaries of the disease demons or of miserable and *evil* souls. Apart from them, the trees that *belong* to certain demonic beings are also considered to be dangerous (tabooed). In Serbian folklore tradition witches are the most famous among such beings. Certain types of trees (walnut, elder, wild pear, and sometimes elm) serve regularly as their meeting places for night gatherings.⁸ Walnut was considered to be their most frequent meeting place; hence, every walnut tree was thought to be dangerous. Therefore, people were not supposed to sleep or stay under it. It was believed that witches were coming on walnuts or black mulberry trees in the form of bats. If someone climbed the tree at that point, the witches would eat their heart. (Зечевић 1981: 141-142). Walnut is related to the chthonic world, which is why it was considered to be the meeting place, not only of witches, but of evil spirits as well, and evil forces in general (Чажкановић 1994/2: 212-213). Vuk Karadzic states how in Srem it is *said that witches most often gather there above the village Molovina on some walnut*. There they feasted over a golden table and drank from golden glasses (Караџић 1972: 302). Similar beliefs about walnuts are found in Herzegovina as well, where it is said that, before flying, a witch would say: *Not on a rock, not on wood, not on a turf, not on a thorn, but on a field under a walnut. - When she says it, a witch climbs on a broom and flies off into a field under a walnut. There they meet and make plans about what evil-doing to commit* (Грђић Бјелокосић 1985: 200). In Bukovica they say the following: *Not on wood, not on a rock, but under a walnut under Promina!* (Ardalić 1917: 306). Another ethnographic source mentions a walnut tree in *Vidovo polje*, where older witches guide the novices through their secrets and eat the hearts they took out from their victims (Памучина 1867: 49-50). In the mountainous villages under Fruška Gora witches are believed to gather on an elm near Šid and dance in circles (Шкарић 1939: 136), whereas near Topola it is said how under such a tree one *can see (...) a circle from their dancing* (Стојановић 1996: 82). In Kosovo (Plakaonica), near the river Ibar, there was an elm, where people believed *witches gather* and make plans where to go: *When one of them was chosen to go to Plakaonica and eat one man, she stormed off like a headsmen, and all others rushed with her. When they returned to that tree, the branches were still moving, and the man died in Plakaonica* (Vukanović 1986: 443).

According to a legend from Bukovica, a man returning home late at night and passing through a field saw *witches gathering* on a wild pear tree *that was all shining* as if *there was a candle on each little branch*. After shooting at them, they

⁸ On places where witches gather (on wider South-Slavic area) see more: Ђорђевић 1953: 30-37.

flew all over, but after several days he met his punishment: *After a few days, a man's son died – nothing other than them eating his heart* (Ardalić 1917: 310-311).

Witches also gather around elders, as it is recorded in Vojvodina: *People used to say that under an elder (...) gather witches, and sprites, and fairies. Fairies used to hide in elders. Because of that, it was forbidden to fell an elder. One girl cut an elder because it was on her way, and because of that her mouth twisted* (Вишекруна 2008: 132).

The above example is significant because it clearly shows the syncretistic character of traditional concepts about different mythical beings – both fairies and witches gather around the same type of tree, which is confirmed by other sources as well. Veselin Čajkanovic states a folk belief about elders: *both fairies and witches stay there, and those who cut or damage it, get punished by becoming paralysed or dead, and to those who cherish it, everything becomes successful*. He adds that, according to the folk belief, *under blooming elders one could see a devil* (Čajkanović 1994/4: 88-89). All the previous examples confirm generally known images of elders as demonic trees. In Mošorin it was recorded that elder was a *sordid tree* and for that reason its parts should not be cut and one should not urinate under it: *It was believed that a woman who urinated under an elder lost feeling in her arms. Somebody cut an elder and died three days after that. Another man took an elder out of the ground in the morning and in the evening he lost his mind. To fall asleep under the tree was also ruinous: A man was sleeping under an elder, and his arms and legs became paralysed* (Петровић 1938: 135).

The mentioned legends about elders as trees belonging to fairies and witches at the same time in the best way show that, when it comes to some types of trees, it is not possible to make a clear division between trees *belonging to fairies* and trees *belonging to witches*. Such concepts are clearly seen in an ethnographic description of healings under a black hawthorn: *The diseased are brought to sleep under a black hawthorn on the first Friday after the full moon. Crud rug is laid on the ground; a pillow gets set and covered with a white sheet without a single colourful thread. They say that witches only like white...* (Петровић 1938: 135). After the quoted passage about witches as demonic beings who bring healing (*People say they bring the cure, but also the disease*) under this tree, the fairies also get mentioned: ***they, they are fairies, witches and various other sordid forces*** (Петровић 1938: 135). Viewing fairies as negative most probably results from the traditional understanding of their nature in general: they act ambivalently, can be good and bad (bring disease and heal), which depends on the way people treat them.⁹ This is

⁹ In the ethnographic material it is often said that *fairies do no harm until someone hurts them* (Милићевић 1894: 56), as well as: *Fairies will not do evil until someone insults them (by stepping on their circle, or dinner, or in some other way), and when they get insulted, they punish in different*

the reason why, in their negative form, they do not differ from witches in any way; they even have the same meeting places, as already mentioned trees.

These views are especially seen in numerous legends about fairies and trees dedicated to them, where they live, or around which they dance in circles and set tables. The research so far marks the following trees that belong to fairies as the most common ones: beech, maple, common maple, elm, elder, pine, fir, oak, pear, hawthorn, mulberry, hazel, walnut, osier, poplar and *inscription* (Чайкановић 1994/4: 34, 47, 51, 71, 89, 103, 106, 140, 160, 175, 198; Раденковић 1996: 197; Bandić 1980: 244-245; Томић 1950: 242). In certain areas it is believed that only ash tree, elm and oak can belong to fairies (Николић-Стојанчевић 2003: 85).

Fairies are connected to trees since they are born, because they *grow from dew and on some peculiar mountain on some peculiar tree are raised* (Грђић Бјелокосић 1985: 198). In some areas it is believed that this tree can only be beech: *In summer she is born on a little branch of a beech, and her mother swaddles her in green leaves* (Беговић 1986: 238). A legend from area near Leskovac about someone felling a young beech tree and a fairy that cruelly punishes them confirms the beliefs related to this tree:

Vasiljko N. from Zbežište (Kukavica) went with his two friends to the area of Mala Reka to make forks and handles. They cut a young and very beautiful beech. In the evening, after labour, Vasiljko couldn't sleep and stayed up all night, while his two friends fell asleep immediately, but in the morning they were dead. Vasiljko, who didn't sleep, heard a cry, looked, and it was moonlight: a girl sitting on the stump of the beautiful tree crying. And in the hut two dead workers were lying (Ђорђевић 1985: 139).

In Batotić, the village near Čajnič (Bosnia) an entire Fairy's forest grew. It consisted of odd looking beeches (with unusually crooked branches, i.e. *made of hundreds of curves*¹⁰). According to the locals, such trees *no longer grow anywhere* and, therefore, everybody treats them with awe and respect: they do not want to take not even the dried little branches from it, because it was long believed that something bad would happen to those who harm the fairy's beech. People say that *fairies used to dance in circles* on them and one could hear music or see fire from the tree tops. Most of the trees are very old – about a hundred years and one of them even three hundred years.¹¹

ways: by shooting someone in the leg or arm, both legs or both arms, or in the heart, so they immediately die (Караџић 1972: 301). On the circle of fairies, punishment for stepping on it and other human offenses because of which fairies show their other – evil and revengeful side, see: Ђорђевић 1953: 64-68, 113-116.

¹⁰ In this example, as well, the shape of the tree (*crooked*) contributes to it being seen as the *tree belonging to fairies*. In Slavic folk culture the notion *crooked* is understood as *vicious, dangerous, or the one pertaining to the other world* (Толстая 2008: 281).

¹¹ More on Fairy's forest: <http://podrinje.in.rs/forum/archive/index.php/thread-543.html>.

The trees where fairies stay separate themselves from others by their position, beauty and size. It is believed that the most dangerous trees are the ones with rounded tops (Томић 1950: 242). Similar beliefs about trees belonging to fairies are recorded near Arandjelovac: people call an old linden of a rounded and wide top a *fairy's tree*, and the regular circle of trodden grass around the tree is believed to be a *fairy's circle*. It is considered to be very dangerous to *step* on that circle, and it is even worse to rest in the tree's shade. It is said how some people died for not respecting these prohibitions (Bandić 1980: 251).

The abovementioned concepts are recorded in many areas in Serbia as concisely formed and generally known beliefs of the local inhabitants, such as the one about an acacia with a *fairy's garland*, or a creeper that sprang up from the tree on the hill called Dušnik (in the area of Stig), which nobody can cut, or in any other way desecrate (Ђокић 1996: 121-122).¹² In other areas, unusually shaped trees are called *crumpled* (*fairy's trees*, *creased*, *curled*) because they have crumples on their branches (like thorns gathered in a ball). It is believed that fairies live in the tree tops and they punish those who urinate and defecate under their trees (the one who does it, can be *crushed*). In relation to such beliefs, there is a local legend about a man who once shot at the top of such a *shadowy tree* and then heard a clear *scream of some creature*. He claimed it was a fairy, which punished him immediately: *After that he got ill and he was being cured for a long time asking fairies for forgiveness* (Ђорђевић 1985: 135, 138-139).

In Gornja Pčinja *fairies*¹³ are believed to *stay next to a tree with a big dog-rose* (*wild rose*). People used to *say* how some people felled a beech when fairies *went to trade*, and when they returned, *there was wailing around the stump and dust rising*. *If they had been there when the tree came down, the man who had done it would have been killed* (Филиповић/Томић 1955: 105).

In Srećka district every old and lonely tree is called a *lone tree*, *home of fairies*, or *tree of fairies* because it was believed that fairies stayed there (Танасковић 1992: 49-50; Николић-Стојанчевић 2003: 85, 92). Numerous examples of legends based on these beliefs are saved in different places in Kosovo. Serbs in Metohija believe that a man can get ill and die even if he only sleeps under a tree *belonging*

¹² In Skopska Crna Gora it is also believed that one should not cut a tree where *ivy spreads* (Трифунски 1975: 134); in southern Serbia and Macedonia the trees where mistletoe or ivy spread were considered to belong to fairies and were not cut. The ramblers are convenient for taking the symbolic role of mediators between the human world and the world of dangerous and mysterious beings, or the world of the dead. In Bulgaria ivy was thought to be a plant under which revengeful fairies hide (Раденковић 1996: 324-326).

¹³ They are actually invisible female beings (parallel to invisible fairies in other Serbs), but they can be heard and their traces seen. It is believed that they are not at home on Saturdays because they go *to trade*, and they return in the evening (Филиповић/Томић 1955: 104-105).

to *fairies*, such as the elm in village Novaci, under which there is a medicinal spring (Николић-Стојанчевић 2003: 138). The elm is famous for being a demonic tree and *fairies gladly sit on its branches because devils are not allowed there*. Near Šid, in Srem, there is a talk about an elm with the most *fairies* on it (Чажкановић 1994/4: 47), and in Skopska Crna Gora elms *belonging to fairies* are widely known for releasing, what is thought to be medicinal water that the diseased use to wash their faces (Петровић 1907: 502). People believe that on a hill above village Mušnikova (Sredačka district) a fairy lives on three old ashes¹⁴ and visits the village by night, banging as if she is *breaking a chain*, and after visiting the village she goes to a walnut¹⁵ (Николић-Стојанчевић 2003: 92). In Gruža (place Klisura) people *see fairies* near a Turkey oak¹⁶ (Петровић 1948: 348). A *tree belonging to fairies* is also considered to be a Turkey oak near Gornje Nerodimlje. People believe the tree was planted by *fairies* and that in *the dead of night* they meet and dine under the tree, and after dinner they gather near it and dance a traditional circle dance which is why the place is called *Fairy's circle dance* (Вукановић 1937: 198-199).

It is believed that if one cut such a tree, they would get ill and die, and their whole house would die out. Later at night a light would appear in the empty houses (Vukanović 1986: 446; compare Вукановић 2001: 411). Once, a servant swayed an axe at a tree belonging to *fairies*, by his master's order, and soon afterwards his nose started bleeding, and the master got ill from *intentions* and died, while a child who lopped off its branches, drowned in the river shortly after (Bandić 1980: 245).

Not even the tree felled by wind should be brought into the house, or used as firewood (Николић-Стојанчевић 2003: 85-86, 92; Танасковић 1992: 50). Often, beliefs like these changed with time into more or less developed legends that were passed from one generation to another in a certain area. According to researchers, even today, people say that some twenty years ago, certain Filip, called Žoro, used an ash tree belonging to *fairies*, felled by an accident, as firewood, which is why everybody from his house, except for his two daughters, died the same year (Николић-Стојанчевић 2003: 92).

Under such a tree one must not spit, sit or sleep, because if someone falls asleep under it, they will become *like wood* (stiffen) or they will wake up in a dif-

¹⁴ Ash is a highly respected tree and *fairies* like to sit on it because *devils cannot* (Чажкановић 1994/4: 103-104). It is a tree respected by all Slavic people. It was believed to have strong protective powers and is often related to *fairies* and demons (they stay there or gather on the branches). That is why it is not good to sit or sleep under an ash for one can become paralysed or wake up in a different place (CMP: 224-225).

¹⁵ In the same area, walnut was considered to be a *lone tree* and it is the only fecund tree attributed with a negative influence for its connection with the cult of the dead. Therefore, it was not planted near houses and it was forbidden to sleep under it. see: Николић-Стојанчевић 2003: 86.

¹⁶ Turkey oak (*quercus cerris*) is a type of oak.

ferent place¹⁷ (Николић-Стојанчевић 2003: 85-86, 92; compare Танасковић 1992: 50). People believe that if someone just passes by such a tree at midnight or lies under it, they will get ill and die, because *supposedly fairies make swings* there, which can be seen by torn leaves and broken branches (Николић-Стојанчевић 2003: 138).

However, in extraordinary cases, fairies can forgive those who involuntarily harm their trees if they are offered an appropriate sacrifice. Once some herdsmen tending cattle fell asleep under a tree and fairies *took feeling* from their arms or legs, but they also left them medicine under the same tree. To propitiate the fairies, it was necessary for herdsman's mother *to make bread, prepare a glass of wine and honey, and take that to the place where the herdsman was sleeping and leave it over night. The next day the mother would go and take what she had left, and give it to her son as a medicine* (Петровић 1948: 341). Also, when a fairy *crushes someone* over a cut tree, fortune-tellers go to that place and burn candles next to the log and splash it with basil and holy water (Ђорђевић 1985: 138-139), or they advise the diseased to offer fairies a bottle of wine and some bread, and hang it on the *tree belonging to fairies* (Вукановић 1937: 202). One description of the healing ritual says that the offerings are put under a holy tree as well: *We have a three hundred years old tree in the village. Nobody remembers since when, it is very declined and decayed. It is an **inscription, an oak** and there is a spring there, there has always been water under the tree. There are fairies there as well. Women used to make cookies there when someone was ill, and there was an old woman who would get naked and take cookies and wine under that tree and if a fairy wanted to help her, she would taste the cookie and drink the wine and the woman would get better. If she didn't, she would take it, knock it over and wouldn't want it* (Марковић 2004: 123, number 159).

The quoted passage perfectly portrays the syncretistic character of folk religion - layering the elements of the Christian cult of sacred trees (*inscriptions*) onto the pagan beliefs about trees related to mythical beings. Ethnographic material brings many similar examples, especially when it comes to the trees belonging to fairies. Even the same terminology was used: a tree that served as the village inscription in Sredska was called *a lone tree* (Влаховић 1931: 47), a name used for the trees related to fairies. In the same area (village Živinanje) the sacred tree was thought to be a large mulberry tree (*a thick tree, branchy and round*), around which people gathered on great holidays (especially St. George's Day); however, the locals believed that under it *fairies used to come out to dance*, so the place was called *the circle of fairies*

¹⁷ According to the animistic concepts, sleeping on certain places at certain time is dangerous because, then, the soul, being outside of the body, comes into contact with supernatural beings, and is greatly exposed to their forces. For that reason, ritual practices about certain trees include the prohibition to sleep (Bandić 1980: 252).

(Илић et al. 2003: 156). One tree in the area of Svrlijig (village Prekonoga) that was respected as the village's *inscription* is also a subject matter of a legend about fairies appearing and staying there, singing: *according to a story, some girls spent the night in a stable – in that place – and heard women's voices, coming from the direction of the tree, singing. When they reached the tree, thinking the girls from the village were singing there was nobody there* (Тодоровић 2005: 60).

From the previous examples of beliefs and legends, it is noticeable that in all cases, whether they are about *sacred/holy* or *dangerous/evil/demonic* trees, there is a deep belief that such trees are tabooed. In addition, as concluded in the research so far, people's treatment of the trees inhabited by supernatural (mythical) beings is ambivalent, because such beings are potentially good and bad, useful and harmful (Bandić 1980: 245). This is especially true for the trees related to fairies, whereas those where witches gather usually bring negative connotations: anyone who comes near them most often comes to grief or a punishment reaches their children, since witches can harm them the most. Only few examples (the ritual under black hawthorn) portray witches as beings that heal. When it comes to beliefs about the trees belonging to fairies and legends based on them, it is noticeable that they are completely in accordance with very complex and ambivalent images of fairies as mythical beings in Serbian traditional culture; they are revengeful (in punishing those who harm their trees), but under those same trees they bring healing from the disease they *sent* themselves. Because of this other, positive aspect of their character, fairies are connected with the Christian cult of sacred trees (*inscriptions*) as the place where they can also gather to dance or to help the diseased, which was only incidentally mentioned in the ethnographic material and literature so far.

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ABOUT ZDRAVETZ (MYTH, RITUAL, MAGIC, POETRY)¹

ABSTRACT This paper examines functions and meanings of the plant called zdravetz (*Geranium macrorrhizum*) in the traditional culture of the Serbs and South Slavs, where it occupies a special place. This position of zdravetz is based on the belief that it originated from the sweat of the Mother of God, who ran from Bethlehem across *hills and mountains*, and everywhere her sweat fell, zdravetz grew. It is this myth about plants originating from the parts of the Gods or their excreta, as well as the fact that zdravetz is a sweet smelling, perennial and medicinal plant, that secured it a privileged position in the preservation of health, in healing, magical and ritual practice throughout the annual cycle, and in the rites of passage. Zdravetz was an unavoidable plant in the life of traditional people, from their birth till death. For Serbs, it occupied a special position in the process of growing up and in marital ceremonies. The custom of planting zdravetz on the graves and the belief that the soul can attach itself to this plant unifies annual and cosmogonic cycles, relating the notion of immortality to this plant.

KEY WORDS: traditional culture, zdravetz, myth, ritual, magic, poetry

According to folk belief, geranium, zdravetz (*Geranium macrorrhizum*)², in Serbian also *zdravac*, which means ‘health’, is a first rate divine and mythical plant. As people used to say, it originated from the sweat of the Mother of God, who, having given birth to Christ, ran from Bethlehem across *hills and mountains* and grew tired and sweaty (Софрин 1912: 98; Усачова 2001: 196).³ This ancient Christianised story about the birth of the God, but also the awakening of the nature

¹ This paper is based on research conducted as part of the project *Аспекти идентитета и њихово обликовање у српској књижевности* (Aspects of identity and their forms in Serbian fiction, No178005) which is financed by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Serbia.

² Zdravetz, from the *Gerniaceae* family, is a medicinal perennial plant with up to 40cm long stalk, palmate divided hairy leaves and pink petals. Leaves are extremely aromatic and contain essential oil tannin and flavonoids. Other common names for this plant are rock cranesbill, Bulgarian geranium and bigroot geranium.

³ Stories like these have been recorded among Serbs and Bulgarians.

– which thus relates cosmogonic and calendar cycles – is related to the female deity of fertility and vegetation which symbolises earth out of which plants grow.⁴

Because this plant originated from the Mother of God, it is holy⁵ and could play an important role in both magic and ritual, representing the principle of birth and growing, also dying.⁶ It has an important meaning for some people even today.⁷

Real basis for this view is the fact that the geranium is perennial herb – it dries out in autumn and grows young again during the vegetation period, thus symbolising annual regeneration of plants⁸, which was of vital importance for a pre-modern man. This is illustrated by song praising a never-dying, ever-green *zdravetz*:

„Здравче, венче, беру ли те моме?“

„Ни ме беру ни код мен’ до’оде.

Големе се све бели босиљак,

Он се бели лети три месеца,

Ја сам зелен и лети и зими.“

(Рајковић 1978: No. 5, St. George’s Day).

“Zdravetz, garland, do girls pick you?”

“They neither pick me, nor look at me.

Instead they praise white basil,

Which is white only three months in summer,

But I am green in summer and winter.“

In this poem, *zdravetz* speaks about its privileged position in the vegetation process, even in relation to basil, which is a supreme herb⁹ in Slavic tradition. The misrepresentation of the plant characteristics in this poem (that it does not dry out

⁴ The most important feature of myth is equating the essence of something with its origin. To describe a world means to tell a story of its ancient creation. In a mythical understanding of the world, knowledge the origin of something is key for its usage (Meletinski b.g izd.: 174-175), as this story about *zdravetz* reveals.

⁵ No plant is holy in itself. According to ancient beliefs, only plants whose origin is divine are holy and can possess magic and medicinal qualities (Eliade 2004; Eliade 2011: 352-355). Beliefs about plants originating from gods and people and their excrement are ancient and exist in many cultures. This is believed to be a consequence of discovering agriculture (Eliade I 1991: 31-39). For stories about this phenomena in Serbian oral tradition, see Vujnović 2012: 69-77. Also see my paper : Карановић 1996: 691-698.

⁶ Herbal world which cyclically dries out and then grows again is a suitable symbolical representation of these rites of passage.

⁷ A note made by a Serb who permanently moved to Australia is particularly telling in this regard. One of the things he took to the new land to plant in his garden, was *zdravetz*. He says: *Our old garden was different from others – in the centre of the garden we had a hazel tree, and next to the fence we had zdravetz! When we moved to this new home, the hazel tree was too big to carry, but we did move zdravetz. We moved it around several times, until we found the best place for it (partly sunny, partly shady), so now we have the smell of Stara planina in our garden* (Петровић: 2009).

⁸ Natural cycles related to the mytheme of deities which die and resurrect are reflected in agrarian myths (Meletinski 1989: 222-229) and a fragment of this phenomenon is preserved here.

⁹ About the privileged position of basil in Serbian folk culture: Софрић 1912: 29-45; Чајкановић 4, 1994: 36-43.

even during winter, its dormant phase), is another indication of how important zdravetz used to be for common people in past time.

Another example which shows its importance can be found in the verses which used to be sung while it was ritually picked. In this song, all cycles of nature are coordinated with the vegetation cycle of zdravetz:

„Здравче, момче, беру ли те моме?“ –	“Zdravetz, boy, do girls pick you?” –
„Беру, беру, како да не беру!“	“They do, they do, sure they do!”
<i>Кад ја цветам, сва гора мирише,</i>	<i>When I blossom, the mountain smells of me,</i>
<i>Кад ја венем, сва гора увене.“</i>	<i>When I wither, the mountain withers with</i>
(Златановић 1982: No. 37, St. George’s Day)	<i>me.“</i>

Zdravetz also has a very intense aromatic smell, and such plants, according to popular belief, have great protective powers, so poems sang about this too:

Збирајте се моме и невесте,	Come together, girls and brides,
Да идемо у гору зелену,	Lets go to the mountain green,
Да беремо цвеће свакојако,	To pick flowers of all kinds,
<i>Понајвеће здравац миришљавац.</i>	<i>But most of all, sweet smelling zdravetz.</i>
(Сојка 1903: 208)	

Zdravetz is given a special place in relation to other plants here as well: saying that sweet smelling zdravetz was picked most of all, confirms its importance.

Zdravetz is also a medicinal plant, as has been known since ancient times.¹⁰ This is not indicated only by its name in Serbian, but also by the fact that it was used in the prevention of diseases and healing. In Gruža region, for example, zdravetz was grown in gardens only to be used for spells (Петровић 1948: 77). It is evident in the songs that used to accompany the weaving of garlands on St. George’s Day:

Да беремо цвеће свакојако,	To pick flowers of all kinds,
<i>По највеће здравац миришљавац,</i>	<i>But most of all, sweet smelling zdravetz.</i>
Да вијемо три венца зелена:	To weave three green garlands:
<i>Један венац за живо, за здраво,</i>	<i>One for the living, one for the health,</i>
(Софрић 1912: 98-99, sung on the St. George’s Day).	

It was believed that it had lustrative power, especially at Easter time when people in region Levač, Temnić and Niš would soak a red egg, zdravetz, rue, sage, wild ginger, sanicle, nettle, lovage, etc. overnight and then in the morning wash

¹⁰ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geranium_macrorrhizum

their faces and body with this water. This was done for better health, so they used to say *здравац да је здрав коју се купа* /*zdravetz to make the bather healthy* (Мијатовић 1901: 124; Мијатовић 1907: 135; Софрић 1912: 99). At Easter, in Gornja Pčinja, people would receive communion with different plants, and *zdravetz* was important in this regard, too. For the communion in vine, it was combined with dogwood, nettle and a piece of Easter cake. Holding the communion food, the host would stand in front of the main door into his house. When a member of the household received a communion, he would jump as far as he could, saying wishes *for health and prosperity* (Филиповић & Томић 1955: 98). On Plant Friday, people in Levač used to ornament the milking bucket with *zdravetz* (means *health*): *да је млеко здраво: may milk be healthy* (Мијатовић 1901: 122). On St. George's Day, young people in Gruža would ornament themselves with nettle, *zdravetz* такође, *да буду здрави: to be healthy* (Петровић 1948: 243). Since it was considered an apotropaic, people in Levač also used to tuck *zdravetz*, rue and lovage in the belt (Мијатовић 1901: 124).¹¹ In Homolj region, a sick person would be bathed in the water in which a branch of dogwood, a root or a bunch of *zdravetz*, a stalk of basil and a pebble were put overnight. After the patient was bathed, he or she would spit into this water three times and say: *Пљујем на тебена и на своје болести./I spit on you and my illnesses*. Then the ill person's mother would take him/her behind the house and poured the water there, and the dogwood, *zdravetz* and basil would be attached to a willow's branch (Милосављевић 1914: 262), as it was supposed to transfer the illness.¹²

The time of the year when *zdravetz* is harvested is also indicative of the special position this plant occupies in Serbian culture. *Zdravetz* is gathered between Easter (usually on Palm Sunday¹³) and St. George's Day (or Plant Sunday¹⁴), which are related to the death and resurrection of the God, i.e. the dormancy and the awakening of nature, and which, in the mind of a pre-modern man, follows the solar-lunar calendar.¹⁵ This is where it was adopted from into Christianity, because Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday following the spring equinox, when plants are harvested. The harvesting done on the St. George's Day is related with the

¹¹ The importance of *zdravetz* is also indicated by a Bulgarian ballad in which a mother sews plants from seven mountains into his calpack (high crowned cap) and his belt to protect him against female demons. Knowing the value of *zdravetz*, the young man barter his calpack and his belt for the demon's promise to give him the Pirin *zdravetz* (Ајдачић 2007: <http://www.rastko.rs/rastko/delo/10032>).

¹² Demons of sickness are driven up a pear tree in some charms (*basma* in Serbian; Раденковић 1982: 49).

¹³ Palm Sunday – the 6th Sunday of the Great Lent.

¹⁴ Plant Friday – Friday before of St. George's Day.

¹⁵ On calendar myths which represent natural cycles, see: Meletinski 1989: 221-228.

ending of one half of the year and the beginning of another, the change of winter into summer.¹⁶ A common attribute associated with the young moon, *zdravljak*¹⁷ (*healthy*), is another etymological confirmation of the relation between zdravetz and the lunar principle. People used to believe that it was good to plant crops while the young moon grows, because this is when plants grow better too (Ђорђевић 1958: 34; Толстој 2001: 355).

In Homolj and Levač, zdravetz and other herbs (rue, sage, dogwood, nettle, maple, lily of the valley) were also gathered on Plant Friday (Мијатовић 1901: 121; Милосављевић 1914: 47-48 57).¹⁸ That zdravetz was attributed specific importance in this environment as well, can be deduced from the expression that was used to name this harvesting of plants, *идење у биље, у траве* / *'to go into plants, into herbs'* (Мијатовић 1901: 121): in Mlava, the expression that was used was *'going into zdravetz'* (Јуришић 1936: 89). This is also confirmed in the following verses:

Да идемо у гору зелену,	To go into mountain green,
Да беремо свакојаку траву,	To pick herbs of all kinds,
Понајвише здравац миришљавац.	Most of all, sweet smelling zdravetz.

(Рајковић 1978: No. 17, St. George's Day)

Zdravetz was usually picked by girls who were named as *flower bearers*, and they went into forests *before sunrise* (Милосављевић 1914: 40, 57; Ердѣљановић 1951: 64, 163-164). According to one informant from the vicinity of Sokobanja: *On the day before St. George's Day, boys and girls would come early with their relatives to the mountain Leskovik, above the St. Stevan Monastery, and they would pick zdravetz, wild ginger, lilac and many other medicinal herbs* (P. C. 1899: 272-273). This was also sung about:

Пој славеје, кукај кукавице,	Sing, nightingale, coo-coo cuckoo,
Да будимо моме и невесте,	Awaken the young men and brides,
Да будимо селске ђувендије,	Awaken the village lads,
Да идемо у гору зелену,	To go the mountain green,
Да беремо свакојаку траву,	To pick herbs of all kinds,
Понајвише здравац миришљавац.	But most of all, sweet smelling zdravetz.

(Рајковић 1978: No. 17, St. George's Day)

¹⁶ A year used to be divided into two: summer and winter, which lasted from the St. George's Day (April 23rd/May 6th), until St. Demetrius' Day (October 27th/November 9th), and from the St. Demetrius' Day until St. George's Day (Милићевић 1894: 122, 144).

¹⁷ Peasants used to address the young moon when they saw it for the first time in the following way: *Здрав, здрављаче, весељаче! Венац ти на главу, а мени здравље и весеље на кућу/You healthy boy, merry boy! Garland on your head, and health and joy on my house.* (Милићевић 1894: 60).

¹⁸ Old women who also go with them, pick rustyback, wild ginger, laserwort, etc. (Милосављевић 1914: 48).

The change from dark to light is paraphrased here as the time when the night meets the new day (the cuckoo and the nightingale). This is a dynamic representation of the process of vegetation, which is further intensified with the mention of young (i.e. fertile) girls and zdravetz.

Garland weaving was another common activity that was happening early in the morning on St. George's Day (Милосављевић 1914: 121). Garlands were made near some water, from zdravetz, lilac, ivy, fumewort, squill, and the activity was accompanied by singing. Since zdravetz again was the most important plant in it, the garland would be named the same, as in the following verses:

„Венче, здравче, беру ли те моме?“	“Zdravetz-garland, do young girls pick you?”
„Беру, беру, како да не беру.	“They do, they do, of course they do.
Берући ме, у гору су зашле,	Deep into the forest they go to find me,
Три дни брале, три ћитке набрале!“ –	For three whole days, making three bunches full!” –
„Кад те беру куде те девају?“	“When they pick you, where do they put you?” –
„Мене вију у зелене венце,	„They put me into green garlands,
Свака вије три зелена венца,	Each girl makes three:
Један венац, за овцу валкушу,	One for the <i>sheep</i> ,
Други венац, за јагње ђурђевско,	One for the <i>lamb</i> ,
Трећи венац, за котал големи.“	And one for the <i>big cauldron</i> .”

(Јанковић 1896: 433-434)

Or:

Збирајте се моме и невесте,	Come together, girls and brides,
Да идемо у гору зелену,	Lets go to the mountain green,
Да беремо цвеће свакојако,	To pick flowers of all kinds,
По највеће здравац миришљавац.	But most of all, sweet smelling zdravetz.
Да вијемо три венца зелена:	To make three garlands green:
Један венац за живо, за здраво,	One for the living and healthy,
Други венац, за то сиво стадо,	One other for the grey herd,
Трећи венац, за ковано ведро.	One third for the mint bucket.

(Софрић 1912: 98-99, sung on the day before the St. George's Day).

This was called ‘garland singing’ and the song, ‘garland song’ (Милосављевић 1914: 53-53), which is again a paraphrase of the ritual practiced to secure fertility of domestic animals. Zdravetz was put into a garland for sheep (Милићевић 1894: 260) and ornaments of buckets which were used for the first milking. In Levač, this milking was done through a garland made of zdravetz (Мијатовић 1907: 106). A manuscript from the end of the 19th century states: *a shepherd would choose the best sheep, put a cake and a garland on her neck, bring*

out a gun or a rifle and start milking, first the sheep with the garland, and then all the others (P. C. 1899: 272-273). In Resava, on St. George's day, mixture of salt, zdravetz, nettle and spurge was placed in livestock feed (Милићевић 1894: 119). In Vrnjci, zdravetz was also fed to cattle (Сојка 1903: 208-209). These were various ways this plant was used to secure milk and health of the cattle. And garlands with the protective power stemming from the zdravetz created associations with cyclical regeneration of nature i.e. with the cult of vegetation (Виноградова/Толстој 2001: 72-73). There was another custom connected with cult agricultural of fertility – in Homolj region people there to mix corn seeds with zdravetz to secure good harvest (Милосављевић 1914: 767).

The way zdravetz was used in the rites of passage – birth, weddings and post mortal customs – also indicates the plant's importance in the traditional culture.

For lustrative purposes, expectant women bathed with water that contained zdravetz, ox-eye daisy and lovage (Милосављевић 1914: 93, 99; Усачова 2001: 195). In Gruža, the first bathing water for a newborn contained zdravetz to secure good health of the child (Петровић 1948: 416). Zdravetz was also sewn in a baby's nappu (Усачова 2001: 195) to keep it safe. It had the same purpose in Boljevac, where zdravetz was put in amulets to keep children alive (Грбић 1909: 289-290). The first cut hair was also kept together with zdravetz (Николић 1910: 181). People were invited to the christening of a child with a bouquet of zdravetz (Усачова 2001: 195). On Christmas Eve a song was sung to the child/small God about a child wearing zdravetz on his calpack:

Духну ветар, Коледо, са планине,
Коледо!

Те издува, Коледо, врана коња, Коледо!

И на коњу, Коледо, бојно седло, Коледо!

И на седлу, Коледо, мушко чедо,
Коледо!

И на чеду, Коледо, самур-калпак,
Коледо!

За калпаком, Коледо, кита здравца,
Коледо!

Да је здраво, Коледо, мушко чедо,
Коледо!

(Милићевић 1894: 160).

A wind blew, Koledo, from the mountain,
Koledo!

And a horse appeared, Koledo, black
horse, Koledo!

And on the horse, Koledo, combat saddle,
Koledo!

And on the saddle, Koledo, a male child,
Koledo!

And on the child, Koledo, sable-calpack,
Koledo!

On the calpack, Koledo, a bunch of
zdravetz, Koledo!

To keep the child healthy, Koledo, male
child, Koledo!

On the Midwives' Day (January 8th/21st), midwives visited homes where they helped women deliver their babies and gave them zdravetz (Усачова 2001: 195).

On Holy Thursday, children used to go from house to house and give *zdravetz* to the people living there (Усачова 2001: 195).

In Eastern Serbia, *lazarice* sang about *zdravetz*s and how important the plant was for growing up and sexual maturation:

Дојде момче на оро,
Зелен здравац донесе.
Све девојке купише,
А Милена украде,
Па си бегом побеже.
Момченце ју говори:
„Стој, Милено, не бежи,
Ти си мене речена
И у писмо писана.“
(Рајковић 1978: No. 22)

A young man came to the village celebration,
Bringing green *zdravetz*,
All girls bought it,
Milena stole it,
And ran.
The young man called her:
“Wait, Milena, do not run,
You are my fate,
It is written in the book.”

In the area around Vlasotinci *lazarice* went around singing to *zdravetz* and about never-ending, perpetual gathering of *zdravetz*, which is also indicative of the plant's importance:

Ситан камен до камена,
Зелен здравац до колена.
Пратише ме да га берем,
На д'н на ноћ по печица,
За недељу цела чоба.

Tiny stones one next to the other,
Green *zdravetz* up to my knees.
I was sent to pick it,
A bunch daily, a bunch nightly,
A whole basket weekly.

(Miroslav Mladenović Nasta, *Poems and dances from Vlasotinac region*: <http://www.vokabular.org/forum/index.php?topic=1551.0;wap2>).

Girls used it to decorate themselves by *zdravetz* to (Софрић 1912: 99). On St. George's Day songs were sung about *zdravetz* as the favourite flower and an herb that is especially good for girls, indicating therefore its role in initiation:

Ситан камен до камена,
Зелен здравац до колена
Пратише ме да га берем,
За дан за два један стручак,
За недељу целу китку.
Сам ми здравац проговара:
„Берите ме, носите ме,
Не дајте ме невестама,
Невесте ме ружно носе.
За дан, за два, за зулуви,
А увече бацају ме..
Већ ме дајте девојкама,

Tiny stones one next to the other,
Green *zdravetz*s up to my knees.
I was sent to pick it,
For a day or two, one stalk,
For a week, a whole bunch.
Zdravetz answers
“Pick me, take me,
Do not give me to the brides,
They carry me in a bad way,
A day, two days in their hair,
And in the evening they throw me away.
But do give me to the girls,

*Девојке ме лепше носе,
Дању носе за фесићем,
А увече у недарца,
У недарца, крај срдашца”*
(Софрић 1912: 99)

*They carry me nicer,
During day, in their fez,
In the evening in their bossoms,
In their bossoms, next to their hearts.”*

Or:

Поручује здравко по овчара:
„Нека дојду моме да ме беру,
Мене моме беру и не беру,
А невесте из корен ме скубу.“
(Рајковић 1978: No. 4, St. George’s Day)

Zdravetz sent the message through a shepherd:
“Have them girls come and pick me,
Girls pick me or do not do it,
But brides uproot me.”

Here is another song recorded in 1980s in the village Dobroviš near Leskovac: ¹⁹

Дојде војник у оро,
Зелен здравац донесе,
Све девојке купише,
Ја Тодора не купи,
Ја си стане да бега. –
„Стој, Тодоро, не берај!
У тебе сам свратија,
Пушка ми је остала,
И на пушку писало:
‘Мене име Делија,
Е тебе [је] Марија.’“
(Костић 2013:

A soldier came to the village celebration,
Bringing green zdravetz,
All girls bought it,
But Todora, doesn’t do it,
And she ren away.
“Wait, Todora, do not run!
I came to see you,
I left my rifle at home
There was written:
‘My name is Delija,¹⁹
And your name is Marija’.”

[http://www.mcleskovac.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3854:leskovaki-pisci-i-njihovo-doba-59-pionir-ako-glasilo&catid=45:ljudivreme-dogaaji-.](http://www.mcleskovac.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3854:leskovaki-pisci-i-njihovo-doba-59-pionir-ako-glasilo&catid=45:ljudivreme-dogaaji-)

In accordance with its apotropaic features and lustrative purpose, zdravetz was used in weddings-related rituals, from the time of proposal until the first wedding night (Усачова 2001: 195). Just before the wedding, the gate to the groom’s house was adorned with flowers, and among them zdravetz had a prominent position. This is still done in the area around Vlasotinac (Младеновић <http://www.vokabular.org/forum/index.php?topic=1547.0;wap2>). In Homolj, a girl dressed in her wedding costume would put wormwood, basil and zdravetz into her bossom with her right hand, *to smell like flowers for her husband* (Милосављевић 1914:151).

¹⁹ Translator’s Note: *delija*, an archaic Serbian word meaning ‘a brave young man’

The trousseau which the bride brought into new family were also decorated with zdravetz, basil, ivy, roses, lilac, again for apotropaic purposes (Милосављевић 1914: 143). It was a custom in Leskovac to put zdravetz and three stalks of rye in all four corners of the bed made of reedmace, where the newlyweds laid on their first marital night (Усачова 2001: 195), which further confirms the significant protective power of zdravetz in the context of wedding rituals and customs, i.e. the participants of the wedding celebration and objects used.

Considering death-related customs, according to existing records, use of zdravetz is particularly common among Bulgarians. They plant zdravetz on the grave of the deceased on the day he or she died and forty days later (Усачова 2001: 196). This custom has been preserved to this day, as the author of this paper has had the opportunity to see on a graveyard in Sophia. This custom is rooted in a belief that a soul can attach itself to zdravetz²⁰, meaning that it can be a channel through which the soul can travel to the other world. This also indicates that the belief in cyclical nature of this plant, that it dies and grows up again, is related to understanding of death and resurrection. The great power of this plant to influence life is also evident from another post-mortem custom: upon returning from the graveyard, zdravetz was put in a sieve together with wheat and bread. In doing this, Bulgarians used to say: *Да са здрави веке живите* /*May you live your life in health* (Усачова 2001: 195), which reflects the belief that *zdrav-et* could preserve health (*zdrv-lje*) of the living and protect them from death which the bereaved had been in contact with at the graveyard.

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²⁰ Various plants and trees are planted on the graves of all Slavs, which is probably related to a belief in the mediating role of the plants (Агапкина 2001: 162; Марјанић 2004: 226–229).

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THE PEAR TREE IN SERBIAN TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND FOLK PROSE

ABSTRACT: The paper explores the meanings of the pear tree in Serbian beliefs and folk prose. The pear tree can be a holy tree, but also a tree with demonic features. Such a position derives from widespread ancient religious systems in which the cult of the trees has a strong significance.

KEY WORDS: the pear tree, folk prose, traditional culture, legend, fairy tale, religious tales

The pear tree ('kruška') has a significant position in Serbian beliefs and folk narration. Some etymologists attributed the origin of its name to the connections with the language of the people who live in the area of its possible cradle. P. Skok considered word 'kruška' came from the East, argued it was related to the Kurdish word *koreši* – *kurest* (Skok 1972: 215). Recent scholars refer to the connection between the noun 'kruška' and the words which signify hitting, shaking, falling:

It is most likely that the speakers of Proto-Slavic and Proto-Germanic created the names for the pear having in mind that it is the favorite food of bears, with which the feelings of fear and superstition were usually associated. In the process of designation, the experience with bears shaking off these fruits provided an incentive to create nouns in Latin, Greek and Proto-Slavic, meaning 'that which is shaken' or, in Proto-Slavic, literally 'gruvano' (Hlebec 2005: 34).

Ethnological material offers a rather inconsistent representation of this tree. According to the model of the tree of the world, which represents three segments of the human view of the world (underworld, earth, sky), the pear belongs to *upright and tall trees (which) best depict the axis mundi* (Radenković 1996: 197). Although a fertile tree (which would indicate a close relation to humans), the pear tree in traditional culture is situated at the borderline between social and wild worlds (Radenković 1996: 198). It is sacred and profane, even haunted (Толстој/ Раденковић 2001: 313), could protect and threaten, be home to solar and chthonic gods¹.

¹ The ambivalent nature of the pear is also present in the representations of other Slaves. On the one hand, it is the protector tree (of fertility, from snakes – Bulgaria, Rhodopes, Slovakia, the Czech

According to some old believes the tree was seen as a hypostasis of solar / chthonic deity, god itself; furthermore, it was the dwelling place of the deity, but also the space which belongs to the souls of the dead (Усачева 2000: 295). The Serbian ethnographic material of the pear tree preserved almost all stages of these representations, particularly those in which it was marked with chthonic attributes (it houses demons, it is a symbol of the *other* world)².

According to Veselin Čajkanović, some narrations and customs of the Serbs preserve the ancient belief that a tree is a temple, a place inhabited by God. By registering examples of taking communion with plants (nettle) or underneath them (plum tree) and naming examples of holy trees – “zapis”, he finds possible traces of the belief tree and also pear tree could be a temple³: *In one of our legends there is a story of a king who never went to church to pray to God but he did that under a pear tree (he used to say: “the pear tree is my church”) and his prayers were so successful that he was sanctified* (Čajkanović 1994b: 173). Čajkanović also found elements of the belief in the holy pear tree in Serbian folk legend: „The one who asks less, is given more“ (Караџић 1988: 97).

The cult of the “zapis” is very well preserved in the folk culture of the Serbs. In addition to the pear tree, as a specific replacement for the temple, great respect was also shown for oak, beech, elm, ash and hazel trees (Agapkina 2001: 189). Underneath them, incense was burned and communions were performed, crosses were hung onto them and sacrifices were offered to them⁴, that is *the divine numen imagined inside them* (Čajkanović 1994 в: 176).

Republic), it is associated with Mother of God in Belarus and Slovakia (Усачова 2001, 313; Дучыц, 2000, 59). On the other hand, it is the dwelling of impure forces: fairies, devils, witches, dragons (Russia, Bulgaria, Belarus, Ukraine). In Ukrainian charms, it is, as the tree of the *antiworld* (evil, barrenness) the negative counterpart to the oak, the tree of the world (Усачова 2001: 313-314). In Christianity, the pear has a positive symbolism: it stands for Christ's love for men (Badurina, 2006: 398). As a traditional symbol in Western culture, *it embodies the female erotic symbolism* (Stivens 2005: 347), represents hope and good health (Купер 1986: 81), its flower is the symbol of transience (Milovanović/ Gavrić 1994: 261). The pear is the attribute of Greek goddesses Hera and Aphrodite (as well as their Roman equivalents); in China, it symbolizes longevity, justice, rightful management and correct reasoning (Biderman 2004: 185-186), whereas its flower is the symbol of mourning (Gerbran/ Ševalije 2004: 452). The representation of the tree as a personified and anthropomorphized creature in the cultures of many ancient world is a common place and a relicts of old religious forms (Фрејзеп 1992: 149-177).

² According to Sofrić, the pear tree has a bad reputation among Serbs (Софрић 1990: 149).

³ The pear as a holy tree is also respected in Macedonia: *In Đevđelija, for example, the pear was given holy communion for Easter: it was surrounded by icons, the priest read from the Gospel and sprinkle the tree with holy water, and then placed the communion under the tree's bark, after which it was called “pračestina kruša* (Агапкина 2001: 189).

⁴ The belief in the holy tree / temple is also found in non-Slavic peoples, for example Greeks (Сиднева 2004: 315).

When we consider the representations in Serbian traditional culture, the belief in the pear tree as the habitat of demonic creatures is quite dominant. The witches and the devils dwell on or underneath it. A dragon that steals the grapes lands on it, and it is believed that it will return everything stolen if it is killed while on the pear tree (Зечевић 2008: 269). „Џума“, the demon of the disease, is expelled from the village and directed to the pear tree.⁵ There is also a record of the wild pear tree (service tree) as the place of expulsion (Чажкановић 1994 в: 447). Moreover, according to Veselin Čajkanović, wild plants belong to the giants – *the oldest form of pagan deities* (Чажкановић 1994 б: 172). The pear tree belongs to a group of haunted plants, which is supported by a number of taboos. When a man disrupts them he enters the world of demonic force and risks the punishment. One should not cut this kind of tree (Усачова 2001: 313), sleep underneath or stand by it in case of thunder (Зечевић 2008: 691).⁶

As *the mediator tree* between this world and the other the pear tree was planted in the graveyard (Агапкина 1996: 11). It was believed that after the death, spirit temporarily dwell in that tree on the way to the world beyond (Виноградова 2000: 184). According to some representations, the pear tree could also be a stop in the reverse direction, from the world beyond to the earthly existence: a stork brings a child and places it on the pear tree (Виноградова 2000: 350).

It is quite certain that the nature of the pear tree also defined its place in the ritual and magic practice. *The pear tree is a valid mediator in the magic practice for at least two reasons. Firstly, the beliefs and the magical procedures refer regularly to the pears growing wild, that is the pears that belong to the space open to humans as well as the wild world* (Раденковић 1996: 201). This fruit is one of those used in funeral rites: it is offered to the souls of the dead, being part of the dining table of the deceased (Недељковић 1990: 147). Underneath the pear tree, a placenta was buried so that a male child would be born (Зечевић: 2008: 624).

The pear tree is present in almost all genres of Serbian folk prose. Within the corpus used in the present study, the greatest number of examples is found in fairy tales and legends, and a smaller one in religious tales, animal tales, romantic tales, fables and humorous tales.

In the material, the dominant representation is that of the pear tree as belonging to the demonic world or existing on the border between the human and the demonic. It is, most commonly, the space which is, temporarily or permanently, in-

⁵ The exorcism of the demon from the social space and its sending to the pear tree (or other places which represent “the other world”: graveyard, water, solitary tree in the field) is characteristic of the rite „provodiah rusalki“ in Russia (Виноградова 2000: 180-185).

⁶ These prohibitions are also present in the beliefs of other Slavic nations (see: Усачова 2001: 313). The motive of punishment for sleeping under the tree is also typical for the Greek tradition (Сиднева 2004: 315).

habited by creatures from the world beyond: a dragon which steals the grapes from the peasant lands (Чајкановић 1999: 349); an old woman (demon) inhabits the tree and comes down in order to petrify/ kill the hero by deception (Чајкановић 1999: 91-93; Самарџија 1995: 31-32); devils gather underneath it and unwittingly reveal the secret to the hero (unaware of his presence) who thus restores his eyesight and well-being (Чајкановић 1999: 213-214; Ђорђевић 1998: 200-201).⁷ A cart greased with the witch's grease is directed to the pear tree (Чајкановић 1999: 395). Besides dragons, witches and devils, other creatures from the world beyond, „sudjenice“ (Марковић 2004: 108) and saints come to the tree. In some cultural and historical traditions, Saint Sava gives food to the wolves under the tree (*portion for the whole year*) (Бован 1980: 136; Дебељковић 1907: 255-256) or buries the treasure underneath it (Лалевић/ Протић 1903: 580). The pear tree is home to the girl of wondrous beauty, daughter of the demonic creature (Ђорђевић 1988: 95).

In the legend of King David (Српски етнографски зборник 50, 193 cited from: Чајкановић 1994 а: 125), according to V. Čajkanović, we can trace old beliefs in the tree as a temple (the king who prays under the pear tree is sanctified). The material also testifies to the demonic tradition in which the pear tree stands as the protection against the demons (Р. Раденковић 1991: 63).

Veselin Čajkanović saw the reflection of the international belief in the capacity of the pear tree to hinder, prevent Death (and its hypostases, „Čuma“ and „Kuga“) in the folk tales where an old woman deceives Death by sending it to the tree (×fLęfîîâčž 1999: 473, manuscript collection of Sima Mileusnić, tale „Worry and Death“). Relying on the researches which showed *a religiously oriented interest in it*, he suggested that the origin of this motive could be traced in *Eastern Europe, mostly in Slavic regions* (Чајкановић 1994 в: 451).

Besides inhabiting the tree, the demons also pick the pear fruits, most often in fairy tales. In some examples, the demon who picks or steals the pear fruits belongs to the realm of adversaries who upset the initial balance – in the fairy tale „The Emperor's Son and the Six-Headed Dragon“ (one version of „Golden Apple and Nine Peahen“ from *Serbian Folk Tales* by Vuk Karadžić), the youngest brother, after the unsuccessful attempts of the older brothers, manages to save the pear tree, whose fruits are picked by the dragon: *All of a sudden, a great rumble and thunder was heard. He stood and leaned against the pear tree, and waited, but there came a six-headed dragon, spewing fire. As soon as it reached the tree, it clung to the branches and picked the fruits, but the emperor's son pulled out the sabre, hit it and severed his right shoulder* (Чајкановић 1999: 50). Keeping guard of

⁷ There are also versions in which, in this type of tales (Aa Th 613), the pear is lost as the locus, but the reference to the wild space remains (*Poor him, he stayed silent in the mountain. There came the devils (whose hotbed was nearby)*) (Ђорђевић 1988: 202).

the pear tree, attacked by an old woman on a red rooster, is a difficult task. After its successful completion, the hero of the fairy tale “Balonja and the Fox” is rewarded with a golden pear which he exchanges for other precious gifts:

Then the old man said: ‘Well, son, you are a true christened soul, ninety nine christened souls guarded this golden pear, and every one had to lose his life, because when they fell asleep, this poisonous old woman came, broke off the golden branch with its golden fruits and left, and the pear tree, touched by her poisonous hand, began to dry. There, you helped me and freed me of this poisonous villain. Bless you!’ Thus spoke the old man, uprooted the golden pear and gave it to Balonja. The moment the old man pulled out the tree from the ground, at the same spot, another one sprang up. Balonja took the golden pear, turned back to the lake, sat in the boat, and went back the same way he came (Самарџија 1995: 86-93).

The departure of the old woman (dragon) into the woods to gather pears in the tale “Stepdaughter” has the function of moving away: *One day, the old woman said to the girl that she would go to the woods to gather pears and wild fruits and left her the keys to all the rooms, ordering that the girl was not to enter the ninth room. When the old woman left, the girl opened all the rooms and, not being able to suppress her curiosity, unlocked the ninth as well (Бован 1980: 86).* In the tale „Adamsko koleno“ we find the ban from staying underneath it in demonic times: *The emperor said to him: ‘Go and hunt all over the field. However, behold: in the middle of the field, there is a large pear tree, do not dare find yourself underneath it when it gets dark, because you will fall through; that is where I lost three thousand men (Самарџија 1995: 30).* In the demon tradition, one would expect it to have a role of the forbidden, demonic space, which the hero (if he violates the prohibition) does not disturb without consequences: it is a graft, a tree not meant to be fouled by relieving oneself (Марковић 2004: 114).

Without losing the meanings it has in traditional culture (Радуловић 2009: 280), the pear sometimes “adjusts” itself to the nature of the genre in which it appears. Thus in fairy tales, suggestive of *metalizing and mineralizing objects and living beings* (Liti 1994: 30), it can be golden, of golden fruits (Самарџија 1995: 90), it can acquire unusual traits: miraculously quickly grows instead of another, uprooted pear tree (Самарџија 1995: 92), horns can grow out of its fruit (Самарџија 1995: 77-78). In the fairy tale *The Emperor’s Son and the Six-Headed Dragon*, the magical pear tree goes through all stages of development in a short period: *This emperor had a garden and in it a pear tree, which, from dark till the eleventh hour of every night, blossomed, grew ripe and, around midnight, something came and took it all away (Чајкановић 1999: 49).* The pear tree has some human qualities (speech, ability to suffer or give birth) in fairy tales of type Aa Th 460V (Караџић 1988: 92-96, *Fate*). Personified and anthropomorphized (Радуловић

2012: 344), it prays on behalf of the hero that the divinity he goes to, accounts for its troubles: it has no fruit or offspring (Ђорђевић 1988: 208-211), or no one eats its fruits (Ђорђевић 1988: 104-106). The pear tree is also present in the scene of an unusual threshing on the tree (Бован 1980: 62-63, 63-64, 64-65), however, being part of a humorous tale, the supernatural elements are omitted.⁸

The pear tree seems to appear in particular types of fairy tales and religious tales. In fairy tales about two brothers who venture on a journey to discover which is better: good or evil / justice or injustice (Аа Th 613), the pear tree is where demons (fairies, devils) come and reveal the secrets which will help the unfortunate brother escape trouble (Ђорђевић 1988: 198-201; Чајкановић 1999: 213-215).⁹ As an unfruitful plant, or a plant of inedible fruits, the pear tree also appears in some variants of the Fate tales („Усуд“) Аа Th 460V, 461A (Ђорђевић 1988: 208-11 and 104-106, a sequence in type 461A in type 425). In fairy tales of type Аа Th 303 the hero rescues his brother who is eaten or petrified by the demon (old woman, dragon). In parallel narrative sequences, both brothers violate the ban against going to the pear tree, and staying or sleeping underneath:

He promised to be careful and went hunting with his hounds and lions . He hunted all day long, caught nothing but a hare, and while returning, it was dark when he arrived at the tree, so he had to stay for the night (...) Tomorrow, he said to the emperor that he would gladly go hunting. The emperor told him to go, but under no circumstances should he find himself at the pear tree when it gets dark, for he would fall through. Oh, he knew at once that was where his brother had fallen through. Off he went hunting with his hounds. He hunted all day long and caught nothing but a hare. On his return, the dark found him under the pear tree (Самарција 1995: 30-31).

A religious tale “He who asks less is given more” (АаTh750 D) from *Serbian folk tales* by Vuk Karadžić is also an example of the model in Serbian folk prose where the pear tree can be found (Бован 2005: 62-63; Ђорђевић 1988: 104-229, 229-231). Three brothers guard the pear tree, under which comes an angel (hermit, old man) which tests their kindness / hospitality / open-handedness. The brothers respond positively to the first temptation (they give away the pears which belong to them) and get rewarded, whereas the second temptation makes the older brothers react wrongly (they are selfish) and they get punished. The youngest acts properly and gets rewarded. The motive of guarding the pear tree, according to V.

⁸ *Whether a scene, a description or an event will seem fantastic or not, does not depend on their constituent elements but on the genre in which they appear (Самарција 1997: 182).*

⁹ In tales of this type, other trees, instead of the pear, may appear – fir, for example (see: Караџић 1988: 100-101) or some wild space is registered as the gathering place: water, woods, mountain etc. (Ђорђевић 1988: 201-202; Марковић 2004: 50-51).

Čajkanović, might represent *a dark memory of the cult performed under the tree as the holy place: 'in that case, guarding of the pear tree would be considered as the remnant of the cult done to the tree, and then we could understand something that is not entirely obvious from today's tale, and that is why it was the brothers who guarded the tree that got the reward* (Čajkanović 1994 б: 173).

In legends the pear tree is the locus where the demons come, at which they gather or from which they part. In demonological legend named „Konj se čivtal al' ništa“ (Раденковић 1991: 44) the hero spots a goat's kid near two pear tree (one of the forms in which the demon – apparition, “omaja” appears). The pear tree is the space (behind the water) from which the demonic force begins its motion: *Firstly, from the other side of the stream, from a big pear tree, something like a rick passed him by, all roaring, and when it crossed the stream and took the Upper / (Traveller's) spring (...) it turned into a circle of girls* (Јома 1998: 36). In fables and some legendary tales, the bear climbs the pear tree and eats its fruit (Ђорђевић 1988: 12, 491).

Serbian folk prose and ethnographic facts are well in accord when it comes to the existence and the meaning of the pear tree. It can be a holy tree, a habitat for the good gods, a tree that provides good and protects the man, but also a tree which is demonic, evil, a place inhabited by various demonic creatures which threaten and hurt the man. Such a position derives from the well known and internationally widespread ancient religious systems (animism, totemism) in which the cult of the trees had a strong position.

In certain folk genres, as well as within certain types of narratives, the pear tree appears more often. Even though there are variants with other trees instead of the pear, or we only find a space equivalent to its demonic attribution, judging by the number of variants with it as the “protagonist”, the emergence of “the others” could be explained by the weakening of the influence of traditional images.

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WEDDING SONGS IN VUK KARADŽIĆ'S COMPILATIONS: FUNCTIONS AND MEANINGS OF PLANTS ¹

ABSTRACT: Different species of plants (basil, apple, maple, grapevine, olive, rose...) appear in more than one third of wedding songs included in the Karadžić's compilation of wedding poetry. These plants appear in various situations: they are planted and grown, given away as a gift, used to awaken somebody, etc. In this paper, examples of these are analysed and related to various phases of the rites of passage, with the intention to identify various meanings and functions of plants which are characteristic for Serbian wedding poetry.

KEY WORDS: wedding songs, wedding ritual, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, vegetation, initiation, Serbian traditional culture

Vuk Stefanović Karadžić collected and published the fruits of Serbian oral tradition for almost half a century, creating a compilation of lyrical folk poems which to this day remains unsurpassed in terms of its volume, quality and influence. Among the poems in this compilation there are 333 wedding poems (Караџић 1841: No. 1–127; 1898: No. 1–120, 265–268; 1973: No. 1–82). Karadžić's compilation contains 118 wedding poems which mention phytonyms of 39 different species of plants.² These mostly appear in the poems which according to their con-

¹ This paper is based on research conducted as part of the project *Аспекти идентитета и њихово обликовање у српској књижевности* (Aspects of identity and their forms in Serbian fiction, No178005) at the Department of Serbian Literature, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. The project is financed by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Serbia.

² Pine (Караџић 1841: No. 85; Караџић 1898: No. 2, 7, 78), basil (Караџић 1841: No. 10, 11, 14, 17, 23, 36, 64, 66, 76; Караџић 1898: No. 7, 19, 26, 28, 38, 50, 73, 74; Караџић 1973: No. 3, 5, 28, 29, 32, 65), beech (Караџић 1898: No. 61; Караџић 1973: No. 80), ivy (Караџић 1898: No. 2), sour cherry (Караџић 1898: No. 39), two types of willow: purple willow (Караџић 1898: No. 1) and weeping willow (Караџић 1841: No. 23, Караџић 1898: No. 31), kidney vetch (Караџић 1841: No. 14), nasturtium (Караџић 1898: No. 27), quince (Караџић 1841: No. 18, 85, 116; Караџић 1898: No. 27; Караџић 1973: No. 28, 31, 77), oats (Караџић 1898: No. 267), hyacinth (Караџић 1973: No. 35), apple (Караџић 1841: No. 18, 67, 68, 83, 91, 108, 112; Караџић 1898: No. 17, 26, 31, 41, 50, 64, 65, 88; Караџић 1973: No. 11, 28, 30, 57, 63–65, 67, 77, 79), maple (Караџић 1841: No. 23, 91; Караџић 1898: No. 38; Караџић 1973: No. 15, 39, 80), ash (Караџић 1841: No. 102; Караџић 1973: No. 36), aspen (Караџић 1898: No. 53), jasmine (Караџић 1898: No. 26), fir (Караџић 1898: No. 1, 7, 24, 26, 28, 73; Караџић 1973: No. 75), lilac (Караџић 1841:

tent or the context of their performance belong to the period before the wedding party goes to fetch the bride. The aim of this paper is to point out some forgotten meanings and functions of vegetative code in verbal manifestations of the wedding ritual through an analysis of wedding poems which belong to the bride's and the groom's text³ and the relation of particular verses to specific phases of the *rite of passage*.⁴

In the bride's text, the world of vegetation appears in verses about her childhood: when the brother-in-law asks her how it is that her face is so white and rosy (Караџић 1898: No. 41), i.e. too beautiful (Караџић 1841: No. 112), the bride answers:

Кад сам млада у мом роду расла,	As I grew up in my family
Свако ми је у род добро било,	All were good to me
У вечер сам рано лијегала,	Early I went to bed in the evening
А у јутру доцкан устајала;	And late I rose in the morning
Ја сам лице ђулсом умивала,	With roses I washed my face,
Отирала лијером цвијећем.	Dried it with lily blooms
(Караџић 1841: No. 112)	

No. 56), sage (Караџић 1898: No. 28; Караџић 1973: No. 14, 29), carnation (Караџић 1841: No. 66; Караџић 1898: No. 27, 71; Караџић 1973: No. 3, 5, 8, 22, 54), feather grass (Караџић 1841: No. 14), grapevines (Караџић 1841: No. 9; Караџић 1898: No. 28, 29, 73; Караџић 1973: No. 4, 6, 27, 69, 70), two types of lilies: sea daffodil (Караџић 1973: No. 23) and madonna lily – white lily (Караџић 1841: No. 112), violet (Караџић 1841: No. 96, 112; Караџић 1898: No. 27, 41, 74; Караџић 1973: No. 57), oregano (Караџић 1841: No. 66; Караџић 1898: No. 26, 74; Караџић 1973: No. 3, 5), olive (Караџић 1841: No. 13; Караџић 1898: No. 10, 47; Караџић 1973: No. 36, 41, 43, 50), orange (Караџић 1841: No. 33, 66, 67, 119, 125; Караџић 1898: No. 2, 5, 26, 27, 34, 50, 56, 73, 74, 99; Караџић 1973: No. 15, 19, 37, 63, 68), marigold (Караџић 1898: No. 8, 28, 79; Караџић 1973: No. 55), rose (Караџић 1841: No. 11, 42, 45, 55, 66, 85, 92, 93, 96, 109, 112; Караџић 1898: No. 1, 9, 27–29, 35, 38, 41, 50, 66, 71, 73, 74, 99; Караџић 1973: No. 2, 3, 5, 8, 14, 20, 21, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 32, 49, 57, 62, 65, 73, 77), rosemary (Караџић 1841: No. 55, 74; Караџић 1973: No. 35), wormwood (Караџић 1841: No. 76), wheat (Караџић 1841: No. 9, 122; Караџић 1898: No. 24; Караџић 1973: No. 4, 75), lovage (Караџић 1898: No. 28; Караџић 1973: No. 3, 8), immortelle (Караџић 1841: No. 23, 35, 56, 76), marshmallow (Караџић 1973: No. 3), common amaranth (Караџић 1898: No. 28; Караџић 1973: No. 23), hellebore (Караџић 1841: No. 23), cypress (Караџић 1898: No. 7) and citron (Караџић 1841: No. 116).

³ If the wedding ritual is treated as a text within the ritual, from the point of view of the participants, there are two active stories, or texts: the bride's and the groom's (Левинтон 1982: 95, 96).

⁴ Acts and verbal manifestations of the ritual which used to accompany entry into marriage have for quite some time been viewed in the light of the rite of passage theory by Arnold van Gennep (Ван Генеп 2005). According to this theory, the initiated person goes through three main ritual phases. Everything begins with a separation, i.e. the individual is drawn out of his or her natural environment. Then ensues the liminal phase (transient state), which is finally followed by reaggregation, in the form of his or her return to the (new) community with a different status (Ван Генеп 2005: 5–18).

Од ружице ђулсом умивала,
 Бијелом ме свилом отирала,
 Гојила ме, док ме узгојила,
 Узгојила, вама даровала.
 (Караџић 1898: No. 41)

With rose blooms she washed my face
 With white silk she dried it
 Fed me and nourished me
 And gave me as a present to you.

Here the plants have the function of a magical instrument which shapes the girl's face, preparing her for the time when she will be ready for marriage.⁵ The true meaning of these treatments is revealed through traditional notions of the role the rose plays in the physiological growth of a woman⁶: the girls used to transplant roses on the day of the Holy Mother of God (March 25th) so that they would grow as well as the roses (Jardas 1957: 53). Similarly, the rose is called upon to regulate the menstrual cycle: *Rosy rose, give me your rosiness, and I will give you my whiteness* (*Ružo rumena, daj ti meni tvoje rumenilo, evo tebi moje bililo*; Lovretić 1902: 187).⁷ A relationship can be established between the chromatic features of roses and a wider complex of notions about the colour red which can be associated with the vulva and the female principle (Раденковић 1996: 293). One poem in Karadžić's compilation speaks of a girl who, calling upon her beloved, says: *If you are close by, my Niko/ release the thin ropes/ hoist the white sails/ ride the waves and come to me/ your red rose* (*Ако си, Нуро, ће близу,/ Понушти танке конопе,/ И разви једра бијела,/ Доједри, драги, до мене,/ До твоје руже румене*; Караџић 1898: No. 35). The rose, with its chromatic feature or rosiness, thus encodes the biological maturity of a girl and her passage from an asexual world into a sexual one. This way, the girl symbolically actualizes her sexual identification, which is further confirmed by the way she calls upon her beloved and hints at an erotic encounter.⁸

This phase of physical and social maturation, during which a girl transforms into a young woman about to be married, implies a change in state and a series

⁵ Successive magical acts and treatments with a red rose and a lily gave the girl attributes of health and beauty (Раденковић 1996: 282, 294), which is recognised by her husband's brother, who is a representative of the groom's community.

⁶ The relation between the rose and the physiological maturation of a woman was first noted by Zoja Karanović who analysed the symbolism of this plant in Serbian traditional culture and poetry (2009: 19-48).

⁷ The Serbs believed that the red colour of a rose originates from the virgin blood spilt on white rose petals when a girl, unaware of thorns, pricked her finger on them (Софрић 1912: 191).

⁸ Physical maturity is a condition for the continuation of a family line, and this is exactly why the bride and the groom have to prove their readiness for marriage during the wedding ceremony (Иванова 1998: 7-13).

of related ritual acts.⁹ Thus, washing one's face with rose water, as a lustrative ritual act which used to be practiced as part of rites of purification¹⁰, is an act of separation from the previous form of existence.¹¹ Similarly, in fairytales which are specific paraphrases of rituals, heroes bathe and brush themselves with plants, mostly those with an intense fragrance, in order to *be completely purified* for the world of the dead (Prop 1990: 105, 106). Being in *the other world* in a fairy tale corresponds with the experience of a symbolical death of the initiated. For a neophyte, this means that he understands metaphysical nature, and is ready for a new state and to enter the world of adults.¹² In wedding songs, symbolic death of the initiated is represented by sleep, which for the Slavs is a state similar to death when the soul temporarily leaves the body and then returns upon awakening (Гура 2001: 480–481). This situation occurs while the girl is still growing up in her family: *My mother put me to bed early/ And woke me late in the morning/ Woke me with a sprig of basil:/ Awake, my daughter, the sun is shining/ Upon our white door.* (Рано мене лијегала мајка,/ А доцна ме у јутру дизала,/ Будила ме китом босиока:/ „Устај, ћери, зрануло је сунце,/ Наше б'јеле обасјало дворе“; Караџић 1898: No. 7). The Serbs believed that basil served as a universal mediator which *communicated* with the world, the underworld and with heaven (Раденковић 1996: 216) and could enable the passage of the *sleeper* from one mode of being to another. Also, because awakening the sleeper was considered potentially dangerous, it was accompanied by a great deal of advice and prohibitions (Гура 2001: 480–481). The mother would therefore use basil – plant of a great apotropaic strength,¹³ as a prophylactic measure which prevented and overcame the *crisis* of awakening.

The correlation between the world of plants and the sleeping/awakening is in the Karadžić's wedding songs created in a different situation as well:

⁹ Living involves continuous passage from one state into another, so the life of an individual consists of stages whose beginnings and ends form a chain. Each of these stages has a ceremony whose common goal is to lead the individual from one stage into another (Ван Генеп 2005: 7).

¹⁰ Among the Slavs, the cleansing rituals with rose water meant washing one's face, bathing or watering the rose plant (Усачева 2009: 468–489). The Serbs in Banat and area around Pirot used to put rose and other plants into the water which was used for the ritual face washing on the day before St. George's Day (Тројановић 1911: 177, 185).

¹¹ Removal of surface dirt is one of ritual procedures whose purpose is to mark separation from the previous status (Lič 1983: 117).

¹² One really becomes a man or a woman only when natural humanity is somehow abolished: initiation involves supranatural experience of death and resurrection/second birth. As far as the infantile, profane world is concerned, neophyte dies and a new form of living is born (Elijade 2004: 133–135).

¹³ On apotropaic power of basil, see: Чајкановић 1994: 38–39; Усачова 2001: 46–47.

Зачух славја ће поп`јева
 На врх маслине,
 Припијева ђевојчице
 Скоро вјерене:
 „Устан`те се, ђевојчице,
 Обасјава дан,
 Ево славје тица зове
 Сврх маслине сам!“
 Када чуше ђевојчице
 Скоро вјерене,
 И оне се устадоше
 Тако веселе,
 Сташе ресит` и бијелит`
 Лице румено,
 Сташе играт` и пјевати
 Пред ђевојчин род.
 [...]
 Младожењу и невјесту
 Све прип`јевају
 И из кола вјереника
 Свога гледају.
 (Карацић 1973: No. 43)

I heard a nightingale sing
 From the top of the olive tree
 It sang to young girls
 recently betrothed:
 Rise, you young girls,
 The day is dawning
 Nightingale is calling
 I am at the top of the tree!
 When the young girls
 Recently betrothed, heard him
 They rose
 So cheerful
 Put on jewels and powder
 On their rosy cheeks
 Danced and sang
 In front of the girls' kin
 [...]
 The groom and the bride
 All sing
 And in the circle of young men
 Each looks at their own.

The tree with a bird at its top is a metaphorical representation of the world tree and its relationship to heaven (Агапкина 2001: 161), which in this situation can be interpreted as a *sign* which motivates and influences forms of behaviour in the world of people.¹⁴ Vegetative and zoological codes together initiate dynamic processes of ritual time: upon awakening, the young girl applies white powder to her face and bejewels herself, and a previously immature individual (immaturity is stressed with a diminutive *ђевојчице*, i.e. 'little girl') acquires features of the initiated.¹⁵ The experience of going through the wedding ritual is what brings her, as a young girl, closer to the world of adults.¹⁶ It also prepares her for that which follows and is suggested by the presence of her fiancé.

¹⁴ Premodern man could live exclusively in objective reality, in an atmosphere not based on relative subjective experience, so he needed a sign, as an absolute element not from this world for all forms of existence. Through revelation, this expression of heavenly will ends relativity and decides about the behaviour of the community (Elijade 2004: 24-25). In wedding poetry, a bird singing from the top of a tree marks the initiation of ritual time or one of its specific phases (Карацић 1898: No. 5, 9, 38).

¹⁵ The colour suitably signifies a temporary change of roles: non chromatic features (white and black) are typical for the unusual, *sacred time* (Lič 1983: 86-87). In a fairy tale, colouring the hero with white or black is typical for the *time spent at a secluded place* (Prop 1990: 207, 208).

¹⁶ One of the basic initiation rituals for a girl in traditional communities involved her ceremonious presentation to the community, which showed that she was mature, i.e. ready to begin to behave as a woman (Elijade 1991: 26).

In wedding poems compiled by Karadžić, plants¹⁷ have a mediating role in bringing the future bride and groom closer to one another, as in the versions¹⁸ of poems about how the young man awoke the girl: *He picked a rose/ stroked his bride's face with it:/ Awake, may you never sleep enough!/ Have you not slept enough/ for nine years at your mother's home/ in the tenth in my arms?* (Убпао стручак ружице,/ Удари младу уз лице:/ „Устан` се, не наспала се!/ Да ли се ниси наспала/ Девет година у мајке,/ Десетој мене на руке?“ (Karadžić 1898: No. 29). Striking somebody with a rose, which in traditional culture was attributed with the power to exorcise all that is *unclean* (Усачова 2001: 590), is an act analogous to ritual purification which physically separates the initiate from the previous world.¹⁹ In addition to this, the rose as a universal mediator²⁰ enables the transfer from the separation zone into a transitional one, which is symbolically expressed with the girl's shift from the many years long sleep into reality.²¹

Plant as a universal mediator also appears as a locus of the sleeper, such as maple:

Млади Васо лов ловио
Вијар планином,
До подна му жарко сунце
Лице умори.
Тражи Васо засијанеца
Да се заклони,
Бог му даде зелен јавор
При бистрој води.
Ту је Васо починуо,
Па је заспао,

Young Vaso hunted
on Mt. Vjar
Until the stark midday sun
Tired his face
So Vaso looked for shade
To hide beneath
God gave him a green maple
Next to a clear water
There Vaso lay down
And fell asleep

¹⁷ Poetic text of any wedding ritual contains plants which function as mediators and nonverbal communicative signs, in situations when a direct contact between the young man and the girl is hindered. For example, they communicate through plants, a rose or carnation (Karadžić 1898: No. 71), or a golden apple (Karadžić 1898: No. 65; 1973: No. 11). In a similar manner, a girl gives a plant to a boy, as a sign of her inclination or acceptance of a marriage proposal (Karadžić 1973: No. 2, 21, 14, 28).

¹⁸ Versions: Karadžić 1898: No. 66; 1973: No. 25, 26, 27, 73.

¹⁹ Striking, whipping and similar acts have an important role in a series of initiation rituals which involve expelling evil spirits and purification. Ritual purification is a procedure of separation from the previous status (Ван Генеп 2005: 200–201; Lič 1983: 117).

²⁰ On universal mediating function of rose in Serbian lyrical poetry see Карановић 2009: 19–48.

²¹ The separation ritual zone which lasted for a long time (Prop 1990: 184) is signalled here by the nine-year sleep, which activates traditional notions about the number nine as being related with the passage, conversion and change (Раденковић 1996: 339), which corresponds to the experience of initiation.

А када се разабрао
И пробудио,
Кад код њега млада Мара
Љепша од виле.
(Караџић 1973: No. 81)

But when he came to his senses
And woke up,
Young Mara was at his side
Fairer than a fairy.

The young man's search for a *shade*, in addition to reflecting a natural human need to hide from intense sun, can be read in an initiation key. It corresponds with the belief that the sun is dangerous for a neophyte, so he should be placed in a space without light. This also associates with ritual isolation.²² In Serbian tradition, maple is related to the chthonic world, which is a locus of initiation sleep.²³ At the same time, the maple, as an embodiment of the *tree of the world* (Перпунин 2001: 164) enables the departure of the initiate to the *other* world as well as his return from it.²⁴ This is the initiate's symbolical death, after which he is ready to be married – and this is why his return to reality includes contact with a girl.

Maturity and readiness to tie the marital knot are often related to cultivating a plant, as in the following verses:

Садио Радо виноград,
Све белу лозу и црну,
Навади му се вран гавран,
Па поче грозђе зобати.
Стаде му Радо претити:
„Не зобај грозђа, гавране,
Ја ћу те врана стр'јељати!“
Вели му сам вран гавран:
„Немој ме, Радо, стр'јељати,
Ја ћу ти, брате, требати –
Када се пођеш женити,
Све ћу ти свате скупити,

Rade planted a vineyard.
White vine and black,
But a raven beset it,
Started plucking grapes.
Rade threatened the bird saying:
“Do not pluck grapes, oh raven,
I will shoot you, black bird!”
And the black bird raven answered him:
“Do not shoot me, Rade,
As you will need me -
When you are to be married,
To round up your wedding party,

²² This is evident in the hunting activity, which is typical for the initiation phase of ritual isolation of the young man (from when he achieves sexual maturity until he is ready for marriage). During this phase, young men exclusively engaged in hunting, which is again directly related to the acquisition of magical power over nature (Prop 1990: 175–187).

²³ The relationship between the maple and the underworld is also confirmed by the customary burial of the deceased in a coffin made of maplewood (Чајкановић 1994: 101). One segment of this custom has been preserved in the poem about a mother who is burying her son, and asks him: *My son Konda, is the earth heavy for you?/ Or is it maple planks that are heavy?* (Сине Конда, је ли ти земља тежка?/ Ил' су тешке даске јаворове? Караџић 1841: No. 368).

²⁴ Communication with three cosmic aspects, Earth, Heaven and the Underworld is also expressed with a picture of a tree, which enables a transfer from one cosmic area into another (Eliade 2004: 31–32).

Под крило десно метнути
Њи с тобом неви однети!“
(Караџић 1973: No. 69)²⁵

Under my right wing to put you
And carry all of you to your bride!”

This situation—a lone young man growing grapevines in a space functionally separated from the rest of the world (a plant species that is usually grown in it), and the announcement of a forthcoming wedding—indicates separation. Successful growing of a cultured species, as well as its magical growth (a realistic time period needed for the planted grapevine to give fruit is skipped in the poem²⁶) confirm that the young man has acquired the knowledge he needs, and can manipulate nature (Prop 1990: 472–477). Since the grapevine can also have the meaning of change in the sense that grapes “die” in order to be transformed into wine, which is analogous with the replacement of the temporary world with an eternal and permanent one (Раденковић 1996: 229), the actual species mentioned in the poem is suggestive of initiation. Furthermore, the young man spares the raven, which will help him when *he goes to get married*, which is analogous to the fairytale motif of a grateful animal, which later helps the hero.²⁷ This helper is, in fact, a theriomorphic ancestor, which is in agreement with the traditional notion of the raven as a chthonic animal.²⁸ The circumstance of a boy feeding the raven, although unenthusiastically, with the grapes he himself grew, brings associations of the customary sacrifice of the first fruits to the ancestors (Чајкановић 1973: 129). Grapes are especially suitable food for the ancestor, because the grapevine is traditionally related to the *other* world. This is confirmed by the fact that it is usually planted on graves (Лилек 1894: 154), and also used in magical acts in the cult of the dead (Чајкановић 1994: 228). In archaic cultures the notion of fertility is related to the world of the dead, because it is believed that the ancestors from the other world affect the Earth’s fertility (Раденковић 1996: 231). The relationship of the grapevine to the cult of the dead is most likely one consequence of the belief in the power of the grapevine to secure continuation of the family line, which is why it was used in magical acts for the birth of children.²⁹ Manipulation of the

²⁵ Karadžić’s compilation contains two more versions of this wedding poem with no mention of plants, and one mentions a falcon instead of a raven (Караџић 1841: No. 15; 1973: No. 70). In her analysis of these poems, Zoja Karanović indicated some forgotten symbolisms of the raven and the function of this bird as a helper and a guide in the process of initiation (2011: 125–140).

²⁶ E. Leach characterises this phase as a period of ritual timelessness (Lič 1983: 118).

²⁷ On the motif of a grateful animal which is a hero’s helper see Prop 1990: 237–242.

²⁸ On raven as an animal related to death and the world of the dead, see Гупа 2001: 109; Гупа 2005: 401–402.

²⁹ In order not to be barren, women used to tie a white vine around their waist (Lovretić 1902: 179). It was also believed that reproductive problems of the men can be solved if a vine is untied in vineyard (Simić 1964: 402, 404).

grapevine before the marital knot is tied suggests that the elementary purpose of marriage is to secure descendants. This is also an endeavour to affect fertility in humans by magical means.

In the following section of another poem, a young man similarly plants a fir, a grapevine, basil, roses, and an orange tree, alters the flow of the living water and leaves a small girl to guard them all. After three years, when he returns, he cannot approach it:

Од висине вите јеле,	For the height of the thin fir
Од ширине танке лозе	For the width of the thin vine
Од мириса босиока	For the smell of the basil
И лијепе дробне руже	And a beautiful tiny rose
И ширине наранџице	And the width of the small orange
И љепоте ђевојачке	And the beauty of the girl
И велике живе воде.	And the great living water.
(Караџић 1898: No. 73)	

The plants the young man planted can be associated with the motif of a difficult task from fairytales. In order to get married, the hero is asked to plant a *magical garden*, and its growth and prosperity confirm that he has acquired the skill of controlling nature (Prop 1990: 472–477). This garden, with the fir as the *tree of the world*³⁰, the *living water* and the *guardian*, expresses an idea of the center, which cannot be approached by the unenlightened.³¹ In one version of this poem³², the

³⁰ This interpretation of fir as the tree of the world is also confirmed in the following version: *I planted a fir in the rock,/ and left it for a year/ and left Lenca to guard it [...] the fir spread out beautifully/ From her top small pearls drip/ From her core white bees fly/ From its roots the cold Danube flows! (Ја посадих јелу на камену,/ Па је ману за годину дана,/ Па постави Ленче да је чува [...] јела ти се давно разгранала,/ Из врха јој ситан бисер капље,/ Из среде јој беле пчеле лете,/ Из корена хладан Дунав тече! (Станковић 1951: No. 98).* The motif of planting a tree which functions as the tree of the world can be found in other wedding poems as well. A young man thus plants and cares for an apple tree with a silver trunk, golden branches and pearly leaves under which his wedding guests will one day sit (Караџић 1841: No. 108). For those in a traditional society, nothing can begin until a fulcrum – the centre – is established (Elijade 2004: 20). In these verses, it is the act of planting and caring for the apple tree, which marks the initial locus and becomes the orientation axis for the the wedding party's future itinerary.

³¹ For a pre-modern man, *living water* is one metaphysical and religious reality: it contains life, strength and eternity. This water is not available to anyone and it often flows next to a miraculous tree, which is one concretisation of the *tree of the world*. The trunk, as a universal pillar, embodies the relation between the worlds of above and below, a spring of absolute reality, and as such is located at the Center of the world. *The Center* is difficult to get to, it often has a guardian and only the chosen few, the enlightened ones, i.e. those who have passed the initiation, can reach it (Elijade 2011: 236–238, 445–447).

³² In the Vienna edition of Karadžić's compilation there are four versions of this poem in the chapter entitled *Љубавне и друге различне женске пјесме (Love poems and various other female poems; Караџић 1841: No. 499, 500, 501, 502).*

young man shows that he is *the one who has acquired knowledge*, i.e. that he has the key to this garden: he drinks from the living water, smells the fruit and finally approaches the girl (Караџић 1841: No. 501).

These verses do not exclude the possibility for girls to perform magical acts in order to foster the growth of plants. Traditional communities held that women were analogous to the Earth. It was believed that women, as carriers of biological power to give birth and as the first cultivators of domestic plants, knew the *secret of creation* and possessed magical powers which they could use to affect the world of flora (Elijade 1991: 35, 36; 2004: 105–107). Among the Serbs, the cult of plants belonged to woman, and it was believed that all vegetation depended on her magical actions (Чажкановић 1973: 7–13).³³

These beliefs are manifested in wedding poems about the garden which a girl plants and cares for by herself. The process of growing a plant is often analogous with the preparation of her gifts (Караџић 1841: No. 36; 1898: No. 27, 28, 38; 1973: No. 3, 5, 8, 31, 54). While still sowing the plants, the girl intends each to one member of the groom's family, creating a map of social and kinship relations:

Млада Мара рано подранила	Young Mara arose early
У бостању да сади цвијеће.	To plant flowers in her garden
Како које цв'јеће засађује,	As she plants each flower,
Тако га млада немјењује:	Thus she intends each
‘	For the members of her husband's family:
Сади свекру стручак босиока,	For the father basil
А свекрви стручак грандафиља,	For the mother marshmallow,
Ђеверима цвијет гаронфиља,	For the brothers carnation
Заовама румене ружице,	For their wives tiny oregano,
Јетрвама дробне мачуране,	For the sisters red roses,
Васу своје стручак милодуа.	For her Vaso hyssop.
(Караџић 1973: No. 3)	

It was believed that all the plant species which the bride selected and intended for a particular member of her husband's family, had the magical power to affect other people³⁴, so it is possible that this was an instance of a magical act with the intention of influencing and regulating relations in the future community. This conclusion is further supported with the choice of space where she prepared her gifts, the garden, which the Slavs considered the most suitable place for magical acts (Агапкина 2009: 532), as well as the time when she did this: *Young Mara arose early* (Млада Мара рано

³³ This correlation between woman and vegetation, i.e. nature in general, is often explicitly stated in verbal manifestations and acts performed in various rites (Lazarica and Kraljicas' rites, wedding rituals, etc; cf. Jokić, Vujnović 2013).

³⁴ This is confirmed by the use of these plants in love magic (cf. Софрић 1912; Чажкановић 1994).

подранила). In another variant, the time is even more specific: *The dawn has not yet coloured the day in white, / Danica³⁵ has not beamed yet* (Још зора данка не б`јели, / Даница жрака не пушта; Караџић 1898: No. 38). This is the moment just before the dawn, which, according to traditional Slavic beliefs, is a transition phase when magical acts are the most effective (Толстој 2001: 102). Finally, this supposition is further confirmed by the verses performed when the wedding party started off for the future home, stating that the bride brought good gifts, *mostly of endearing kind, / for the future home to be peaceful, / home peaceful and obedient* (а највише биља од умиља, / Да је мирна кућа у коју ће, / Да је мирна кућа и послушна; Караџић 1898: No. 16).

The choice of a floral gift for her betrothed was most often based on principles of etymological magic, thus the girl prepared *miloduh* (hyssop; Караџић 1973: No. 3, 8) *dragoljub* (nasturtium; Караџић 1898: No. 27) and *karanfil* (carnation; Караџић 1973: No. 54) in order to ensure love and harmony in the marriage.³⁶ Likewise, in a poem which used to be performed when the wedding party came for the bride, the girl planted a gift - basil, *a flower of great reputation, with the power to foretell the future* (Софрић 1912: 44), which she used to tell fortunes:

Девојка се сватовом надала,	A girl was expecting wedding guests
Вас дан дуги босиљак сејала,	Planted basil the whole second day
На војнову срећу намењује:	Wishing luck upon her beloved
Ако војно добре среће буде,	If good luck finds him
С вечера ће босиљак никнути,	Basil will grow this evening
До по ноћи и прекрстити се,	By midnight be consecrated
А у зору у ките се вिति.	And at dawn braided.

(Караџић 1841: No. 36)

In these verses, divination is done on the basis of magical growth and progress which is often ascribed to the individual flowers the girl planted, but also to the wider space where she planted with her own hand (cf. Караџић 1841: No. 66; 1898: No. 28, 74). Successful growth and abundance of her garden, analogous to a difficult task in a fairy tale showed that she had matured and mastered the forces of growth and fertility, and therefore was ready for the marital bond.

What she planted was most often destroyed by the groom or his wedding guests³⁷, as in the poem that was performed in front of the girl's home before the guests arrived:

³⁵ i.e. Venus

³⁶ The very names of these plants create associations with a certain magical action: *miloduh* (*milovanje*=caressing, *mila*=dear) has the power to incite caressing and make the girl dear to her man, whereas *karanfil* (*karati* = quarrel) is given for happiness and harmony: *karanfila da se ne karate* (a carnation so as not to quarrel; Чајкановић 1994: 111, 183).

³⁷ The liminal phase of ritual reality included invented obstacles which the groom's guests were to overcome in front of the bride's home. In the verbal manifestation of the ritual, the garden which

Do not allow this, do not allow this, girl,/ A stag walked into your home,/ Grazed on your white basil (Бре не дај, не дај, девојко,/ Јелен ти у двор ушета,/ Босиљак бел ти понасе (Караџић 1841: No. 17), or in the verses: *There goes the young gentleman Vaso/ on his great steed,/ into her garden/ Mara's garden he destroyed* (Тудар прође челебија Васо/ На својега коња великога,/ На бостан је коња нагонио,/ Те је Мари бостан поарао; Караџић 1973: No. 3).³⁸ The symbolism of the life cycle of plants, from sowing and growing until destruction (i.e. death) is related to notions about the cyclical restoration of vegetation, and has associations with dying and rebirth. In this manner, through a *floral drama*, an analogy is established between the life cycle of the vegetation and the initiation experience of symbolical death. At the same time, events referring to the destruction of the girl's garden announce sexual relations, since motifs like ripping out flowers and stamping on a garden or a vineyard have the symbolism of deflowering and coitus in Slavic traditional culture (Гуца 2001: 501–502). The vegetative code thus alludes to the first marital night, which as a physical confirmation of marriage is the climax of the aggregation phase.

This analysis of selected wedding poems from Karadžić's compilation shows that floral world of wedding poetry forms a specific system of signs, whose functions depend on the specific features of the species as well as on the particularities of the situation in which the plant is used. Examples from our corpus are suggestive of a symbolical potential of the floral world in the analysed genre, which are characteristic for Serbian and Slavic traditional culture. A more comprehensive and thorough analysis of this phenomena would require a greater number of poems from different Serbian linguistic areas, in order to establish a true representation of floral diversity in wedding poetry and discover potential similarities or differences in the function and meaning of certain species.

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the girl grew was one such obstacle before the guests could take the girl (cf. Караџић 1841: No. 66; 1898: No. 74).

³⁸ Version: Караџић 1973: No. 5.

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FROM THE HERBARIUM OF SERBIAN FOLK (GENRE SYSTEMS AND BELIEFS ABOUT PLANTS)¹

ABSTRACT: Beliefs about trees and plants from widest cultural corpus are stylised in various ways in folk poetry and naratron. Numerous roles of plants reveal influences of genre systems, layers of tradition, dynamic relationships between types of fantasy and realia of a certain area. The stability of rich semantic potential of trees and plants does not diminish the flexibility of their meaning, which may be realised in various ways, spanning from ritual and magical practice to figurative dimension of formulae and expressions. Vegetation in folk prose may have the purpose of expressing the old basic distinction between tales and legends, but also the apparently simple Karadžić's distinction between "male" and "female" stories.

KEY WORDS: folk naration, trees, plants, ritual, beliefs, stylistic figures.

When the course of civilisation is analysed in terms of how humans used plants, the change from eating raw or rotten plants to having them cooked or baked was an important stage. People began to grow their plants and this intensified the adversity between nature and culture. The new knowledge was paid dearly – humans lost their immortality (Levi Stros 1983 I: 164; II: 355). Archaic basis for these notions in Slavic and Serbian tradition was influenced by the process of Christianisation, but the cult of trees and plants survived it in various ways: in agrarian rituals and rites of passage, beliefs, magic deeds and folk healing practices. The range of possible meanings also became richer: from toponyms, female names to formulas and phrases based on floral symbols. However, magical and ritual practice, systems of taboo rules and other ancient elements are not stylised in the same way in folk jeners. In lyrical poems, for example, flora is an active structural and semantic segment, whereas in legends and tales it has a different function.

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Cooked Beans and Baked Pumpkin

Ritual, magical and figurative potential of plants is least expressed in humorous tales. What is accentuated is practical purpose of plants, i.e. as food. Culinary specialties, however, as well as raw fruits may have special roles. Bizarre and comic situations unmask human nature. This is well exemplified in a series of Serbian folk stories, where, to cite a few examples, a miller and his best man both hope to profit from the same satchel of wheat; hodja blows on watermelon in the field because he had previously burnt his tongue on a baked pumpkin, a guest would rather try ajvar than beans, disregarding the hostess's mention of high price she had to pay for the former; or a braggart would praise his cabbage, and not say a word about another man's bacon.²

The favourite topic of humorous tales is human stupidity. A character may plant salt, or bullets, pellets, needles and wool.³ The popular character Nasreddin has features which depend on the context of improvisation. In the deep shadow of an oak tree, Nasreddin Hodja compares a small fruit of the tree and of a thin vine. His dissatisfaction with the divine order of things changes when an acorn falls on his head. A gypsy is usually caught in the theft of onion⁴, and a liar grows giant vegetables.⁵ The size of the fruit is prominent when a tsar aims at his subject with a fig he had brought as a gift.⁶ During his wife's labour, Nareddin throws nuts all over the room, in order to tempt the baby out and shorten the labour of the mother.⁷

² Караџић 1987: 224, 2566, 1543, 5999; Врчевић 1868: 113, 283.

³ AaTh 1200: Врчевић 1868: 316, 317, 378; Врчевић 1883: 94, 94-95, 103; Šimatović 1884: 118; Basariček 1887: 50; Кордунаш 1893: 78. (Variants from compilations from Serbian and Croatian linguistic regions.)

⁴ AaTh 1624: Караџић 1987: 1323; Врчевић, 1868: 79; Stojanović, 1879: 7; Bлагajić 1886: 68-69; Сремац 1894: 85.

⁵ AaTh 1960 D: Белан 1834: 48; Врчевић 1868: 176; Stojanović 1879: 16; Mulabdić 1893: 19-20; Чајкановић 1927: 480.

⁶ AsTh 1689; Stojanović 1879: 83; Врчевић 1883: 36-37, 194; Basariček 1887: 59-60; Mulabdić 1893: 44; Сремац 1894: 73, 192. The reaction reflects characteristics of those in power (aga, tsar, kadija) and is at odds with the ethnographic meaning of figs, which are a sacrificial offering and a sign of respect. In this story, however, the fig eventually saves the subject's life, so there are archaic layers of meaning present in this critique of the society. The fig is believed to possess protective and apotropaic power (Чајкановић 1985: 220). Tree is present in the fertility and birth cult and is related to abundance, power, immortality and *knowledge* (Софрић 1990: 204-205; Chevalier – Gheerbrant 1983: 612). The semantic focus is however on the absurd circumstances, i.e. social relationships where the position of power is stronger than justice, customs and laws.

⁷ Сремац 1894: 23. Nuts have important roles in the cult of the dead and in the fertility cult, during Christmas and weddings. When women had difficult labour, the child used to be tempted out with offerings (Ђорђевић 1980: 110; Беговић 1986: 194), and the labouring woman was sometimes

A Gypsy reads fortune from nuts invoking welfare, but when he realizes that its core is rotten, quickly and easily he changes his prayers.⁸

An oak, nut, pumpkin, fig, wheat are all symbolically rich. Norms of a particular genre spontaneously affect the process of semantic substitution. Even in complex circumstances such as the birth of a child, reading fortunes, sowing, having guests, ritual and magical complex is subdued, and ritual tension is replaced with comical elements.

The same processes are not as easily noticeable in swindler novellas because of a more developed plot structure. Following his daughter's advice, a poor man would plant a cooked bean in an attempt to answer the tsar's impossible request (Караџић 1988: 25). A trickster would sell a bag of cones instead of nuts (Караџић 1988: 47) and the characters named Čosa and a child would take part in a lying competition for a bread made of freshly ground wheat. A series of these lies is about millet⁹ dropped into the sea. It grows and ripens in heaven, so the God himself harvests it, makes bread out of it, then soaks it in hot milk and eats it.

The process of ascribing new meanings to concepts as a consequence of genre norms takes a different route in fables. It is easier because the poetical system rests on a "translation" of literal meaning (Blek 1986: 65). This type of semantic substitution depends on the shift of focus from wider ethnographic foundation to human relationships.

Sour Grapes

Plants are rarely leading characters of fables. It is not physical characteristics of trees and plants that are essential for characterisation, but their dialogue. Although there is evident contrast between a reed and a lombardy poplar or the taste of a rose hip and a tart wild apple, the allegory is dependent on their conversation and a twist in the storyline. A storm pulls out a tall tree; an apple gloats when its trunk is filled with honey. Since the moral could be ambiguous, wild rose makes it clear that whatever is sweet in the apple tree comes from another source. The

sprayed with nuts (Чајкановић 1985: 287). In such a ritual and magical context, the story about Nasreddin is indicative of the complexities of transformations taking place in a culture. A forgotten, insufficiently clear act has gone a long way from its primary role until it became this unreasonable act, consistent with hodja's typical characteristics.

⁸ Караџић 1987: 3544; Врчевић 1883: 83; Чајкановић 1985: 286-287.

⁹ Караџић 1988, 44. Ritual acts where millet has a sacrificial function are carried out during Christian holidays and weddings. The purpose is protection from demons and amorous enchantments. Although replaced with wheat and corn, it used to be sacrificially placed into foundations, so the traces of it have been found in the remnants of cities of Sokol, Svrlijig, Koznik and Marko's castle (Чајкановић 1985: 193-195).

third version varies the metaphor about the lovers' longing – hyacinth and daffodil (Караџић 1975: 553). As opposed to lyrical miniatures, the only features of flowers mentioned in fables are those analogous to characteristics of women.¹⁰

A human's need to belittle that which is unattainable is often expressed through a relationship between a plant and an animal. A fox cannot reach a grape or a rose hip and therefore speaks disparagingly about the desired fruit. The change of actors does not affect the context, as neither does the twist in the example where the bear cannot reach pears. The bear is also the victim of its greed and stupidity. It thinks dogwood will be the first to ripen and waits to take all the fruits for himself, and therefore misses all other fruits.¹¹

Whereas typical characteristics of animals are in the service of allegorical expression of human nature, plants do not have such characteristics. Plants do not change their habitat and characteristics, so their main function is to demask the hero. In the stories about animals, functions and meanings of plants are even more peripheral.

Sections of plot are situated in the forest, shrubbery, garden or field. Trees have the role of a badly chosen hideout, whether it is a wolf resting on a stump (Кукић 1898: 74-77) or a bear which falls from the treetop because it was frightened by a cat (Караџић 1988: 49; Чажкановић 1929: 9). A branch of any tree comes in handy for a hero to get out of a ditch, and a rough-hewn club is a lethal weapon when one needs to protect himself from bullies (Чажкановић 1927: 7; Ђорђевић 1988: 12).

The humorous situation prevails over ritual and magical meaning. Still, there are no rules in this simple structure. Sometimes, an episode is isolated from the ethnographic core, as is the case with a detail about a rooster drooping on an apple tree before it outsmarts a fox (Кукић 1898: 96-98), where the apple tree is completely irrelevant for the story. But when a bear runs up a pear tree (Караџић 1988: 49) several associations are made with certain realia, a figurative plan of expression¹² and beliefs that are related to this particular tree.

In this prose genre, neither flora nor fauna is divided according to standard oppositions. Domestic animals turn into hajduks, members of company come from both groups, and beasts do agriculture together (Караџић 1988: 49). Analogies with the world of humans lead to allegory and humour, as both can be created during the development of plot and characters. The comic twist dominates the animal stories where it neutralises both symbolic and ethnographic component of these notions. Different processes are at work under the influence of a certain type of fantasy.

¹⁰ Врчевић 1883: 42, 39, 23-24.

¹¹ АаТh 59: Караџић 1987: 1718, 2202; Врчевић 1868: 390, 415; Врчевић 1883: 32-33, 99, 105; Караџић 1987: 19-20.

¹² Караџић 1987: 198, 1010, 1054, 1695, 55, 1836, 3159.

Dangerous forests and miraculous gardens

In accordance with the fairytale poetics, scenery is not described, and the characters depend on the space. When three brothers go on a journey to achieve the same goal, they are first challenged by realistic or imaginary inhabitants of forests. One of them is a yard long beard, a foot tall man¹³, who is noted for his chthonic attributes. The hero of the story overpowers him by catching his beard in the cleft of a tree. Following “the experiential logic” of his own community, the narrator chooses a beech or an oak. This indirectly shows the abilities of the hero and the power of the strange old man. During the night, the demon restores his strength, uproots the tree and, running away, leaves a trail leading to the next phase of the fabula.

Choice of detail depends on the size of evergreen species. Archaic notions from the cult of the dead are less “visible”. Beech is closer to demonic trees, fairies are born on its branches, and the hollow trunks are the devil’s hideout. Beech tree, however, is included in other ritual acts, as well, which are more typical of the cult of the oak (Чајкановић 1985: 37-38; 240-245). Oak is considered a deity and therefore a holy tree among the Serbs, and its branches are used in the Christmas Eve rituals. Neither Christian nor pagan notions are of primary importance for the plot in a fairy tale, but they enrich the meaning of stylised tests during liminary rites (Prop 1990; Ван Генеп 2005).

The hero’s journey is directed toward tree as the axis mundi, which rises out of the underworld, and absorbs archaic notions from the mythological complex (Иванов/Топоров 1988; Радуловић 2011: 535-550). In one of the episodes, what is tested is the hero’s ability to be merciful: having saved chicks from a snake, he earns the gratitude of his helper (the eagle) which carries the hero from the underworld to the world of the living. The death and resurrection connect the initiation tests with agricultural ritual complex, but cyclical rebirth of vegetation and different understandings of life after death are represented in a specific way (Meletinski 1981: 222-223) and serve the poetics of the genre. Such meaning is indirectly suggested by the trees too, although giant trunks form a part of a one-dimensional set and the trees do not acquire fantastic features.

Memories of ancient cults are observable in the way the commitment to enter marriage is expressed. Newlyweds give their oaths in the middle of the mountain – above a few straws laid on a dry tree stump (Самарџија 1995: 14). Going around dry hornbeam has the same purpose (Чајкановић 1927: 54, 519-520; СМ 2001:

¹³ АаTh 1961: 301, 301 А, 301; Николић 1843: 9; Valjavec 1858/1890 (I): XXI, XXII; Stojanović 1867: XXIII; Plohl-Herdvigov 1868: 12; Војиновић 1869: 9; Bosanske 1870: 5; Којанов 1871: 9; Mikuličić 1876: 79-87; Tordinac 1883: 7; Blagajić 1886: 80-96; Strohal 1886: 12; Basariček 1888: 54-57; Добросављевић 1895/1896: 53-68; Кановић 1897: 15-29; Николић 1899: 88-104; Чајкановић 1927: 10, 12, 498-499.

74); after this kind of exposition, the main motive of plots is female infidelity. Due to the abstract style of fairytales (Liti 1994: 28-40) trees need not be named, especially when the semantic potential of the space is expressed. The heroes (twins, an uncle and a nephew etc.) split company and drive a knife into the tree trunk at the *crossroads*. If the knife rusts, it is taken as an announcement of death of a brother or a cousin (Караџић 1988: 29; АaTh 1961: 303).

Flowers occupy the borderline position mostly as a member of a tripartite series of difficult tasks. The focus is not on describing a mysterious flower from the giant's garden, but on provoking a lover's longing (Самарџија 2009: 8). An unfaithful wife conspiring with her lover (a demon, a devil) usually demands plants and fruits from a dangerous place. A reverse process of challenge in this world loses elements of fantasy and acquires metaphorical dimension. In a fairytale, the tsar would test his daughters-in-law asking them to bring him the most beautiful flower. The oldest girl would choose a wild rose, the middle one a carnation, a flower denoting fertility and birth but also death and disappearance (Софрић 1990: 220). The winner would be the youngest bride from a foreign land. She would possess important knowledge and come to the father-in-law with an ear of wheat (Самарџија 1995: 30), as a symbol of fertility of both vegetation and humans.

When the border between the living and the dead is one of the foci of the story, immortal tsardom of eternal youth and oblivion is surrounded by the waste "sad field". On the other side of the dividing line a flower would grow. As soon as the hero picks it, his memories return, and like all other living creatures, he cannot avoid death any more (Ристић-Јончарски 1891: 3).

Belief in shadowy trees and plants is stylised through a type of metamorphosis, by which a higher force protects the innocently persecuted. A tree or a flower would grow on their grave. This miracle corresponds to parallelisms in poetry¹⁴ and proverbs, but the figurative dimension of the expression is neutralised by genre characteristics of fairytales.

Within this poetic system, sceneries, animals and plants from the real world are marked as miraculous with an epithet, when unusual characteristics are ascribed to them or with, a broken trope (a hyperbole, comparison, metaphor). The combination of an epithet and a noun in a fantasy¹⁵ is sometimes strengthened with

¹⁴ *Два су бора напоредо расла / Међу њима танковрха јела/Two pines grew side by side/ Between the a thintop fir* (brothers and a sister, Караџић II 1988: 5); *Ој девојко: питоме ружнице; румена ружнице!/Hey, girl, you tame rose; red rose* (Караџић 1975: 422, 594). The motif and the belief are even more explicitly stylised as a foreboding of death in ballads: *Ђул мирише, мила моја мајко./ Ђул мирише, Омерова душа/The rose smells sweet, my dear mother/Rose smells sweet, it is Omer's soul* (Караџић 1975: 343).

¹⁵ This strenghteing is achieved with accumulated epithets and concepts, mythical creatures and with a marked space: *Вилиној гори: врх до мјесеца дотицаше, а листови јој златни бјеху,*

a gradation (*copper, silver and golden forest*), but even more often, *golden apples* adorn faraway gardens on the other side of the border and in the tsar's gardens. A shorter process also indicates miraculous features, as when the tsar has a golden apple tree in front of his castle, which blossoms and ripens and is harvested in a night (Караџић 1988: 4).

In this kind of setting, the golden apple tree is a part of the "scenery" of the fairytale, a gift of the helper or an ornament. But when it becomes an attribute of a girl faster than a horse, who is the sun's sister, golden apples announce death.¹⁶ In the process of coordinating the picture and the formula with the characteristics of the genre, in poetically expressed sequences of the rite of passage, golden apples are compared with interrupted life of a young person or are used to stress the vitalising strength of the wedding atmosphere:

<i>Расла јабука Ранку пред двором:</i>	<i>A golden apple grew in front of Ranko's castle</i>
<i>Сребрно стабло, злаћене гране,</i>	<i>With a silver trunk, golden branches,</i>
<i>Злаћене гране, бисерно лииће,</i>	<i>Golden branches, pearly leaves,</i>
<i>Бисерно лииће, мерџан јабуке.</i>	<i>Pearly leaves, coral apples.</i>

(Караџић 1975: 108)

In the same way a cosmic tree connects the worlds, the wedding itself is enough for the bride and groom to acquire God's mercy and benevolence of the ancestors.

Both the *miraculous* and the *figurative* are expressed in this stylistic and linguistic combination, and the two concepts (gold+apple) form a rich semantic field. Which of the meanings would become dominant depends on the poetic system. Motifs and formulas are not just elements taken from the registry of the miracles; they also reveal genre conventions which influence a particular understanding of pictures as parts of the miraculous world or the metamorphosis of a miracle into miraculous features of words.

In ritual and love poems, quince, orange and sour cherry have the same symbolic potential as apple, and golden trunks and fruits of the apple tree are sometimes alternated with golden pears. Although nothing is significantly changed at the level of functions and plot, chthonic features of the fruits are more clearly expressed. These are especially dominant when a fabulate is stylised about a man, most often a blacksmith, who grows an ordinary pear tree next to his house. Although it has neither golden branches nor fruits, this is where devils, witches and

а стабла сребрна, а усред ње виђаше се велики плам и дим од огња/ A vila's mountain – touched the moon, had golden leaves and silver tree trunks and a big flame and smoke from the fire (Караџић 1988 Д: 6).

¹⁶ Караџић 1988: 4, 24; Чајкановић 1927: 50, 57; Самарџија 1995: 7; Караџић 1975: 232. Радуловић 2009: 282-283.

the death itself would come (Чайкановић 1939). The complex of beliefs from the cult of the dead is also indicated by various interpretations of the cult of St. Sava as a herdsman of wolves, who from the top of the pear tree decides on the destiny of the wolves (and men; Ђорговић 1927/1990: 262).

The power that a man has over animal and plant species is coordinated with the style of the fairytale (Радуловић 2009: 45). The transformation of the wild into the tame is sometimes even explicitly a task that cannot be accomplished. The example with the vineyard also shows how the fantasy of the fairytale depends on the realia of a certain area. The long period of growing grapes and making wine from the planted grapevine is reduced. The hero must *plant the vineyard and in seven days produce wine from its grapes* (АаTh 531; Караџић 1988: 12). A miraculous girl and basil help break natural laws and the outcome is the same as when the time given to accomplish the task is shortened to only one night (Караџић 1988: 14).¹⁷

The difficulty of obstacles and challenging tasks is also expressed in that the heroes are spatially far away, so they would bring a cure for their father from a faraway tsardom. Just like special water, the grapevine, grapes and wine also have the power to heal. Losing or returning the great grapevine which gives more than 300 litres of wine (Чайкановић 1927: 50) symbolically includes both the age of the father and the testing of the sons. In order to make a full life circle, however, the hero dies and is resurrected again. Similarity with the process of vegetation is conspicuous at this level, all the more so since the youngest brother believes his own death (plants in autumn and winter) to be a dream; disguised as a beggar, he goes back home (beginning of the sprouting in spring) and then marries a golden girl (blossoming of plants).

Ritual and symbolic potential of the plot can be related to the rhythm of lunar phases, but it is certainly influenced by genre characteristics of fairytales. The meanings of vineyard, grapevine and wine are secondary to stylisation, regardless of whether they are based on a Pagan or Christian background. Techniques used to ascribe miraculous characteristics to grapes are obviously different, and both the category of chronotope and hyperbole are activated. Only one grape is enough to feed the tsar's army (Николић 1842: 3). The vineyard is metaphorically described as a weeping mountain (Чайкановић 1927: 77), but in the genre of the novel the focus is not on the unusual scenery but on the wisdom of the bride.

The meaning of the same picture is conditioned by the genre. This is exquisitely revealed in the figurative meaning of an expression, as in: *When the weep-*

¹⁷ The same process formula in the structure of wedding poem has a more complex meaning. The basil that has only been planted in the evening would sprout in the morning (Караџић 1975: 36). Planting and blossoming of vegetation symbolise readiness for marriage, and the connection between plants, the bride and the groom is customary in lyrical comparisons, parallelisms and metaphors.

ing willow gives grapes/dry maple gives apples (i.e. never; Караџић 1987: 1902). Elimination of ambiguities and the transfer into the sphere of the fairytale fantasy is especially noticeable when difficult tasks are to be performed. The opponent would demand apples growing on a birch, maple and beech tree on the other side of the border in the garden of the devil and other demons (Чажкановић 1927: 54, 519-520).

Only in fairytales a tree would give quite an ordinary fruit, whose power is revealed too late. Only when a man tastes the fruit (an apple, a pear) the miracle would happen and the horns would grow on one's head or fall off. This detail also confirms the relation between the expression or the picture with the context. This is so because, apart from the horn of abundance, the horns are representative of a young moon and the attribute of gods, mediators and demons (Apollo, Dionysus, Messiah, devil; Chevalier-Gheerbrant 1983: 563-565). They denote victims of marital infidelity, and in a fantastic twist in fairytales they easily become the deserved reward or punishment. Fantastic elements aside, however, the fruit of an apple tree makes it possible for the hero to understand or learn important messages. Split in two equal or unequal halves, the apple reveals honesty of a friend and intentions of the villain (Чажкановић 1927: 45).

A tree will not grow in an *unclean* land, fairies' dwellings (Чажкановић 1927: 90) or where natural processes are prevented by treasures buried under roots (Самарџија 1995: 34). The fertility cult is based on the symbolic potential of particular plant species in fairytales – a seed of an (golden) apple or an orange from which miraculous heroes can grow. When conceived under special circumstances, with the magical help of seeds (pepper, wheat, rice, peas, beans), the child is physically different from others, and the description is supplemented by a picturesque diminutive nomenclature: Biberče, Biberčić, Pasuljko ("Pepperling", "Beanling") etc. In addition to miniscule sons of great strength (AaTh 1961: 300, 301, 700), there are also virgins who originated from plants. In a fairytale, a woman gives birth to a stalk of basil (Караџић 1988 Д: 16), a stolen flower transforms into a girl with golden hair, and she becomes victim of the tsar's mistress. She would then be revived by an old woman leading a seemingly ordinary life, who uses magic and secret power of plants.

The girls *born* from an apple or an orange belong to the same passive type. Fantastic origin is not explained, but they must die and resurrect before they get married in this world. The happy twist (AaTh 1961: 408) is conditioned by a miraculous healing or reviving of girls, and female characters (fairies, the Sun's mother, God Mother) have the role of the helper. Phases of initiation and the symbolism of agrarian cycles are also stylised by means of these models.

Death and resurrection are dealt with in the types of fairytales about the unwanted stepdaughters (AaTh 1961: 431, 480, 706). After the testing (and/or hard-

ship) is over, the girls receive their permanent reward either by marrying or acquiring new abilities (golden hands, tears turning into pearls, words turning into golden roses; Караџић 1988: 35). These elements of fantasy confirm the complexity of the poetic system, whose norms are related both with the ritual basis (Самарџија 2011: 111-126) and the semantic potential of the stylistic figures. Whereas rewards announce the end of the narrative sequence, violent death of golden twins marks the beginning of a series of transformations.¹⁸

Metamorphoses of daughters of supernatural beings are not motivated in the same way. They run away with the abductor of their own accord, and in order to save themselves, they transform into objects, animals and plants – most often the rose. Deeply suppressed animistic beliefs, stylised in the final formulas in ballads¹⁹ are secondary to the denouement of the fairytale and the fertility impulse.

Another type of transformation also rests on the relation between living beings, birth and death. Unusual fruits grow from buried animal bodies (three eels, a snake). In addition to objects (a sabre; Караџић 1988: 29) which are decorative elements of narration, the hero acquires enormous wealth. Although a man inadvertently disobeys instructions received from the Moon's sister/snake, he buries her properly under the threshold of his house:

After some time, a huge tree grew in front of his house, which grew golden coins in one night...

(Самарџија 2009: 4)

The opposite example also has the form of a miracle, but from the perspective of the fairytale characters, which is not typical for this genre. What is stressed in such cases is disregard for the laws of nature, as in the example where a tree blossoms, but does not yield fruit. The main hero usually learns about the reasons for this infertility and how to restore the natural order of things from the creature

¹⁸ Trees (i.e. a poplar, a pine) grow from their bodies, and when these are cut down and burnt, a series of metamorphosis begins. АаTh 1961: 707; Николић 1842: 11; Valjavec 1858/1890 (I): III, XII, (IV), XXXV; Plohl-Herdvigo 1868: 25; Bosanske 1870: 2; Караџић 1988 Д: 10, 11; Којанов 1871: 19; Алексић 1871: IV; Mikuličić 1876: 23-28, 130-134; Strohal 1886: 1, 3, 80; Dvorović 1888: 81-94, 94-97; Николић 1899: 20; Чајкановић 1927: 63, 64, 522-523; Ђорђевић 1988: 65, 66, 508-509; Самарџија 1995: 6, 7; Самарџија 2009: 7, 8, 113-115.

¹⁹ In the final twist in the storyline in ballads, plants grow from young bodies as a confirmation of their innocence:

Више драгог зелен бор израсте, / А виш' драге румена ружица - From the boy a green pine grew, / and from the girl, a red rose (Караџић 1975: 341, 342, 345);

Ђе је од ње капља крви пала, / Онђе расте смиље и босиље - Where a drop of her blood fell, / Immortelle and basil grew (Караџић II 1988: 5);

На Момиру зелен бор никао, / На Гроздани винова лозица - From Momir a green pine grew, / From Grozdana a grapevine (Караџић II 1988: 31).

who has the power to determine fate or from the devil. The place where the tree grows is then marked as *unclean* (belonging to fairies; Чажкановић 1927: 90) or there is a treasure buried under the roots²⁰ (Самарџија 1995: 34). Still, absolute negation of a real world experience cannot be negated even in a fairytale – a tree cannot walk. It grows, blossoms, gives fruits, sometimes it is uprooted, fell or cut down, a lightning can strike it or it can dry out, hollow trunks and treetops can shelter demons or outcasts, but they always remain in the same place. An “explanation” for such a destiny is given in legends, which say that the trees remain tied to the ground because of human wantonness.²¹

While the language of flowers has various roles and nuances in love messages, magic and wreathes for weddings and funerals, in fairytales plants rarely possess the power of speech. Only when a hero knows arcane language can he have other abilities by analogy and *hear everything the grass says* (Чажкановић 1927: 56). Arcane language is most often a gift of a grateful tsar of the snakes, but plants from the wild, virgin nature can also give similar power. Special forest strawberries (Чажкановић 1927: 17) give the hero the power to talk with the earth, and if one picks fern on Ivan’s Day²², he or she can understand languages of all living creatures (Чажкановић 1927: 61). Time of the year is also very important, as well as special rules, which, if obeyed, would lead to mysterious knowledge.

Much like other typical ambiguous symbols, plants acquire both positive and negative markers in the fairytale structure. This depends on the region, the character they are related to and the narrative context. Traces of archaic layers of culture are suggested indirectly – plants are used by females (fairies, witches, fortune-tellers) and depending on the lunar cult. While growing, the Moon produces medicinal plants, and when shrinking, poisonous (Софрић 1990: 40). This is why various potions made of herbs, flowers and fruits influence fairytale heroes in different ways. Those who drink them may fall into deep sleep, die or be healed. Plants do not work on their own, but are used by mediators. Their effect does not result from their permanent characteristics; it depends on who gives them away, an adversary *or* a helper, with a friendly or unfriendly attitude toward the main hero.

²⁰ The same picture has a completely different function in the structure of the legend about buried treasure (Karanović 1989).

²¹ Stojanović 1867: VII; Basariček 1888: 32-33; Чажкановић 1927: 206; Ђорђевић 1988: 366, 553; Палавестра 2003: 12, 275-276; Самарџија 2009: 28, 128.

²² In addition to numerous ritual actions on Ivanjdan (also called St. Jovan, The plant picker, takes place on June 24th/July 7th) forest and meadow herbs are braided into wreaths with various functions (from romantic enchantment to healing; Недељковић 1990: 101-104). Ancient notions about the death of the plant spirit are related to the summer solstice on Ivanjdan after which the days are shorter (Frejzer I 1992: 424).

Plants are usually not precisely named, even when they are an important ingredient of the cure or poison. In fairytales, they are termed simply *herbs*. To give a few examples: the mother of the girl with golden hair would say *she picks herbs in the mountain to bewitch the young men and turn them into beasts*. In another tale, a witch would give to envious sisters a stalk of *a herb* and the instruction how to apply it. Proscribed words and actions are responsible for the contrary process, if the hero *finds* herbs *yellow like broom*, whereas charms together with *some herbs* (Караџић 1988, 19: 27, 28) heal a girl's hands. Belief in miraculous power of herbs and their effect on mortals is also visible in Serbian words and expressions like *zatraviti, ostati zatravljen* (trava = herbs), meaning *to charm, to make somebody crazy, to heal*, etc. The magic of nature is well known to fairies and women of demonic predispositions (Зечевић 1981: 135). Still, regardless of who uses them, when and with what intention, these herbs remain unknown²³ to ordinary mortals. It might seem that abstract style of fairytales is responsible for attributes such as *some herbs*, or *an herb*. Other reasons related to ritual and magical rules are also possible. Even when it would be crucial for the denouement of the fairytale, the herb of life is not described and is easily alternated with the *living water*. The plant named after its powers can neither be found nor applied outside the framework of the genre. It is known only to snakes, mice or birds (Чажкановић 1927: 23, 24), and this is another detail which makes fairytale motifs very similar to mythical representations.²⁴

In alternative segments of fairytale variants, heroes may use plants to overcome obstacles and escape their pursuers. This is the function ascribed to walnuts and hazelnuts, but not just any picked from a tree, but only if they are given away as a gift by the magical helper. In a fairytale a broken walnut, which is important in the cult of the dead and the fertility cult (Чажкановић 1985: 159; 184), would stop the pursuers for a moment by breaking out *into flames which almost burn the entire mountain* (Караџић 1988: 19). Another primal element is associated with the hazelnut, from which *furious rivers* flow. In the denouement function, the power is ascribed to three twigs cut off from a hazelnut tree or any other tree, whereas the fig tree itself is very rarely involved (Чажкановић 1927: 48). Three twigs open the secret door to the underworld (Караџић 1988, 8), the golden branch is taken from

²³ The wreaths are made during spring holidays for the weddings and deaths, which also indicates the role of herbs in the cult of the dead and the fertility cult. The metaphor about the death of a young unmarried warrior is structured with the same symbols. The hero remains in the tsardom of shadows (Сувајић 2005: 151-167), enchanted with herb juices (vine), the water of forgetfulness, charms cast by demonic beauty and the powers of a floral wreath made from unfamiliar herbs (Богишић 1878: 6, 82).

²⁴ Gilgamesh brings the immortality herb from the bottom of the sea, but the snake steals it and acquires abilities which are possessed only by plants.

a shadowy fir (Чажановић 1927: 64), whereas hazel saplings bring back to life and transform, reward and punish. A miraculous something is used to drive away, catch and kill a devil, depending on which force is holding it – the devil, Solomon or God. The symbolic meaning of a stick (a crutch, a lightning) is realised in different ways in mythical representations and in legends, and the belief about hazel being a holy tree is deeply suppressed (Софрић 1990: 145-146). The power the twigs have in fairytales reminds of ancient representations, but they are toned down by the dynamics of the fibula and frequent substitutions (the same power being present in objects, fruits, etc.).

In the shadow of the genre

Flora is not equally present in all oral genres and text types. Archaic foundation and symbolic potential often surface with varying importance in riddles and proverbs, comparisons and fixed expressions as well. Complex roles of trees, fruits, flowers and herbs are related to the magical and ritual practice and figurative expression of emotions. These processes are however important and common in the formulation of lyrical and epic poems. Flora can have the central position in etiological and other legends which interpret the origin, characteristics and extinction of various species.²⁵ Circumstances based on realia of a certain regions are represented as consequences of words and decisions of higher beings (the God, the God Mother, saints and the devil). Grains, fruits and vegetables can also be food seized from the devil (Ђоровић 1927/1990: 239-243).

The opposition wild/tame is often suppressed by a blessing or a curse. Dangerous plants, demonic and shadowy trees or mysterious herbs which unlock all doors and open the way to immortality are opposed to apotropaic characteristics of plants such as garlic, thorn and hawthorn. As is the case with most symbols, plants have ambiguous meanings. They have special roles in cultural and historical legends, although they are also secondary elements of the structure. They are used to underline the strength of popular heroes or to mark the chronotope. Mention of particular trees (Dušan's oak, Lazar's elms, Miloš's poplar, Karađorđe's mulberry) makes the narrative more believable and the emotional attitude toward national history stronger.

Plants are rarely the main characters of narrative genres, even fables. They are almost completely absent from tales about animals, novellas, funny stories and anecdotes. If a tree is mentioned in any of these genres, the fruit or the flower is its semantic substitute. Instead on the ethnographic core and the complex of be-

²⁵ *Cow parsley, aspen, terebinth, tobacco, shadowy trees* (Караџић 1969: 174-184); *Sliphion* (Караџић 1986: 873). See Софрић 1990, Чажановић 1985, Карановић 1996.

liefs, they rest on comical twists and turns in the plot, demasking of human faults and social phenomena. The worlds of the fairytale are, on the other hand, suitable for the growth of plants. In compliance with the norms of the genre, descriptions are left out, but the trees, flowers and herbs express meanings and functions from various segments of the tradition. In addition to permeating pagan and Christian layers, transformed traces of animism, animatism, totemism, metempsychosis, elements of ritual and magic are all clearly discernible or just hinted. The functions themselves (in the genre and culture) mostly correspond, but they are also fuzzy, because the characters are easily replaceable as this is not their primary scope. On the other hand, ritual and figurative potential of flora, beliefs and stylistic figures are subdued by the type of fantasy which is peculiar to fairytales.

As fairytales are literary stylisation of the process of growing up and 'translations' of cycles in nature, plants in them are used in their abstract meaning. Opposite processes thus simultaneously enfold in the same genre. Symbolic meanings of rituals are more condensed, and figurative meanings of expressions and pictures more diluted. The context of the plot and the genre conceals and at the same time, preserves the ritual, magic and symbolic components of the pine, oak, apple tree or basil. Still, miraculous adventures do not completely absorb their 'semantic valency' (Лотман 2004, 160-161). Symbols keep their semantic potential, but their realisation narrows the meaning or some of the features in order to fit the new contents. The wider the semantic field of the symbol, the greater its adaptability.

Despite lost immortality, humans are not left without means to reach eternity. Idyllic heaven resurrects harmony between the righteous and nature, although plants in oral poetry are far from memories of the holy gardens and the promised bounty of the Eden. How closely attached the human is to the plants is confirmed by metaphors, symbolism or roots and buds, of a young tree and dry stub, of the family tree or the offshoot of a family line.

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HOW TO READ RIDDLES: EROTIC WORLD OF CULTURAL PLANTS

ABSTRACT: This paper presents a cross-section of plant world in traditional Serbian riddles (in the text and the solution) which is predominantly based on the classical corpus of riddles by Стојан Новаковић (Stojan Novaković). Special attention is devoted to erotic connotations of fruits, vegetables and grains: fig, grape, cabbage, beans, paprika and corn.

KEY WORDS: folklore, obscenity, riddles, plants

Slavic ethno botany has been a fast developing discipline for the last twenty or so years. A short historical overview of this discipline is presented in a study by Russian folklore researcher Valeria Kolosova (Колосова 2010), and her monograph devoted to lexis and symbolism of the Slavic folk botany (Колосова 2009). A chapter in her monograph is devoted to male and female symbolism of plants. In the Slavic world, birch is considered a female tree, and oak and maple – male (Колосова 2009, see also Толстой 1995).

This paper aims to relate some research results in Slavic ethno botany with the findings of folklorists working on eroticism in folk texts.¹ Studies of obscene elements in folklore started in the 1960s (cf. Halpbert 1962, studies of eroticism in riddles Bolding 1992 & Kaivola Bregenhøj 1997) but have remained outside the mainstream Slavic Studies. Still, all Slavic national branches have published representative monographs, materials, even serial publications about erotic folklore. Recent Slavic studies of erotic riddles include Сендерович 2008 and in Serbian folklore Карановић and Јокић 2009.

¹ This paper is based on the research undertaken as part of the project “Language, Folklore and Migrations in the Balkans”, which is supported by Serbian Ministry of Science and Education. The results presented here are partly based on Сикимић 1996a. All data about original variants of riddles cited in this paper are also given in Сикимић 1996 and 1996a, except the examples cited from the compilation of riddles by Новаковић 1877.

Flora in traditional riddles

Thanks to Novaković's compilation of riddles (Новаковић 1877) as representative of a segment of Serbian folklore², it is easy to make an inventory of plants in traditional riddles. The assortment of plants, quite expectedly, depends on whether they occur in the text of the riddle (the 'left' side of the equation) or in the solution (the 'right' side of the equation). The control corpus of riddles is Taylor's compilation (Taylor 1951), which can be taken as universal and which includes riddles from Novaković's compilation.

In the text of the riddle, a plant is most often present as an unspecified 'tree', 'bush' or 'forest'. When it is a specific tree or a forest made up of specific trees, the inventory is the following: the commonest tree is the coniferous pine, but there is also beech and beech forest, thorny plants – Crown of thorns (*Paliurus aculeatus*) and thorny bushes, dogwood, hornbeam, oak (under its various Serbian names), fir, purple osier (a type of willow), hazel (and hazel forest) and linden.

In the inventory of solutions in Novaković's compilation trees are not specified, and a 'forest' is a part of complex denotatum in only one example:

*I set fire on an old ugly woman, it burned completely, but the roots could not. –
Cropland cleared from forest.*
(Новаковић 1877: 111–112)

Together with this riddle, which he received from Vuk Vrčević, Novaković offers a rather complex explanation: "When somebody clears a forest in the mountain, burns it, ploughs it and then plants wheat in the soil covered with soot". It is highly unlikely that the solution to this riddle is authentic for the cited folklore text, because if this were the case, both verbs would have remained untransformed ('*zapaliti*'='set fire to' and '*izgoreti*'='burn'), just as the part of a tree – the roots – remained untransformed, which does not fit in with the usual logic applied in the traditional text of a riddle.

The situation with flowers is similar: they occur in several texts of riddles in the form of 'a flower' as such (Новаковић 1877: 132, 169, 240), as well as a sage and a water lily. There are no flowers in the solutions, with the exception of one riddle from Risan (Montenegro) whose solution is 'a carnation':

*A dog is sitting on the border in a red rain cloak; the rain cloak is worth more
than the dog and the border.*
(Новаковић 1877: 28)

² Due to a combination of historical circumstances, Novaković's compilation does not include riddles from Eastern and Southern Serbia and Kosovo and Metohia.

This model of a riddle is representative of the Slavic folklore formula (Сикимић 1996: 27), so it could easily contain such an unusual denotatum for a traditional riddle as a ‘carnation’. It will suffice to say that there is no denotatum ‘carnation’ in the index of solutions to universal riddles (Taylor 1951). At the time this riddle was recorded, Risan was under a strong Italian cultural influence, which is evident from the local Romanic term that was used (*garofan*).

The following fruits, however, are quite common in riddles: grapes, apples, pears and blackberries. In addition to these, solutions may also be fig, cherry, plum, and often just ‘fruit’. In Novaković’s compilation, Vršević, however, provided a proverb with ‘orange’ as the solution:

Eight sisters were born in one shirt; when they disappeared, people’s mouth felt sweet. (Новаковић 1877: 141, with an added commentary ‘referring to a slice of an orange’)

Vršević’s example of a riddle about the ‘stinging nettle’ is another rare exception. The model of riddles with negations is typical for all riddles, but in the series of negations there are two plants (chilli pepper and crown of thorns), and all three elementary characteristics of nettle are very similar and hard to differentiate (‘hot’, ‘burns’, ‘itches’).

It’s hot – but it’s not a chilli pepper, it burns – but it’s not a fire, it stings – but it’s not a crown of thorns.
(Новаковић 1877: 97)

Various nuts are common in riddles from Serbian folklore tradition: walnuts, chestnuts, hazelnuts and acorns, but they usually do not appear in the text (walnut appears more often, hazelnut and almond rarely).

The situation with grains is similar: harvesting of grains, most often wheat, is a common topic of riddles. Riddles about millet and hemp were recorded around 1850s. Numerous riddles are about corn, which began to be cultivated in the Balkans quite early. As could be expected, corn does not appear in the texts of riddles from Novaković’s compilation, but there are wheat, millet and oats.

Vegetables are also asymmetrically present: there are numerous examples of pumpkin and broad bean in the text, whereas watermelon (*pipun*) and melon are present in one example, which was again submitted by Vuk Vršević:

A full cap of apples, and among them a watermelon and a melon. – The sun, the moon and the stars.
(Новаковић 1877: 218)

This Vršević’s riddle is based on the ‘fruit’ key: innumerable amount of smaller fruit (*apples*) and two different large fruits (*watermelon and melon*), in a piece of clothing (*cap*) as the recipient. Traditional taxonomy may not correspond

to the scientific, botanic taxonomy. Novaković's compilation contains other variants which are structurally comparable, describing a recipient full of innumerable small fruits alongside one bigger.

In the universal corpus of riddles (Taylor 1951: 445–447), the model §1093–1095 presents fruits on trees or in a bowl as 'stars'. In Novaković's Serbian variants, stars are compared to hazelnuts, and the moon to a walnut:

A sieve/an attic full of hazelnuts, and in the middle, only one walnut.
(Новаковић 1877: 129)

A sieve full of almonds, with only one walnut.
(Новаковић 1877: 129)

Small fruits can also be pits in a bowl:

A tin full of golden pits.
(Новаковић 1877: 57)

Other variants of riddles about food show that not just any plant would appear in the riddle, but only domestic edible plants which can be put in bowl and used in one's household:

A tin full of cakes. A tin full of small eggs.

A room full of millet is also a logical metaphor for a starry night:

A basket full of millet; the basket is not unravelled, the millet is not scattered.
(Новаковић 1877: 56)

Novaković received many variants of this riddle from his informants, and the difference between them most often rests on how 'porous' the *lesa* is (*it does not bend, yield, move,...*). Here, millet is not used in its meaning of a grain (or a fruit as it was termed by Taylor), but of small particle, so it agrees with other similar fruits: pit, hazelnut, and almond. The problem here today would be to understand the exact meaning of the Serbian word *lesa*, which probably means a bowl or a container made of wattle, corresponding to numerous other recipients, variants of a sieve, tin, etc.

In his analysis of riddles about celestial bodies, Taylor (1951: 449) notices that riddles about celestial bodies and a period of one year are closely related, and that numerous Serbian variants of the riddle about a bowl with twelve apples can be analysed in the same way:

A bowl of yew, with twelve apples, in each apple, four pits.
(Новаковић 1877: 31; this is the variant from Karadžić's Rječnik, entry *ždelica*).

Yew from which the bowl is made is one of the trees that appear on the left side of the riddle equation (about characteristics of yew see Раденковић 1996: 206–207). This variant of the riddle speaks more about the value of yew in the traditional culture than about its (indisputable) magical characteristics (especially bearing in mind that one variant has *zlatna kablica/golden pail* instead of yew). It should also be noted that there is a variant in Serbian folklore in which twelve apples are sent by a ‘tsar’ to a ‘tsarina’, without any mention of the container. Taylor is certainly correct in relating variants of the structure ‘fruits in a recipient’ to the universal model of riddles about ‘stars in the sky’, but number 12 is equally universally related to 12 months in a year. What is crucial for solving this riddle is this exact number 12, especially when it is further strengthened, as is the case with the variants where this number is further divisible into four slices: each apple into four slices (‘the exact’ number of weeks in a month), and then each slice into seven pits (the exact number of days in a week).

The greatest asymmetry is evident in the folklore world of ‘vegetables’: favourite vegetables in the world of solutions (on the right side of the equation) – onion, garlic, cabbage, potato, pea, carrot, pepper and cucumber – do not appear in the text of the riddles. Such an asymmetry requires analysis because it exists due to anthropomorphic and, to a lesser extent, zoomorphic replacement of denotata. As a new agricultural species in the Balkans in the second half of the 19th century, pepper was already included in the traditional culture, at least as the solution. It was still too early for the tomato which occupied its present day culinary place as late as the 20th century.³

Riddles about watermelon and pumpkin are numerous in Novaković’s corpus. Various industrial plants: tobacco, common madder, olive, wild edible mushrooms and rose hip. The corpus analysed suggests that only pumpkin, grapes and walnut are equally present in the text of the riddle – as a replacement for a denotatum and as a denotatum.

Erotic reading of a riddle

In addition to explicit obscene terms in the traditional botanical taxonomy, erotic connotations of phytonyms in Slavic folklore are discernible in folk riddles too. Researchers can read them the usual way: a denotatum = a replacement of a denotatum. A direct naming of the denotatum in a riddle by its erotic counterpart, for example *balls* as ‘grapes, fig’; *dick* as ‘pepper’, *cunt* as ‘fig’ indicates a denotatum that is not obscene. In its morphology, the male sex organ corresponds to

³ Taylor 1951: 627 records only one riddle about tomato that is based on the model ‘red on the outside, pits inside’.

various fruits, so in Russian, it is called a ‘banana’, ‘carrot’, ‘horseradish’ or ‘cone’ (Ermen 1993: 69).⁴

On the other hand, the whole text of a traditional riddle can be interpreted as erotic, as a text describing an obscene act without a direct naming, and the corresponding denotatum can again achieve the ‘effect of an unfulfilled expectation’. The choice of the denotatum in this case is not arbitrary: Slavic folklore has its set of ‘obscene’ denotata, such as, for example, ‘lock, key, loom, mortar and pestle’, in addition to some plants (for example, a bean or walnut). Furthermore, South Slavic riddles can have certain models of texts which by their initial formulas (which are common for some widely known erotic folklore texts) anticipate an erotic connotation, although the ending of the riddle does not justify it. Such a riddle can be understood only if one knows the folklore context and its position in the system of riddles. Riddles with illocutionary force belong to this group: they have the structure of a message to be delivered, or a request to borrow an object.

Riddles introduced with a formula containing a possessive Genitive (lost in English translation) also has an erotic connotation. Plants are also common denotata in this category (Сикимић 1996b: 50–52). These riddles have a simple structure, describing an anthropomorphic denotatum (marked by an expressive term without an appellative meaning) clothed in red:

Our tutulan has a red coat. – Corn.
(Милеуснић 1901: 128)

Our doloman has a red bottom and coat – Pepper.
(РСАНУ, entry doloman)

The clothes can also be green:

Our toroman has a green cloak and coat. – Pepper or a chestnut.
(Обрадовић 1895: 12)

Structurally the same model of the text in a riddle may not necessarily refer to a plant, so red clothes can be understood as a ‘flame’, and in variants where the object is clothed in the same traditional outfit of an unspecified colour, the denotatum is most often a domestic animal (‘cock’ or a ‘billy goat’).

Grapes

The model of a riddle with the structure of a description of an older man who exposes his private parts (‘balls’) is solved on the basis of morphological as-

⁴ In Bulgarian folklore there is a symbolical similarity between a dandelion and a male sex organ (Georgiev 2008: 25; About erotic connotations of an onion, see Sikimić 1996a).

sociation of this part of the body with different fruits. The solution here can be any fruit-bearing plant, such as ‘grapes’, ‘potatoes’, ‘pumpkin’, ‘corn’, although the commonest solution is ‘grapes’. In the text of a riddle the fruit is usually defined as *muda*. This part of the male body is rarely replaced by other body symbols of males, a ‘beard’ or a ‘chest’:

An old man is sitting under a fence, supported by a grapevine, showing his balls to good people.

(Вуксан 1893: 156)

In a shorter variant of the riddle about ‘grapes’, the old man is positioned in a particular place and the only thing described is the length of his balls (Шкарић 1939: 219). Russian folklore has a riddle of the same structure (‘an old man showing his balls’), but the balls are marked in red, so the denotatum is a plant common to northern regions of Europe where grapes do not grow⁵ – ‘raspberries’ or ‘tomatoes’.

In numerous variants without the obscene fragment (‘exposing one’s balls’), there is only an old man positioned usually under a fence, and his act of covering himself with a ‘grapevine’ or a paronymous, usually meaningless word:

An old man sitting under the fence, covering himself with a grapevine. – ‘Grapes’, ‘pumpkin’.

(Влајинац 1925: 158)

Direct naming of the morphological part of the plant, the grapevine, is the reason why the dominant form is one with the solution ‘grapes’. On the other hand, this same reason might have influenced the presence of other denotata, because non-transformed parts of a body or a plant are unusual in a traditional riddle.

Fruit hidden in leaves

Among South Slavs and other Balkan peoples, grape is the solution for riddles where the motif is the process of picking fruits: before picking it, one has to move the leaves. In the text of a riddle, there are leaves described as a piece of clothes or something hairy and then there is the act of reaching for the grape. In South Slavic variants, the ‘grape’ does not have one replacement of the denotatum - it can be ‘mercy’, ‘goodness’, ‘stalk’ or ‘balls’- depending on its quality or morphological features. The first two create an indirect erotic association and can refer to the female sex organ, whereas the third and the fourth are more explicit in describing the male sex organ. This South Slavic model of the text is restricted to

⁵ Areas with Slavic riddles about grapevine are analysed in Сикимић 2013.

the zone of folklore Balkanisms and includes Bulgaria and Macedonia. Solutions are recorded in South and South-East of Serbia:

Move the hairs, grab the grace.
(Бушетић 1901: 6)

The denotatum ‘corn’ logically agrees with different models of riddles with erotic connotation, just as in the following Bulgarian examples of with ‘clothes being taken off’:

Throw his clothes away, get hold of his goodness.
(Влајинац 1925: 153)

Erotic connotations of ‘weapon’ and ‘size’ are used in South Slavic riddles about corn – a measure of length up to the elbow is usually obscene, as is the movement denoting it.⁶ For example:

Our soldier has the weapon up to his elbow.
(Влајинац 1925: 153)

Erotic connotation in the text of the riddles about corn is not obligatory, as is evident from the example of the riddle which describes the morphology and yellow colour of the corn:

Golden horses, silk cover.
(Jelisavčić 1893: 116)

Other Balkan peoples think of denotatum ‘cucumber’ in the riddles about picking fruits hidden in leaves. Romanian example contains several common folklore erotic markers: a couple of ‘old women’ and ‘old men’, explicit naming of pieces of clothes – ‘old woman’s panties’ and the euphemism for the ‘fruit’ – ‘old man’s long thing’:

I searched an old woman’s pants and found an old man’s long thing
(Еξαρχος 1986: 98).

Romanian variant of searching and finding a part of human body in leaves:

I put my arm in a caught an old man’s lip.
(Флора 1981: 46)

Cucumber may mean a ‘male sex organ’ in Serbian dialects as well, and this has been confirmed in erotic folklore as well (Ковачевић s.a.: 126).

⁶ Ethnologist Sima Trojanović (Тројановић 1935: 51) described this gesture as follows: “When one raises his or her elbow a little and hits it with the palm of their hand, people call it ‘turn an elbow to somebody’ or to measure one up, meaning ‘you will never get it!’”

Pepper

Explicit naming of a sex organ is usually indicative of a neutral solution, as in the text of the riddle where the denotatum 'pepper' is replaced by the word *kur* ('male sex organ'). In this riddle, the attribute is red colour, so some variants have a semantically empty anthroponym (*Petko, Iva*) in the position of the replacement for the denotatum. However, a syntagm that is minimal in terms of its informativeness, comprising of just 'red' and 'long shape', is enough to produce a double association of both male sex organ and 'pepper':

Red dick on the plate.

(Ризнић 1894: 265)

Red Iva swims in the plate.

(Срећковић 1899: 266)

Such an erotic association is strengthened with the measure 'up to his knees' in a structurally different riddle for 'pepper':

Our tutoman has red barrel up to his knees.

(Ђурић-Јовановић 1887: 2)

Quite expectedly, carrot also has erotic connotations in Slavic folklore due to the vegetable's red colour and long shape. In Bulgarian, 'red beet' occurs in a structurally very simple riddle which mentions only two features: 'red' and 'fat':

Red fat.

(Чехларов 1910-11: 301)

Cabbage

Obscene connotations of cabbage in riddles stem from descriptions of the process of transforming plant into food and i.e. the relation: raw vs. fermented/sour. The result of a technological procedure whereby a plant becomes food (what was 'hard' becomes 'soft') is analogous to other similar antonymous relations describing the sexual act ('dry' becomes 'wet' or something 'naked' enters something 'furry'). Riddles about cabbage as food which is first hard and then turns soft is a universal paremiological procedure: Taylor (1951: 600–601) distinguishes ten models of riddles which are based on this transformation which correlates with the opposition dry-wet. In Europe, such are the riddles about cabbage, fish, bread, linseed and similar), but the order of transformations can be reverse as well. In the following riddle about cabbage, there is a semantic shift toward abstract meaning of the elementary antonymous pair 'hard'-'soft' vs. 'cheerful'-'sour' where the second member of the opposition can have its basic and metaphorical meaning ('sour'/'sad')

Cheerful enters, sour comes out.

(Обрадовић 1895: 8)

Ukranian riddles of the same structure ('hard' becoming 'soft') have the 'sour cucumber' as the solution:

I pushed it as a horn, and took it out as a hose, which was dripping.

(Чубинський 1995: 216)

Temporal opposition of living in summer vs. winter solves the problem of transforming the plant into food,⁷ but the erotic connotation is absent:

On a stalk it spends its summer, in the barrel its winter – 'Cabbage'.

(Вукановић 1970: 45)

There are also explicit erotic questions with the same temporal specification ('summer' and 'winter') where the root of cabbage 'is' the sex organ, and not a 'stalk', as in the previous example:

What spent summer on a dick, and winter in a barrel?

(Димитријевић 1908: 48)

Fig

Taylor (1951: 556) defines model §1355 as round, yellow, containing many things: the basic concept of this riddle is a recipient with innumerable objects which corresponds to various species of fruits with many seeds. As an especially successful variant, Taylor mentions a Polish riddle about poppy and an Ethiopian one about pomegranate. He also mentions other numerous variants (Taylor 1951: 835-836) noting that the kind of fruit varies a great deal, but the commonest are poppy, fig, pomegranate and pepper.

The fig-fruit is represented as a 'part of the body/woman full of nits'. Both concepts - 'the part of the body as a recipient' and 'a woman (as a recipient)' - in some variants are replicable by explicit naming of the part of female sex organ, or as 'balls' or an 'ass' understood as recipients:

Cunt full of nits.

(author's recording, Kopaonik)

⁷ A more precise temporal specification of two different phases of cabbage (as plant and as food) exists in sayings too. It is possible that cabbage was pickled for winter in some regions on the day of St. Luke, and it could also be that sour cabbage was the regularly eaten for Christmas, meaning it was ready to be eaten by then: *On St. Vitus Day in the garden, on St. Luke's Day in the barrel. On St. Miholj's Day in the valley, on Christmas in a casserole.* (Влајинац 1925: 167).

Šigic, migic, your ass is full of nits.

(Zovko 1930: 155)

Balls full of nits.

(Гъбъов 1906-07: 151)

There is one example of a riddle with this motif ('a part of the body full of nits') from Slavonia (a geographical region where figs do not grow). The solution to this riddle is a cultural plant 'poppy capsule'. The recipient in this variant is a part of human body that is not obscene at all – a hand.

Šigic, migic, a handful of nits.

(Новаковић 1877: 125)

Lice or nits are not the obligatory element of the text of the 'fig riddle', a part of body as a recipient can be full of golden seeds.

Our Anica's belly is full of wheat.

(Вуксан 1893: 156)

Riddles about fig definitely belong to the Balkan geographical region. In the Greek folklore there is the same motif, but the object is a cap full of 'lice'. In traditional culture a cap also often has the function of a recipient.

My grandfather's cap full of lice.

(Βαμβακίδη 1939: 154)

Beans

The riddle about 'beans' with an obscene motif of a woman who 'spreads her legs' (in some variants 'arms' as well) is limited to Kosovo and Montenegro. Erotic connotation here is strengthened by a description of a woman as 'wilful', of 'loose' behaviour (creepers, hop; Сикимић 2013).

Lady came of her own will, of her own will she raised her legs on the master's shoulders. Come closer, mister, you are aroused too.

(Павићевић 1937: 40)

Alone girl, wilful, raises her arms up the roots of the beech tree.

(Вукановић 1970: 50)

In the following riddle, 'beans' are also related to an immoral woman who shows parts of her body which traditionally ought to remain hidden ('knees'):

An old woman is sitting above the road, stretching her legs under the road with her panties torn and knees in plain sight.

(Вукановић 1970: 48)

In Russian folklore, the motif of a woman who raises her legs is present in a riddle about ‘strawberries’:

An old woman is sitting on a hill, spread her tits; a billy goat came, hit the woman with his leg, and the woman raised her legs.

(РЭФ 1995: 432)

The motif of a woman who raises legs is present in variants of riddles with denotata ‘loom’ or ‘plough’ (for erotic connotations of weaving in Slavic folklore, cf. Sikimić 1998). Indecent behaviour of women is further underlined with an explicit invitation to go closer to the anonymous caller:

Multicoloured cow, wilful woman, raises her legs on her own; come over.

(Mijatović 1908: 3)

By way of conclusion

The inventory of plants in Slavic riddles, being conditioned by climatic circumstances, varies greatly depending on where and when the variant of a riddle was recorded. Obscene connotations are mostly related to edible plants when they are mentioned in a riddle. Grapes, corn, cucumber, pepper are all examples of fruits which because of their morphology have attributes of male body parts. Fig, poppy and pumpkin have female connotations due to their morphological shape of a recipient. Erotic connotation of ‘beans’ is much more complex: its biological feature of growing upwards, as a creeper, although related to anthropomorphic female agent is in folklore associated with raising of legs and arms, which is by itself and obscene act according to traditional community.

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MAPLE IN SERBIAN CULTURE

ABSTRACT: This paper presents the features of the maple tree in Serbian tradition, as well as the features which are ascribed to this tree in the world folk heritage. Alongside these characteristics, mythological presentations of this tree are also listed and analysed. This paper concludes with a general question of whether identical features of a tree in different traditions can be used to explain a concept of pure national culture and national identity.

KEY WORDS: maple, gusle, history of Serbian culture, national identity

Although seemingly not as popular as some other trees in Serbian folk tradition, maple nonetheless has been proven as a means of expressing a heritage line which in the collective memory and narratives brings together the past and the present. Maple (*javor* in Serbian) is present in Karadžić's dictionary of Serbian in eight entries (Karadžić 1852), his comments and translations of the definitions): 1. *javor* (maple, a tree); 2. *Јаворина* (a mountain in Bosnia); cf. *Јахорина*); 3. *Јахор* (in Montenegro), cf. *javor*; 4. *Јаворина*, а) augmentative for *javor*: *Стар је војно трула јаворина*, б) mountain, see *Јаворина*; 5. *јаворје*: а) mass noun for *javor* in verses: *Седлом бије о јаворје*, / *А копитом о мраморје*, б) a mountain between Drobniak and Morača, also in verses: *Од Јаворја зелене планине*; 6. *јаворов* (maple's) for gusle: *гусле јаворове*; 7. *јаворовина*: maple wood; 8. *гуслице* (diminutive form for *gusle*), in verses: *Садељајте гуслице/од сувога јавора*.

Maple really is a nice looking and useful tree. From relevant literature we learn that Lithuanians adored it, and it has been highly appreciated among the Slavs too (Sofrić 1912: 115-117). There is a love song which proves this – a song from the central parts of Serbia - which in my childhood I heard from my grandmother Ruža in Oreovica village. She was a well known healer and a weaver. Later in my life, I heard it as performed by the Brothers Teofilović: *Ој, јаворе, јаворе!/// Ту си дрво најбоље!//Hey maple, maple!/You are the best tree!*

In the vicinity of the Macedonian town Gevgelija there even was a maple for which people believed that is holy (Софрић 1912: 115). And there is a maple which was associated with the best known medieval town in Serbia, Novo Brdo. There is also a legend about the maple tree which grew next to a holy spring near the city of Niš. The

sick used to hang their shirts or towels on this tree, and whether it was devoted to the maple or the spring has not been resolved to this day. The existence of some sort of a mythical relation between the spring and the maple is also evident from some folk songs, one of which begins with the verse *У ливаду под јавором вода извиру*/In the meadow under the maple tree a spring gushes forth. One other song uses the same motif.¹ A third example relates that the Slavs from Udine worshiped a tree and a spring stemming from under its roots, which could be equalled to a Christian expression of respect for God.

The story about maple as a home of demons who must be appeased with gifts in order to secure recovery of the sick agrees with the legend about maple as a healing tree (Софрић 1912: 115). And as the demon of illness associates with death, it is understandable why the story about the features of maple agrees with the cult of the ancestors: in a folk song, the coffin for the deceased is made of maple. There is also a contrary belief that a maple will dry if a sick person pours the water in which he or she washed their face on its roots: the sickness transfers from the sick onto the tree. This story is based on the superstition that a sickness can be transferred from a human onto a plant. On the other hand, a dry maple will grow green if an unfairly convicted person hugs it, which means that the tree is attributed the virtue of justness.

The folk musical instrument *gusle* which accompanies songs about heroes from bygone times is also made of maple. The epithet *javorov* (made of maple) always accompanies the noun *gusle*. In epic poetry, this formulaic expression shows appreciation of the cult of the ancestors. An instrument like this possesses the power of words, and the words show their strength/logos through *gusle*. Mythological features of maple are transferred onto the instrument which is made of it, and the instrument further gives the meaning to the poems which it accompanies (Костић 1933: 72–74). Maple woods in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* have the similar meaning. Also, cribs in fairy tales are usually made of maple, which indicates that maple is a good tree.

Maple is present in folk sayings. Instead of the usual: *кад на врби роди зрожђе*/when grapes grow on willows, there is a saying with the same meaning (i.e. ‘it can never be’): *when apples grow on maple*. Such a saying could be taken as a proof that the maple tree concept has been present in the collective memory of the Serbs from the ancient times.

The presence of maple in the Balkans also influenced creation of many toponyms; there is a *čair* (meadow) *Javor* on the mountain Rudnik, many springs are called *Javor*, and there are also meadows with the same name (Стојановић 1903: No. 3412, 248–249).² Both males and females can be named after this tree (m.

¹ *Расла јела у осоју, / зелен боре у присоју. / Јела бору поручује: Ој јаворе, зелен боре, / лијепо ти је украј воде, / из табла ти вода тече, / из грана ти пчеле лете, / а врхом ти бисер рађа.*

² All these localities are recorded in the manuscript of abbot Aleksije dated from 1774. The manuscript is a part of the four gospels from the end of the 14th or the beginning of the 15th

Јавор, *f. Јаворка*) as well as surnames (*Јавор*). The location *Javorak* is mentioned in one version of a folk story about vampires (Ђорђевић 1953: 36). A spring given a personal name such as *Jahorika* indicates that it was local people who invented names for the localities (Nodilo 1981: 136–137). A famous Serbian magazine, the first edition of which was published in 1862, was also named after this tree.³

Going far back into the Celtic mythology, different periods were related to different trees in a floral horoscope: maple was the tree for those born between April 11th and 20th and October 14th and 23rd, and it was the sign of people who were independent, extremely original, ambitious, proud and with a complicated love life. In relation to this horoscope, Michael Vescoli (www.kosmas.cz/knihy/115437/keltsky-stromovy-kalendar/) wrote that: *only there where a man identifies his history with the history of a tree can the feeling of how useful even a mortal tree is, win* (our translation).

At the time of classical antiquity, maple was probably considered a tree of great power, since, according to Greek mythology, the king of Colchis hung the Golden Fleece on a maple tree in the sacred grove of the god Ares (Greys 1969: 481–483). In the Ovidius's *Metamorphoses* there is also a passing mention of maple.

The fact that maple was often mentioned and the long history of associating maple with certain characteristics indicate the importance of this tree in the folk religion. Whether this continual presence in human imagination might be attributed to its longevity (a maple can live up to five centuries and be over one meter in diameter) is not a question that needs to be answered here. There is, however, another relevant question of the same level.

Maple belongs to the group of happy trees. Its qualities are always positive and beneficial. It is good for woodwork: all over Europe it is used to make a block flute, furniture, or veneer, its juice is one of the best bases for cough syrups (probably because of the saccharin content). These are natural qualities of the well known forest or mountain maple which has been common in the wet terrains of Northern Germany, England and southern Scandinavia from the 15th century onward (Roloff 2009: 3).

There is, however, also a field maple. It symbolizes a protective home tree. Originally, it was cultivated particularly for this purpose in the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Carpathians and in the Balkan Mountains. If it grew on the boundary between

century which was kept in the National Serbian Library (cf. Стојановић 1903: 21): (...) и учинише ђевиш на првој билези више чапра Јавора, на Рудничком путу под главице хумке више пута надесно, а под путем идући од Рудника налево камена билега код цера, обе те билеге више чапра Јавора. (...) Стрепчанском реком на извор Јавор и ливаду Јавор; од Јавора воде право узбердо по суху до камените билеге код цера под путем и главице хумке више пута. (...)

³ There are at least ten periodical publications named after this tree in the electronic catalogue of Matica Srpska Library.

two properties, it was a good sign for the owners which meant that they would prosper and grow. In the spring people collected juice called *buza* from this tree.

In folk beliefs most trees are somehow related to animals, but this is not the case with maple. The dragon guarding the Golden Fleece in the maple grove is intentionally excluded here, because this dragon did not live in a maple tree, the trees were simply there, in this protective situation. When the Golden Fleece was stolen, the maple still lived in the mythical grove, but the dragon was gone. Maple is not related to any bird, either, which is quite extraordinary, all the more so because it is associated with people, either in the form of gusle players or the sick.

The maple, however, does behave like a person. It is like a person: it is able to rejoice, it can suffer as opposed to the conifers which, according to Isidora Sekulić, are trees that do not know how to suffer or be happy, but only how to last. They are, therefore, living fossils. And just like a human being, a maple will be born, will live, experience joy and sadness in its life, and eventually die after a long and emotionally rich life. Due to its longevity, it is a life-tree; according to the Gospel by Matthew (7, 33-36), it represents the tree of wisdom in Paradise.

All these characteristics and what we hinted at in our questioning dilemma point toward the unavoidable question of whether it is possible to determine a stable semantic formula for everything a tree such as a maple represents. This question invokes a more general cultural meaning, which could prove to be important both for a national culture such as Serbian and for the history of culture in general. To be able to reach this point, a few analytical steps are required.

Maple occurs in different genres of Serbian folk poetry where it carries a wide spectre of meanings:

1. In a lamentation (Караџић 1841: 298) a deceased priest Marko Samardžić is metaphorically addressed as maple:

Наш *јаворе* на саборе,
мудра главо.

2. In *kraljica* poems (Караџић 1867:41-42)
 - a) the singers address the priest whose house is protected by an overhanging maple tree:

Ми дођосмо овде
Пред попове дворе.
Попови су двори
Борјем ограђени,
Борјем и *јаворјем*.
(Karadžić 1841: 182)

b) a hero is named Javor (i.e. Maple) in verses:

Јавор ишетао,
 Девојке гледао,
 Пак је говорио:
 „Која је ту моја,
 Јави се, девојко,
 Измеђ' девојака.“
 Ево ме, *Јаворе*,
 Ал' ти нећу доћи,
 Док ми не сакројиш
 Од мака кошуљу,
 Од свиле рукаве.“
 (Karadžić 1867: 50)⁴

3. A maple is invoked in a song which used to be sung in the 17th century, during a fast (Карацић 1969: 167–168):

Ој страоре, страоре!⁵
 Ој *јаворе* страоре!
 Чујем, чујем неборе

4. In a *koleda* song both the hero and the plant are named maple (Javor/ javor)

Што тај Дунав, Симуне,
 Мутан тече, Угрине,
 Симуне јело,
 Угрине брајко,
 Јаворов момак,
 Јаворова биљка,
 На црквенцу,
 На злаћенцу
 Ран(о) поје.

5. Maple's gusle are mentioned in epic folk songs in the meaning of maple's tree that sings;
 6. The meaning of maple which always brings happiness and prosperity is present in the following verses depicting ploughing where wooden parts of plough are named *javor*:

⁴ Karadžić first published this song in *Народна српска пјеснарица* (1815), and it was published again in later collections of folk songs.

⁵ Expression *страор* is used in the sense of 'old'.

јармови јаворови,
палице шимширове,
заворњи босиљкови.

7. In one folk lamentation a mother buries her dead son and puts him into a coffin made of maple. It is a solid wood, whose durability metaphorically prolongs the life of the body it holds. She then puts the coffin under an orange tree. The son is released from motherly arms by being placed into a maple coffin, so that he may sing in the heaven, as dry maple wood produces the most enchanting music (maple's gusle, musical instruments are made of this tree; cf. Neuner 2009; Jeske – Grosser: 2009).
8. In folk poetry, maple often personifies the groom, whereas an old man is called a 'rotten maple' (Serb. *trula javorovina*). But maple can allegorically mean reason as well, i.e. it can stand for a mature person with great life experience (Grmača 2009).
9. A relation between a girl and a maple tree is presented in versions of the song about a Basil girl (*Bosiljka devojka*) which were published by Miloš N. Đurić (Ђурић 1925; *Сунчева сестра и цар, Цар и девојка*).

In addition to this, forest maple whose habitat is always associated with mountains (Wauer 2009) has some specific features:

- According to folk beliefs of the Germanic peoples, maple is synonymous with peace and harmony; it can uplift a depressed person, fulfil one's hopes and dreams and drive away witches and angry spirits;
- A threshold made of maple wood protects from witches who do not dare step over a maple;
- The Celts considered maple a sign of something complete, whole; white maple tree symbolised inner purity and innocence;
- The Trojan horse was made of maple wood, although all Homer said in the eighth chapter of the *Odyssey* was that it was made of beams;
- Mountain maple is used to make sugar;
- Production of maple syrup was particularly common at times of war since the beginning of the 19th century, especially in Germany;
- In the spring, bees use maple flower as their source of nectar;
- Leaves of the mountain maple used to be given as food to the livestock;

- Young leaves were used for tea, known among the Germans as the Sunny tea; Ancient Egyptians also used it as a medicinal plant (1600 BC);
- It was believed that maple had the same medicinal qualities as the leaves of cabbage – it could cool relieve sore muscles;
- It was used to treat insect bites;
- It was even considered a cult tree. The most famous cult maple was located in Switzerland in 1395. It was known as a holy tree and the local community held its regular meetings under it. The tree lived until 1870, when it was damaged in a great storm, after which the locals organized a post mortem procession carrying parts of the stable all the way to the city hall.

The fact that maple wood was used to make *gusle* for the epic singer, that it is still used today to make violas, violins, violoncellos, testifies to the richness of its beneficial, natural and mythical features; maple wood produces a characteristic melodious sound, both light and firm. The strength of *gusle* made of maple wood has been described in folk poetry. One poem published in Serbian journal *Bosanska vila* describes how the Turks caught hajduk Lazar Pecirep, who sang to the accompaniment of *gusle* made of maple, and acquired such enormous strength that he killed the Travnik vizier (Крстић 1984: 426).

It can thus be concluded that elements of folk beliefs about the maple tree are still alive today just as its natural qualities are still appreciated. There is therefore a tradition related to this light-coloured beneficial tree, just as the awareness of its real characteristics is still alive today. What is this tradition about? In both research and colloquial usage, the tradition usually stands for something primitive, i.e. pagan/unchristian, whereas the contemporary features, i.e. those which are still 'alive', are explained by the notion of context. So when famous Bronisław Malinowski uses the term 'primitive', it denotes something original or originally alive. It seems, however, that this attribute, 'alive' cannot quite explain what it is that it denotes, so the aliveness of a myth is understood as a kind of automatism, as if it were a mythological machinery which has been churning out the mythical representation on its production lines from the beginning to this day. Could this be the case with the maple tree as well?

Just as the concept of a horse is stable and is in anthropology almost identically interpreted as a very important element in the life of a warrior, regardless of which performer from which national culture sings about it, and regardless of the performers being unrelated to one another, it could similarly be assumed that there is a unified interpretation of what maple tree means in different national cultures.

It is certainly clear how the maple is described in the regions where this tree normally grows – parts of north America, western Europe and the Balkans all the

way to the Carpathians, the region along the Black Sea and huge areas in eastern and southern China. But is there a tree with equal qualities in areas where maple has never grown? What does this question entail? I wonder: can there be a common motif under different names? For example, does the baobab tree in Africa have the maple's characteristics? Or the cherry tree in Japan? If the answer is affirmative, which I believe it is, the next question is whether there is such a thing as a pure national culture.

How can we establish features of a national identity that are different from some other national identity, even a neighbouring one? If everybody moved from the village to the city, the village would disappear, and then the difference between the village and the city would also disappear; there would be nothing to compare the city with, and it would be impossible to determine the city's typical features. Imagologically speaking, when the Other is lost, the possibility of defining oneself is lost too. It is with the birth of the city culture that the oral folk culture gained the opportunity to define its own spiritual space; one could not exist without the other. Having found the foundation of Serbian national identity in a folk poem, Miloš N. Đurić gave a definition which in the deep structure implied the existence of difference (Стефановић 2013).

The maple is the same kind of motif in different national cultures which do not lose their characteristic and unique features. Saying that baobab has the same mythological and natural characteristics as maple means giving the answer at same semantic level. And yet again, I wonder if losing the awareness of this difference (the features of a tree being the same in different cultural regions) means that the idea of a unique national collective identity is also lost? Or is this what we have here a plural identity (Јовановић 2011: 53–71)? Are cultures dependant on one another, regardless of how specific and national they may be and is this a possible answer to our dilemma?

If we want to continue with this line of questioning, the next question would be: what is it that constitutes one culture if it is not that which is permanently valuable, as opposed to that which is temporarily and fashionably current? There is, it seems, a unique set of values that makes a culture. Still, this set of values is not permanent either, it also changes, and with it, the culture changes as well. Culture lives and dies, i.e. it undergoes metamorphosis like the Penelope's embroidery: what is woven during the day is unwoven during the night, until eternity. The philosophy of the grave as the cradle of a new transformation, of ashes and phoenix, of death and resurrection denotes longevity of a national identity and its elementary values. This is what Serbian poet Jovan Jovanović Zmaj sang about in his poem *Svetli grobovi* (*Light graves*): *Па се тако светли млази / Па се виде светли трази / Једног духа разних доба, / Духа коме нема гроба.* // *And this is how the light beams/Leave behind light traces/ Of one spirit from different ages/*

Of one spirit that does not die (our translation). A physiognomy of a culture can be seen in the features of the maple, which as a moving mimesis can appear in another culture. There remains, however, one unique and unchangeable fact. The same or similar concepts in different cultures are still expressed differently, i.e. in different languages. What one poem says is untranslatable into another language. The autonomy of what is said, and this is purely national, cannot be translated into any other language.

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A GRAVE IN THE WOODS

Intertwining of spatial and plant encoding in the epics¹

SUMMARY: In traditional culture of the Balkan Slavs *gora* (woods, forest, mountain) is the place with the greatest possible number of negative connotations: it is always wild and alien, therefore dangerous ([gora] *nikad nije pusta / bez vukovah ali hajdukova*: this land is never waste / without either wolfs or brigands), with distinctive chthonic characteristics (in *gora*, there is an entrance to the netherworld - through a cave or a hole; the impure forces are banned into it as into their natural space; in *gora/woods/forest* the penitentiary god's miracles happen) etc. In consequence, when transferred to the epics, *gora/woods/forest* becomes a spatial image of the peak of all active plot-lines of the poem, which is simply the point of no return, from which the action can go only towards a tragic end. By *tragic* meaning – of course - the premature, unavoidable, and violent death of the protagonist(s). What is more, whoever dies in the woods – stays in the woods too, because it is forbidden (in traditional culture at least) to bury the impure dead in the holy land of graveyard. As those dead are usually loved and honoured ones without any personal blame, their graves are equipped with running water, benches and flowers or fruits to mark the spot of their departure and to figure as an offering to their souls.

KEY WORDS: forest/woods/mountain, death, grave, fruit, flowers, water

In the traditional culture of the Balkan Slavs *gora* (woods, forest, mountain)² is the place with the greatest possible number of negative connotations: it is always wild and alien, therefore dangerous ([gora] *nikad nije pusta / bez vukovah ali hajdukova*: this land is never waste / without either wolfs or brigands), with distinctive chthonic characteristics (in *gora*, there is an entrance to the nether-

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² In Serbian *gora* is an archaism for the contemporary mountain or forest (in the mountain). *Gora* encompasses all those meanings.

world³ - through a cave or a hole; the impure forces are banned into it as into their natural space; in gora/woods/forest the penitentiary god's miracles happen)⁴, etc [Cajkanovic 1994/1; Radenkovic 1986]. In consequence, when transferred to the epics, gora/woods/forest becomes a spatial image of the peak of all active plot-lines of the poem, which is simply the point of no return, from which the action can go only towards a tragic end. By *tragic* meaning – of course - the premature, unavoidable, and violent death of the protagonist(s).

A death in the epic woods might be silent and bloodless one when it is caused by a *vis maior* (charm, curse, god “the old slaughterer”, fairy), or it is violent and brutal if the killers are men. For the benefit of epic poetics, it is rather important to mark that the death by the “higher forces” has its own stable formulas, which means that it is usually announced and described by regular, generally accepted linguistic means which must be rooted in a very deep antiquity:

„Nek me spuste na zelenu travu;

„**Ljuto me je zaboljela glava,**

„Jarko mi je omrznulo sunce,

„A crna mi zemlja omiljela,

„Bog bi dao, te bi dobro bilo!”

[Vuk III, 78:159-163]

A mene je zaboleda glava,

A od srca preboleti ne ću.

To izusti, pa dušicu pusti.

[Vuk II, 7:138-140]

Skide Marko zelenu dolamu,

Prostrije je pod jelom po travi,

Prekrsti se, sjede na dolamu,

Samur-kalpak nad oči namače,

Dolje leže, gore ne ustade.

[Vuk II, 74:117-121]

Let them put me down, to the green grass;

I have a bitter headache,

I hate the bright sun,

But the black earth is so dear to me,

By god, let it all be for good!

But I have a bitter headache,

And I fear I will not get through it.

Thus said, she parted with her soul.

Marko took off the green dolama⁵,

Stretched it on the grass under the fir tree,

Crossed his heart, sit down on dolama,

With samur-kalpak⁶ he covered his eyes,

Down he lied, and never got up.

³ This netherworld is not comparable with the ecclesiastic and standard understanding of the “other world”, the abode of the dead. Within the South Slavs tradition, netherworld is simply a parallel world with three suns, with green meadows in bloom, and with young and beautiful people dancing on them (cf. the fairytale “Kravaric Marko” (Marko, the cow’s son) [Cajkanovic 1927, no. 10].

⁴ Eg. in the poem “Kumovanje Grcica Manojila” (Godfathering of Manojlo the Greek) Vuk II, 6 where the protagonist is punished for perjury by cannibalism (without knowing it, he eats his own son who turned into a black lamb and ran into him on the road through the woods). The possible punishing force here is more probably st John the Baptist, patron of godfathering, than the God himself.

<i>Tu je malo postanulo vrime,</i>	When a morsel of time passed,
<i>Teško Marka zabolila glava.</i>	Marko had a bitter headache.
<i>Trećim mu je putem besidila:</i>	For the third time she [the fairy] spoke to him:
<i>“Stani, kurbo, Kraljeviću Marko!</i>	“Halt, you slut, Marko the Prince!
<i>Neka tvoju ja odsičem glavu,</i>	Let me cut off your head,
<i>Ne ćeš doći bilem dvoru svome.”</i>	You will never reach your white castle.”
<i>Još je vila u tom riči bila,</i>	While she was still speaking,
<i>Mrtav Marko pod konjica pade</i>	The dead Marko fell under his horse
<i>I umire, pokojna mu duša!</i>	And thus he died, God bless his soul!
[MH II, 72:40-48]	

On the contrary, descriptions of the violent death from a human hand have their origin in historical, relatively recent times. Actually, they are very similar to the reports of direct experience, so the stable formulas for this kind of action have not yet been formed by the time when poems were recorded:

<i>Od sebe ga mačem ošinuo,</i>	He stroke him with his sword,
<i>Na dvije ga pole prekinuo,</i>	In two halves he cut him,
<i>Pa se vrati, ode uz planinu.</i>	And then he returned, going up the mountain.
<i>A kad dođe Stevo u planinu,</i>	And when Stevo came to the mountain,
<i>Đe su šnjima kavgu zametnuli,</i>	On the spot where the clash had started,
<i>Krvavo je po drumu kamenje,</i>	There on the road all the stones are deep in blood,
<i>Krvave su vite omorike;</i>	All the slender spurs are covered with blood;
<i>Po kamenju i po krvci crnoj</i>	On the stones and on the black blood
<i>Gazi junak harambaša Limo</i> [Vuk III,42:355-363].	There steps the hero, Limo the brigand chief.
<i>Ufatiše Kovčica Osmanagu</i>	They got him, the Kovcic Osmanaga,
<i>i od njega velje muke grade -</i>	And they put him to the bitter torments –
<i>kidaju mu i noge i ruke,</i>	They tore apart both his legs and arms,
<i>ostaviše nasred drumu puta</i>	And then they left him in the road
<i>da ga miču tpice svakojake</i>	To be consumed by birds of many kinds
[SANU III, 66:132-136]	

The point mutual to both kinds of dying in the forest is the burial of the dead, of whom none reaches the consecrated space of cemetery. They all stay in the spot where the death caught them: in the mountain/forest/woods, on the road, or at the crossing of the roads through the woods. The only exception of this rule – where the ideological needs of the culture overcome the needs of epic poetics – appears in the small number of poems about the death of a ruler. Although at first buried in the woods (or abandoned in the battlefield - which is the locus of similar connota-

⁵ A kind of luxurious cape or jacket, usually a rank-marker for gentry and alike.

⁶ A kind of helmet, trimmed with sable fur.

tions), the ruler at the end is given an ecclesiastical burial and the apotheosis of holiness. One of such examples is “Smrt cara Urosa” (Death of the emperor Uros, Vuk VI, 14) where king Vukasin takes the young emperor to the woods in order to murder him there:

<i>Urou jede љeba bijeloga,</i>	Uros is eating his white bread,
<i>Uroš jede, ujko ga ne jede,</i>	Uros is eating, his uncle is not,
<i>Već on oda po gori zelenoj,</i>	But he strolls in the green forest,
<i>Pa prebira otrovana bilja,</i>	And he goes through the poisonous plants,
<i>Da oturje dijete Uroša.</i>	With which to poison the child Uros.
<i>Otrova ga i sarani mlada</i>	He poisoned him and buried the youngster
<i>Pod najvišom i najgranatijom</i>	Under the tallest and most branching fir tree,
<i>U gorici a brsnatom jelom,</i>	The one with the mightiest treetop,
<i>Gdi sjedoše jesti ljeba b'jela. [25-33]</i>	Under the same tree where they ate their bread.
.....
<i>I onde se Uroš posvetio,</i>	And Uros was there sanctified,
<i>Te se samo posvećeno t'jelo</i>	And the very sanctified body of his
<i>Nazidanu manastiru šeće,</i>	By itself went to the monastery,
<i>Onde leglo sanak boraviti,</i>	And lied there to fall into slumber,
<i>Boraviti i bolne cjeliti,</i>	To stay there and heal the sick,
<i>Da je slava Bogu velikome,</i>	All in glory to the mighty God
<i>I Urošu ugodniku svome. [82-88]</i>	And to Uros, to his favourite.

Another of the exempla is the epic fate of both the head and the body of duke Lazar after the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 [Vuk II, 53]. Separated from the body by decapitation, the duke's head was hidden at the bottom of a well, but the body was abandoned in the battlefield, unburied:

<i>Stajala je glava u kladencu</i>	The head was lying down in the well
<i>Lepo vreme četrdeset leta,</i>	For a pretty long time – for the forty years,
<i>A ubavo na Kosovo telo,</i>	And the beautiful body in the field of Kosovo,
<i>Ni ga jedu orli ni gavrani,</i>	Nobody touched it – neither eagles nor ravens,
<i>Ni ga gaze konji ni junaci. [17-21]</i>	Nobody steps on it – nether horses nor the heroes
.....
<i>Pa zagazi u vodu kladenca,</i>	So he steps into the water in the well,
<i>Te izvadi iz kladenca glavu</i>	And from that well he brought the head
<i>Svetitelja Srpskoga Lazara,</i>	Of the Holy Lazar of Serbia,
<i>Pa je meće na zelenu travu,</i>	And he put it on the green grass,
<i>I zaiti vode u kondiru.</i>	And he fetch some water in the cup.
<i>Dok se žedni vodom obrediše,</i>	After they all drank from the cup,
<i>Kad su crnoj zemlji pogledali,</i>	When they looked at the black dirth,
<i>Nesta glave sa zelene trave,</i>	The head disappeared from the green grass.
<i>Ode glava preko polja sama,</i>	The head went over the field by itself,
<i>Sveta glava do svetoga tela,</i>	The holy head to the holy body,
<i>Pripoji se kako što j' i bila. [44-54]</i>	And those two became one as they were before.

*Ne će svetac zadužbini tuđoj,
 Već on oće svojoj zadužbini,
 A u svoju krasnu Ravanicu
 Pod visokom pod Kučaj-planinom.
 Što je Laza sagradio crkvu
 Za života jošte za svojega,
 Sagradio sebi zadužbinu
 O svom lebu i o svome blagu
 A bez suza bez sirotinjskije. [79-87]*

The saint is not willing to endowment of others,
 But he's going to his own endowment,
 To his beautiful Ravanica
 Under the high Kučaj mountain.
 This church Laza had built
 While he still was alive,
 Had his endowment built to himself,
 For his own money
 And without oppressing anyone.

Here, the ideological interventions in the epic model are clear and – by all means – of very recent origin. They, actually, have no influence on the older layers of epic singing and on the general division of the burials in the woods. The same indifference the burial-in-the-woods pattern also shows towards the scarce poems where a dying hero asks his friends to bury him in some specific place (in a salt field near the sea, on the crossing of twelve roads, near the ferry post, and similar – cf. ER 64, 89, 94) because not even then the word is about a true, ecclesiastical rite.

In the context of an epic song perception, the strangeness of this situation for an amateur reader (or for one belonging to a different type of culture) is growing even bigger as in the largest number of cases the dead left in the woods are actually the dearest ones: brides, grooms, brothers, blood brothers, good friends. The logical question here is: what is the motivation for such a severe and (from the point of view of the cult of the dead) extremely dangerous decision, having in mind that each culture – let alone the traditional one – takes a very good care about the relations between the dead and the living. Epics itself by no means can act in this matter against, or in opposition to, the belonging cultural norm. On the contrary, it honours its standpoint with great attention and consistency. At the first site, it could be a paradox because the actions in the woods appear at the same time as both a respect of tradition and an impingement of it. This can only be solved from the position within the traditional culture whose strict rules for handling the impure dead are, actually, the main (if not the only one) reason for leaving them in the woods.

The Church, even today, is reluctant to give to the so called “impure dead” a regular burial,⁷ and in the prime time of epic singing traditional rules of the kind were

⁷ An Orthodox requiem cannot be served to those who do not belong to this confession, to those who were not baptized in it, or to those who were excommunicated. An orthodox priest cannot perform this holy deed for a Christian of another confession, except in the very rare cases; nor can he do it for the people of some other religion or for the atheists. For the anabaptized children, even of the baptized parents, there cannot be a requiem. Same goes for the suicides, people killed in a duel, in some countries also for the people under the death sentence. A dead mass is also denied to people who “permanently lived in sin”, or who bore “a death sin known to others, without redemption or

even firmer than that. The right to the church burial was denied to all who did not die of natural causes (in Serb. the so called “pogibalci”), especially to drowned people, suicides, people killed by thunder, brigands and criminals, to those who were hung, to participants in a ritual cortege (wedding guests, fertilizing rites, rain invoking processions) and similar. As the victims of an unnatural death, people who died during epidemics, women who died on childbirth, stillborns, children born “on the wrong side of blanket”, anabaptized and first born children belonged to the same category, as well as members of certain ethnicities or professions (e.g. Gypsies and diggers). Besides, whoever died in gora/woods/mountain, automatically took part in this list because they were either killed by a *vis maior*, or murdered by men. Keeping in mind what kind of locus *gora* itself may be, the dead were actually very well situated indeed – at the entrance to the netherworld (and in some interpretations, in that world itself).

In direct connection with all these, as an outcome of the various taboos densely intertwined, the belief was formed that those souls, if denied a burial, cannot enter the other world but have to stay in this one and suffer. Under those circumstances, they can easily be influenced by impure forces and become either their servants, or demons dangerous for the living. So the living have every reason to take care of the people who died (or were killed) in gora/woods, which means to bury them decently, not in consecrated space of the graveyard, but on the spot of their death: beside the road, in the garden, in the orchard, even in the special graveyards far away from the human habitats.⁸ So, whenever a person who dies in woods also gets buried in it, such a burial is both an expression of love for the dead, and the need of the living to see about the safety and peace of his/her soul.

Graves in the woods could be either single or group. Single graves are further divided in maiden’s, bachelor’s, and warrior’s, while the group graves are usually for a pair (a bride and a groom; a boy and a girl - ER 180; MH VIII, 20; two brothers - ER 132; MH I, 48; MH II, 71; SANU II, 8; a best man and a brother in law - MH V, 215), or for the whole wedding procession (ER 180; MH VIII, 20; MH V, 215; KH II, 74). The collective graves in epics are relatively scarce; the single longer description of making such a grave can be found only in the poem “Maleta hajduk sahranjuje svatove, koje je pobio” (Maleta the brigand buries the wedding guests, whom he killed – MH VIII, 20). The atypical picture of that grave is made of two incompatible

confession”. http://www.sv-jelisaveta.org.rs/news_alone.php?ArticleId=%2060

⁸ Bibliography on this subject is enormously big. For the purpose of this article, we used mostly older sources because of the need to adjust the reconstruction of the customs and beliefs with the time of epic singing and of recording of the poems in our corpus. In more recent times, according to the results of the fieldwork, the attitude towards the burial and cult of the dead changed well enough to make the comparison with the epics ineffective. So, for the present analysis, cf. Trojanovic 1911; Zecevic 1963; Zecevic 1982; Djordjevic 1937-1940; Djordjevic 1984; Filipovic 1950; Cajkanovic 1994/1-5; Bandic 1980, 129-135.

components: the imagery (belonging to the older layers of epic singing) and thematic layers (new by origin). So the final picture of the grave looks in many details like the older, maiden and bachelor graves, which is poetically improper:

<i>Svaki ajduk svoga zakopava,</i>	Each brigand inters his own dead,
<i>A Maleta momka i djevojku,</i>	But Maleta inters the bride and the groom.
<i>Ter oko njih vočke posadiše,</i>	Around them he plants fruit trees,
<i>Bunar-vode kod njih iskopaše:</i>	A well of fresh water they dug on the side:
<i>»Kad putnici budu putovali,</i>	“Whenever the travelers my travel this way,
<i>Iz bunara ladne vode pili,</i>	Whenever they may drink from the cool well,
<i>Sa jabuka trgali jabuke,</i>	Whenever they may pick an apple
<i>U debelu ladu počivali,</i>	And whenever they may rest in the shadows,
<i>I putnici budu govorili:</i>	They will have to say:
<i>„Bog mu dao, onome junaku,</i>	‘God bless him, the nobleman,
<i>Koji ‘e ovu vodu navodio,</i>	Who dug this well
<i>I uza nju vočke posadio!’</i>	And planted the fruit trees on the side!’
<i>Bog će nama oprostiti grije.«</i>	God will give us a redemption.”
<i>Još uz momka Maleta ajduče,</i>	On the side of the groom
<i>On uz momka zelen borak sadi,</i>	Maleta plants a green pine,
<i>Uz djevojku vinovu lozicu.</i>	And on the side of the bride – a tiny vine.
<i>Vijala se loza oko bora</i>	The tiny vine bent around the pine
<i>Ka’ djevojka oko svog junaka!</i> [148-156]	Like the girl around her lover.

Between the maiden and bachelor graves there is no significant difference because in both cases the death is understood as an interruption in the process of ripening: it is all about the brides who never entered the state of married women and about the young, still not proven enough men who get killed either by mistake, or of bad luck – in any case before their time:

DEVOJACKI I MOMACKI GROBOVI

sabljava joj sanduk satesaše,
nadžacima raku iskopaše;
Posuše je grošim’ i dukatim’;
čelo glave vodu izvedoše,
oko vode klupe pogradiše,
posadiše ružu s obje strane:
ko j’umoran, neka se odmara;
ko je mlađan, nek se kiti cv’jećem;
ko je žedan, neka vode pije
za dušicu lijepe djevojke
 [Vuk III, 78:190-201].

MAIDEN AND BACHELOR’S GRAVES

They cut her casket with swards,
 With hatchets they dug her grave;
 They covered her with groats and duckats ;
 Above her head they dug a well,
 Around the well they built some benches,
 They planted roses on both sides:
 Who is tired, let him rest;
 Who is young, let him cut the flowers;
 Who is thirsty, let him drink the water
 For the sake of the beautiful girl’s soul

*Lipo su mu greba iskopali,
Blizu dvora na vrati od dvora.
Na glavu mu cviće posadili,
A na noge vodu izvodili.
Ko je mlađi, neka cviće bere,
Ko je žedan, neka vode pije,
Neka reče: Pokojna mu duša!*
[MH II,33: 139-145]

*I ljepo ga Janko ukopao
i kod groba posadio klupe
i kod klupe izveo vodicu:
tko ti je trudan, neka počiva
tko je žedan, nek pije vodicu.*
[ER 157: 45-49]

*oko groba stole pometao,
čelo glave ružu usadio,
a do nogu jelu usadio,
do te jele bunar iskopao
i za jelu dobra konja svez'o:*

*koji prođe tud drumom carevim,
ko j' umoran, neka otpočine,
ko je mlađan pa je za kićenje,
nek se kiti ružicom rumenom,
a koga je obrvala žećca,
bunar ima, nek' utoli žećcu,
ko je junak vredan za konjica,
nek' ga dreši, pa nek drumom jezdi-
sve za zdravlje Iva Senjanina
i za dušu nejaka nećaka*
[SANU III, 40:100-114].

*Kopajte mi jamu pri svetemu Ivanu,
nutra prostirajte moju kabanicu,
na jnu položite moje grešno telo.
Vane ostavljajte moju desnu ruku,
za jnu privežite mojega konja vranca.
Nek se konjic plače, kad se ljuba neće.
Kopajte mi zdenec ober groba moga,
doj mi putem pojde, vode se napije,*

They dug him a nice grave,
Near his home, at the threshold of his home.
Above his head they planted flowers,
At his legs they dug a well of water.
Who is young, let him cut the flowers,
Who is thirsty, let him drink the water,
Let him say: God bless his soul!

Janko nicely buried him
And by his grave he put some benches
And by the benches he dug a well of water:
Who is tired, let him rest
Who is thirsty, let him drink

Around the grave he put some tables
At the head he planted a rose
By the legs he planted a fir tree
By that fir tree he dug a well
And for the fir tree he left a good horse:

Whoever passes by the imperial road,
If he is tired, let him rest
If he is young a likes to embellish himself
Let him cut the rose
And who is thirsty,
There is the well, let him drink
Who is worthy of the good horse
Let him have it and ride it on the imperial
road –
All these for the health of Ivo from Senj
And for the sake of his nephew's soul.

Dig me a grave near Saint John,
Put in it my cloak,
Put on it my sinful body.
Only my right arm leave outside,
Bind my black horse for it.
Let the horse cry for me lest my darling
won't.
Dig a well of water in front of my grave,

<i>za dušu spomene.</i>	Whoever passes by on the road, let him drink
<i>Sadite mi rože oko groba moga,</i>	and think of my soul.
<i>doj mi putem pojde, rožicu otrgne,</i>	Plant roses around my grave,
<i>za dušu spomene.</i>	Whoever passes by on the road, let him cut
<i>Delajte mi klupu oko groba moga,</i>	the rose and think of my soul.
<i>doj mi putem pojde, za klupčicu sedne,</i>	Make a bench around my grave,
<i>za dušu spomene.”</i>	Whoever passes by on the road, let him sit
[Delorko 1973]	on the bench and think of my soul.

Although the difference between a bachelor's and a warrior's grave is visible only in ritual offerings to the dead, their epic images have quite different connotations. In case of the duke Kaica, for example, this difference is most easily noticeable:

<i>sa sabljama sanduk otesaše.</i>	They cut the casket with swords
<i>saraniše vojvodu Kaiiu,</i>	They buried the duke Kaica
<i>čelo glave koplje udariše,</i>	They left his spear above his head,
<i>na koplje mu sokola metnuše,</i>	On the spear, they left his falcon,
<i>za koplje mu konja privezaše,</i>	For the spear they tied his horse,
<i>po grobu mu oružje prostreše;</i>	Over his grave they spread his weapons;
<i>od Mađara unku načiniše,</i>	They made a hummock of Hungarians,
<i>obgradiše groba Kaičina,</i>	They fenced in the Kaica's grave
<i>da mu mrtvu ne pretresu telo</i>	To protect his body from thieves.
[Vuk II, 81:244-253]	“Death of duke Kaica”
“Smrt vojvode Kajice”	

Similar sepulchral gifts, but without a grave, are left for the dead Jugovics, the warriors killed in the Kosovo battle 1389 and left in the battlefield unburied (“Smrt majke Jugovica” / The Death of Jugovic Mother, Vuk II, 48):

<i>Mrtvi nađe devet Jugovića</i>	She found them dead, all the nine
<i>I desetog star-Juga Bogdana,</i>	Jugovics
<i>I više nji devet bojni koplja,</i>	And with them the tenth, the Old Jugovic
<i>Na kopljima devet sokolova,</i>	Bogdan,
<i>Oko koplja devet dobri konja,</i>	And above them nine piercing lances,
<i>A pored nji devet ljuti lava.</i>	And on the lances she found nine falcons,
[15-20].	Around the lances were bound nine good
	horses,
	And behind them stood nine fierce lions
	[=hounds].

The dislocation of the system begins when the Jugovic mother leaves her dearest dead in the battlefield and takes all the sepulchral gifts with her – the knightly animals and weapons. The elder (maybe even the eldest) layers of the customary-ritual practice that served as material for this poem, with one of the most touching and strongest poetic images in the whole Serbo-Croatian epics, were

long ago abandoned and forgotten as an epic practice when the variants to this poem were born. In one of them, e.g. in the song about Ivan's mother (SANU III, 46) with the similar attitude towards the sepulchral gifts, even the mother's silent suffering larger than life is condemned as inappropriate and heartless, without any understanding whatsoever for its true poetic role [cf. Cajkanovic 1994/1: 94-109]:⁹

<p><i>Al' besedi Ivin konj zelenko:</i> <i>"Ja sam konjic, želim gospodara,</i> <i>A ne žali majka Ivanova!</i></p>	<p>So speaks the Iva's horse Zelenko: "I am but a horse, and I grieve for my master, And his mother grieves for him not!"</p>
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So, unlike the unburied dead left in the battlefield, the dead in the woods get a rather stylish burials: they are laid down the other way round – facing east (in the cemetery, the dead are facing west, cf. Detelic 1996), and on/around the grave itself, the fruit trees (usually an apple tree¹⁰), or a rose/pine/vine are planted, some benches are built, and a well of fresh water is dug. Explaining such treatment of graves in the woods, Cajkanovic [1994/5:160-182] points that behind them there had to be an antique custom known as *paulisper assidere*, meaning that "any traveller, passing the holy woods, should stay a little and sit down for some time" [175]. So the recommended short stay beside the grave in the woods, which is interpreted in the poem as a doing "for the soul" of the dead and as redemption of the living, could itself had been a part of the cult of the dead, or a survival of the ancient practice of exposure of the dead (presumably to some demonic being) that could be recognized in traditional healing by exposure "under dittany" [Cajkanovic 1994/2] or some other shady tree.

Judging by where they are planted and under what circumstances, plants on the grave in the woods have themselves to be shady because their purpose is to attach a soul to themselves or to offer the soul as much as possible of advantages it was deprived of when denied the regular burial. Both apple and rose really are plants of binary symbolism: they can grow both in heaven and under the earth, and in both places they serve some special purpose. Apple is the attribute of the Greek goddesses Eris, Aphrodite, and Hero and of Hell, the German goddess of the netherworld; as a mythic tree, an apple grows both in Paradise and at the entrance to the underworld; according to tradition, in Paradise apples grow as a solace for the smallest of the children longing for their mothers. An apple tree can also represent the axis mundi, as in the poem: *Jabuka je nasred raja rasla, / na*

⁹ Cajkanovic here concludes that Jugovic mother had to be a fairy because it is utterly inappropriate for a traditional mother to suffer silently (even if she finally dies of it). This could be corroborated by completely unusual taking the offerings from the dead, which is simply never done. In this case, mother herself poses as a goddess of death, very similar to Valkyrae.

¹⁰ Although it is named distinctively, an apple tree is not a reliable term because on the level of linguistic history and etymology it signifies any fruit of adequate shape [cf. Detelic 2013].

pakao grane nadnijela [An apple tree grew in the middle of Paradise / Its branches overreached the Hell - cf. Čajkanović 1994/4; Detelić 2013].

A rose, on the contrary, is a symbol of beauty, love, and death so it unifies all the three categories together. According to Veselovsky, the Slavic name for rose (coming from Latin *Rosa*, ae, f) is connected with the antique custom called *rosalia/rosaria*, which reached Russia through the South Slavs (Serb. *rusalije* – All Souls Day; *rusalke* – spirits of the dead) [cf. Dizdarevic-Krnjevic 1997]. During the early Christianity, rose were often planted on the graves of the first martyrs where it symbolized a resurrection, whereas in the Balkan folklore under a rose, near its roots, an Easter egg should be hidden to ensure a good and fertile year [Мифы 2 s.v. *Роза*; Čajkanović 1994/4: s.v.].



The most recent populist use of this symbolism was in Disney's film "Snow-white and the seven dwarfs" in the image of the dead Snow-white in the glass casket exposed in the woods: beautiful girl, dead, and loved by many, waiting for her true love with her head on the pillow of roses (of course, her death was only conditional).

Although their roles in formula are different (who is hungry – to eat apples, who is young – to embellish him/herself with a rose), both plants in this context share the same characteristics: they grow "on the border" between the worlds,

their nature is shady and in direct connection with the cult of the dead.¹¹ There are, however, many more plants and trees of the kind (maple, for example, which is a favourite with Bulgarians; yew tree, basil etc.) never mentioned in the epics in connection with graves, although they are perfect from the standpoint of the cult and rites.¹² So, the choice of apple and rose for the graves of boys and girls should – probably – emphasize the liminal phase within the rite of initiation which, because of the unfortunate track of events, never ends and thus becomes permanent. Behind this unwanted inversion lies an alarming concept of the dead who – after all – are not completely at peace as far as one can speak with them, which is almost an epic routine. Thus the neutral meaning of the term “permanent”, through the elevation, changes into an ominous “eternal”:

<i>Često Lazo na grob izlazio,</i>	Lazo often went to her grave,
<i>Pa je pit'o svoju zaručnicu:</i>	And asked his bride to be:
<i>„Jel' ti, dušo, zemlja doteščala?”</i>	“My darling, is earth too heavy for you?”
<i>Devojka mu mrtva odgovara:</i>	And the dead girl answers him:
<i>„Nije meni zemlja doteščala,</i>	“It is not earth that is heavy to me,
<i>„Već je teška materina kletva.”</i>	But my mother's curse.”
[Vuk II, 7:151-156]	
<i>Svako ga je jutro oblazila:</i>	She visited him every morning:
<i>„Sine Konda, jel' ti zemlja teška?</i>	“My son, Konda, is earth heavy for you?
<i>Il' su teške daske javorove?”</i>	Or are the maple planks too heavy?”
<i>Progovara Konda iz zemljice:</i>	And Konda answers from under the earth:
<i>„Nije meni, majko, zemlja teška,</i>	“It is not earth, mother, that is heavy for me,
<i>Nit' su teške daske javorove,</i>	Neither earth nor the maple planks,
<i>Već su teške kletve devojačke:</i>	But maidens curses are too heavy for me:
<i>Kad uzdišu, do Boga se čuje;</i>	When they sigh, even God hears them;
<i>Kad zakunu, sva se zemlja trese;</i>	When they curse, all the earth trembles;
<i>Kad zaplaču, i Bogu je žao!”</i>	When they cry, even God feels sorry.
[Vuk I, 368]	

Contrary to this, vine on the grave in the woods¹³ does not appear regularly in the epics. The example with Maleta the brigand is exceptional because the actual making of wedding graveyards are rarely described at all. Usually, there is only a verse or two, like: *svaki se je svoga privatno / I u ladan grob ga položio*

¹¹ For multiform functions of rose cf. Dizdarević-Krnjević 1997; Karanović 2010; for apple Čajkanović 1994/4, s.v.; Detelić 2013.

¹² According to Serbian legends, basil shot up on the grave of the emperor Uros, even on the grave of Jesus; or it was made of tears of St. Sava the Serbian [Čajkanović 1994/5:171].

¹³ In epic poems it, actually, has not to be just vine (Serb. loza): any liana or wall creeper could do – ivy or wild grape that sprouts freely anywhere. It is, however, supposed that the word is about the vine because it has always been considered shady and holy, so no other plant could take its place in pointing the grave of a saint or of a person tragically killed in the woods.

(They each took his own dead / And in cold grave put him [MX VIII,20]); *pak ih lepo pokopasmo ondi / devojku i momka poreda / a svatove pod jele zelene* (So we buried them there nicely / the girl and the boy together / and the wedding guests under the green fir trees [ER 157]) etc. The aberration of this pattern is not motivated by needs of the epic poetics which would appreciate quite a different treatment of vine on the grave: it should sprout by itself from the bodies of tragic lovers or from a martyr (usually a maiden or a wife), as in the poem “Bog nikom dužan ne ostaje” (God never spares anyone – Vuk II, 5) where from the body of the righteous sister (after the plants that grow from the places where her limbs were fallen) finally a church materializes:

<i>Na Momiru zelen bor nikao,</i>	On Momir a green pine tree appeared
<i>Na Grozdani vinova lozica,</i>	And on Grozdana the vine:
<i>Savila se loza oko bora,</i>	The vine bound around the pine
<i>K'o sestrina oko brata ruka.</i>	As a sister's arm around a brother
[«Nahod Momir» Vuk II, 30:91-94] ¹⁴	“Momir the foundling”
<i>De je od nje kaplja krvi pala,</i>	Where a drop of blood fell off her,
<i>Onde raste smilje i bosilje;</i>	There immortelle and basil grew;
<i>De je ona sama sobom pala,</i>	Where she herself fell down,
<i>Onde se je crkva sagradila.</i>	There a church itself was built
[„Bog nikom dužan ne ostaje“ Vuk II, 5:87-90]	“God never spares anyone”

In that way the very important task of manifestation of the God's miracles on the Earth is fulfilled, which is one of the epic's constant features (cf. «Bog nikome dužan ne ostaje» / God never spares anyone SANU II, 4; MH I, 41-43; «Đakon Stefan i dva anđela» / Deacon Stevan and two angels Vuk II, 3; MH I, 6; «Kumovanje Grčića Manojla» / Godfathering of Manojlo the Greek Vuk II, 6; SANU II, 5 etc. [see also Bakotić 1937]). If it is planted on purpose, as it is a case with Maleta the brigand, this choice is motivated by its numerous and significant

¹⁴ Such examples are many: in love songs collected by Nikola Begovic (*Tu dva groba naporeda biše: / Iz junaka javor drvo raste, / Iz devojke vinova lozica. / Lozica se oko bora vila, / Kao svila oko grude smilja. / Oko njih mi šance iskopaše, / I u šance vodu navedoše; / Oko groba klupe sagradiše, / Oko klupa voće posadiše. / Ko je žedan neka se napije, / Ko je gladan neka voće ije, / Ko je trudan neka odpočiva, / Nek spomene krvave svatove* [Begović 1885]. Especially interesting is the following example from Bulgaria: *Насяха лози на гроба, / на гроба, на Николова, / на гроба, на Маламкина. / Мина се малко, не много, / мина се до три години. / Расли лозите, порасли, / че се през черква изплели, / тогаз са грозде родили. / Тогава са се сетили, / гробове да си одровят, / кокали да им съберат. / Де заровиха Никола, / там не наидоха Никола, / Никола го в гроба няма; / като Маламка одровиха / и двама в гроба лежаха. / Горна Оряховица* [СБНУ 26, № 254].

connotations. First of all, it is a symbol of life and survival of the species (“loza mu se ugasila” - may his lineage¹⁵ drop dead/cut off/die away/vanish), and thus the symbol of fertility; it is a custom to put it on flames on the grave of those who died “without a candle” (in darkness); it is carved and painted on tombstones etc. [Древности 1(1995): s.v. *Виноград*]. In folklore, vine is not just a shady, but also a holy plant avoided by vampires and werewolves (so it is a good shelter against them). On the fire built with vines saints are burnt (st. Sava and st. Andrija/Andrew): “When st. Sava was put to flames, his relics could not burn on the common wood fire, but vine had to be cut from the vineyards and only then they succeeded to burn him out” [Corovic 1927]; st. Andrew, before he was reborn, burnt his own self on the fire lit by vines as a redemption for the sin of mixing vine with water [Čajkanović 1927: no. 166; cf. Matičetov 1971].

It is clear, finally, that all the three plants – apple, rose, and vine – are planted on the graves not only because they are connected with the cult of the dead, but also because they are ambivalent and thus represent for the dead both an offering and a promise of eternal peace and serenity. In that context, the edible fruits and vicinity of water guarantee a seasonal renewal of offering rites in place where the presence of friends and family is not easy (if not impossible) to obtain. Fir trees, though, fulfil the same promise in quite a different way.

Whether they appear on the grave of young people (two boys or a man and a woman) or they stand as a metaphor for the living youngsters (especially if there is a need to stress something exceptional in their looks or their destiny) – pine and fir tree are always a direct substitute for a human:

MRTVI	DEAD
<i>Dv'je grobnice ovdje iskopajte,</i>	Two graves you dig here,
<i>Jednu meni, drugu bratu momu,</i>	One for me, one for my brother,
<i>Pa nas, braćo, l'jepo sahranite,</i>	And bury us, brothers, nicely,
<i>Dva zelena bora usadite,</i>	Two green pines plant here,
<i>Medju njima spomen podignite</i>	Between them put the tombstone
<i>I na njemu ovo napišite:</i>	And write this upon it:
<i>„Ovdi leže dva brata rođena,</i>	“Here lie two sibling brothers,
<i>Po imenu mali Marijane</i>	By the names of little Marijan
<i>I bratac mu arambaša Ivo.</i>	And his brother arambasa Ivo.
[MH I, 48: 473-481]	

¹⁵ Loza in Serbian has both meanings: a plant and a lineage of anything living (both animals and humans).

ŽIVI	LIVING
<i>Dva su bora naporedo rasla,</i>	Two pines grew together
<i>Među njima tankovrha jela;</i>	And between them thin topped for tree;
<i>To ne bila dva bora zelena,</i>	Those were not two green pines
<i>Ni međ' njima tankovrha jela,</i>	Neither with them a thin topped fir tree,
<i>Već to bila dva brata rođena:</i>	But those were two brothers
<i>Jedno Pavle, a drugo Radule,</i>	First one Pavle, the other Radule,
<i>Među njima sestrice Jelica.</i>	And between them their sister Jelica.
[Vuk II, 5: 1-7]	

In folklore, pine is considered a shady and holy tree. Cajkanovic is of opinion that it can also get divine and kingly attributes, especially in connection with some exquisite, old, and tabooed examples – e.g. the pine of king Milutin, of the emperor Uros, of the empress Milica etc. [1994/4, 34-36]. The same author also thinks that euphemistic curses like “bora mi” (by pine)¹⁶ or “gloga mi” (by hawtorn) actually preserve the ancient times knowledge when pine and hawthorn were equal with “god” in the same type of phrases (“boga mi”). In that case, the origin of those phrases/formulas should be looked for in popular believes that gods and demons (all kinds of numina) permanently or temporarily dwell in trees (e.g. the antique Daphne in laurels, and later the fairies and spirits of the dead in other kinds of trees, etc.). The example could easily be found in one of the wedding songs from the 19th century [antology by Jovan Cvetkovic 1890-1894]:

<i>Boga moli mlado momče</i>	A young fellow prays to God:
<i>„Daj mi Bože zlatne nože</i>	“Oh, God, give me golden knives
<i>„I srebrne parokčiće</i>	And silver horns,
<i>„Da probodem boru koru</i>	Let me cut through pine’s bark
<i>„Da ja vidim šta j’u boru.</i>	And see what is in the pine.”
<i>Bog mu dade zlatne nože</i>	God gave him the golden knives
<i>I srebrne parokčiće</i>	And the silver horns
<i>Te probode boru koru</i>	So he cut through the pine’s bark
<i>Te on vide šta j’u boru</i>	And he saw what was there in the pine
<i>Kad u boru mlada moma</i>	And there was a young maiden in the pine
(ASANU Etn zb. 1-1-52).	

So, pine on the grave served at the same time as a tombstone, a binder for the soul, a permanent replacement for the dead, and his/hers deified shade. A fir tree in that context figures as a feminine variant of the same thing, as it usually is a custom to compare a girl with a fir tree “slim and tall” in both epic and lyric (ritual

¹⁶ In Serb. the difference is in one vowel: bor (pine) and bog (god). Same as in Eng. “by gosh”. The same similarity in sound goes also for the next example – gloga mi (glog – bog).

or love) songs. It should also be mentioned that the caskets - the last mansions of the dead both in the woods and in the regular cemetery - are usually made of fir or of maple wood.

There is a great number of shady trees and plants in folklore: acacia is a "bad tree"; elm, ash, poplar, and wild fruit trees, together with nuts, belong to demons; beech, as well as iris, peony, Virgin grass (*bogorodicina trava*) and a very long list of plants are good for spells and healings, etc. [cf. Cajkanovic 1994/4]. What influenced the epic choice of these particular five (apple, rose, vine, pine, and fir) can only be guessed at. One of the reasons could have been the antiquity of beliefs connected with those plants, permanently present in traditions of many nations from ancient times till today. This argument holds in the epic optics too, because any appearance of those plants in the epics has its own, stable formula: *ko je gladan (neka jede)* [who is hungry, let him eat], *ko je mlađan (nek se kiti)* [who is young, let him spruce him/herself], *dva su [zelena] bora (rasla)* [two green pines grew together], *savila se loza oko bora* [the vine grew around the pine] etc. together with others connected with the bench and water unit, belonging to topos of the holy woods/grove.

At this particular moment it is difficult to differ the aim from the means of translation of the holiness in connection with the digging of the grave in the woods: are the holy woods/groves good for burials because they were deified by the divine presence, or are the graves what makes the place numinous – because of the care the living showed towards them. In both cases, the combinations of plants – of which some are upright and with their roots connect the dead with the treetops in the heavens, and some are creeping and interlacing around the others – testifies more about the dynamics and movement than about a static interruption of life. Contrary to this, a bench on the side of a grave implicates the end of motion, the adoration by sitting down (*paulisper assidere*), and thus brings the balance to the structure of the *daemon loci*. To this structure, each and every one of the elements contributed something of its own:

- a ball-shaped fruit (apple) – association with celestial bodies, bolts, and thunders (*Munja groma nadigrala / Dvjema-trima jabukama / I četirma narančama* [The Bolt outplayed the Thunder / With two or three apples / And with four oranges] - Vuk I, 235);

- vines – its ancient connections with souls and metempsychosis (*Srdita devojčica* [A wrathful girl] / *Srdito bežala* [Wrathfully ran] / *Uz lojze zeleno*: [By the green vines:] / „*Bože, mili bože*, [”Oh, my dear God] / *Pretvori me, bože*, [Change me, dear God,] / *Đižu belo grojze!*“ [Into a white vine!] / *Momče po nju trči* [A boy ran after her] / *I bogu se moli*: [And prays to God:] / „*Pretvori me, bože*, [”Change me, dear God,] / *Pile kosovile* [Into a mocking bird] / *Da*

pozobem, bože, [And let me peck, oh God,] / *Đižu belo grojze!*“ [The white vine!]”– Koželjac, no. 37);

- rose – its connection with blood and knowledge/keeping of secrets (sub rosa), as well as the ability to creep high over surfaces (*Ružo Sovijanće*, [O Rose, Creeping Rose,] / *Ti visoko rasteš*, [You grow high,] / *Ti daleko vidiš*. [You see far.] / *Dole Smederevo*, [Down there is Smederevo,] / *Dole mi je vojno*, [Down there is my husband,] / *Kaži mu da dojde*. [Tell him to come back.] / *Sve mu je propalo*: [Everything goes apart:] / *Seno nekošeno*, [Grass is not reaped,] / *Lozje neobrano*, [Vines are not picked,] / *Ljube neljubeno*. [Wife is not kissed.] - Đul devojče, no.160);

- fir and pine – their direct connection with the idea of axis mundi, as well as the ancient capacity of marcation, putting a sign on an important place (, *U visoku Biščansku planinu*, [In the high mountain of Bisce] / „*Đeno ima suhvrha jela*, [Where there is a high fir tree] / „*I pod jelom jedan bijel kamen*, [And under that tree a white stone] / „*Kod kamena jedna voda ladna*, [And by that stone a cold, running water] / „*Tu ćeš mene naći, pobratime*, [There you will find me, my blood brother] / „*Sa mnom hoćeš svu družinu moju* [And all my company with me] - Vuk III,42, 19-24);

- water – the ambiguity of an element which is, at the same time, not only a means of cleansing of the dead (libations) but also a way to protect the living from them, both the source of life and the borderline the dead can never cross.

So, in more ways than one, an epic grave in the woods is – so to say – a multilayer topos, every element of which is most carefully selected. It is not a mandatory procedure with those who die in the woods (or in the battlefield), but a gift to the dear departed, a sign of the last and the greatest mercy. That said, the most interesting find of this analysis is the complete absence of this motive in the Muslim epic songs. They too sing of warriors who fight and die in the woods/ mountains, but Muslim singers never leave anybody in the woods:

<i>Tude malog Mehmedagu najde,</i>	There he found the small Mehmedaga,
<i>Gje on leži pod zelenom jelom,</i>	Lying down under a green fir tree,
<i>Jer su Mehu rane osvojile,</i>	Because the wounds took over Meho
.....	
<i>Mujo njega diže na zekana,</i>	Mujo got him on the horse,
<i>Dodade mu u ruke kajase,</i>	Put the reins in his hands
[EH 7: 1189-1205]	

*Ali ranjen razgovara Mujo:
»Od te kajde ne imade fajde,
Ovako je od Boga suđeno,
Meni vakat umrijeti dođe.
Vi hajdete bijeloj Kladuši,
Povedite Mijat harambašu,
Bacite ga na dno u tavnicu.
Mrku ćete noću prenočiti,
Pokupite mlade Kladušane,
Vodite ih u Kunar-planinu,
Onda ćete mene ukopati,
U planini turbe namjestiti.«*
[KH II, 48: 161-172]

***Udariše poljem zelenijem,**
Halaknuše, Boga spomenuše,
A za oštro gvožđe prihvatiše.*

.....
*Tu šehite svoje pokopaše,
Mezare im glavam' okitiše,
Ranjenike svoje poniješe,
Na dva koplja četiri junaka*
[KH I, 23:776-779]

*Vrlo su me rane savladale,
Sjaši, brate, dogu velikoga,
Pa se svrati s puta u planinu,
Nakreši mi jelove četine,
Pa mi prostri pod jelom zelenom,
A pokrij me divan-kabanicom,
Prinabij mi moje puške male,
Obe puške metni kod meneka;
A ti hajde na grad na Udbinu,*

.....
Kada na grad na Udbinu dođeš,

.....
*Svedi doru do čardaka moga,
Podaj konja mojoj staroj majci,
Pa mi kaži na odžaku majci,
Nek prodaje sinova dorata,
Neka sebe na odžaku hrani;
A kaži mi sestri jedinici,*

But wounded Mujo said:
"There is no purpose in this doing,
God had it for me in his hand,
My dying hour is here.
You go to the white Kladusa,
Take Mijat arambasa with you,
Put him to the bottom of the dungeon.
When the black night is over,
Gather young Kladusa men together,
Take them to the Kunar mountain,
And there you will bury me
In the mountain, with my turbeh."
(the hero is still alive and fairies later
save him, so he does not get buried in the
woods)

They went through the green field,
They yelled, mentioning God,
And held their sabres and swords

.....
There, they buried their dead,
They ornated tombstones with heads,
They took their wounded,
On two spears – four warriors

My wounds have overcome me,
Dismount, brother, your big horse,
Leave the road, go to the mountain,
Cut the fir branches for me,
And make me lie there under green fir.
Cover me with my robe,
Gove me my little guns,
Both of them as near as possible;
And you go to town of Udbina

.....
And when you come to the town of Udbina

.....
Take my horse down to my castle,
Take him to my mother,
And tell my mother in my castle
To sell her son's horse,
To sell him and support herself;
And to my only sister you will tell

<i>Nek s'udaje, a mene ne čeka, Mene nikad dočekati ne će.</i> “ [majka i sestra pronađu junaka, odvedu ga kući i neguju do ozdravljenja] [MH III, 15:445-466]	To marry, not to wait for me Cause I will never come back again.” (mother and sister go to the mountain and find the hero, take him home and nurse him to his full health)
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The very fact that protagonists go back to fetch their dead and wounded, although those insisted on being left at the place they went down, testifies about the relatively recent origins of Muslim epic singing in the Balkans. Only once, depicting the death of Lika Mustaj-bey, the Muslim singer leaves the murdered bey in the mountain where he died, but even then it is only for a time being. The accents, of course, are not on the place of death, but on the poor character of the killer (a goat-herd) because the very idea of a better warrior than Lika was outrageous and unimaginable. When time comes, he is taken from the mountain and buried in a better place.

This should not be understood as a complete absence of burials in the place of death – this motive is very well known and very frequent in Muslim epics:

<i>A šehite svoje pokopaše, Pokopaše, gdje i poginuše.</i> [na polju Brestovcu] [KH II,65: 1009-1010]	And they buried their dead, On the spot where they died [in the Brestovac field]
---	--

<i>te sve svoje mrtve pokopaše,</i> [u polje Markovo] <i>ranjenike svoje poniješe</i> [KH III,2:929-930; 1774-1775]	And all their dead they buried [in the Markovo field] And their wounded they took with them
--	---

<i>Pokopaše po polju šehite, Ranjenicim sala napraviše</i> [EH 9:1122-1123]	They buried the dead in the field, And made stretches for the wounded
--	--

<i>Jedni ljudi grobove kopahu, Pokraj puta kopaju svatove, Pokopaše tri stotine svata, Ranjenike u grad opraviše.</i> [KH II, 74:556-559]	Some were digging graves, By the road they dug the wedding guests, They buried 300 wedding guests, And wounded they took to the town
--	---

<i>Ranjenike Turke iskupiše, A šehite ondje pokopaše</i> [u lužini, pod kulom] [KH III, 2:838-839]	They took the wounded Turks, And the dead they buried on the spot [in the cops, under the fortress]
--	---

It even has its own stable formula: *i šehite/lešine/mrtv(ac)e pokopaše* [they buried their dead] (KH I, 21, 23, 26, 27; KH II, 53, 54, 57, 59, 74; KH III, 3, 10; MH III, 9, 12, 17; MH IV, 29, 33, 37, 41, 43, 45). In the Christian epics this phrase is doubled by the usual report on death by a human hand, whether it was in context of pillage (of bride's gifts, of wedding guests, of merchants, caravans etc.), or of clash of arms.

The Muslim songs, not less than Christian, recognise also a motive of wedding cemeteries, but their attitude towards them is quite different. The best example could be found in the "Zenidba Ahmet-bega Vezirovica" (The Wedding of Ahmet-bey Vezirovic" KH II, 61) where the difference between the woods/mountain and the field is maximally stressed:

<i>Sedam su je puta provodili</i>	They went with her for seven times
<i>Pod Bakonju, zelenu planinu,</i>	Under the Bakonja, the high mountain,
<i>Na široko polje Zlatarevo,</i>	To the wide open field Zlatarevo,
<i>A studenom vrelu Šarganovu,</i>	To the cold water spring Sarganovo.
<i>Tu imade sedam mezarova,</i>	There are seven graves there,
<i>Djevojačkih sedam mušterija,</i>	Seven maiden's proposers,
<i>Sve nesretne đuzel-đuvegije,</i>	All unfortunate bridegrooms,
<i>Sve su oni tuđen izginuli,</i>	Who were all killed there,
<i>A najposl'je Derviš begoviću,</i>	And the last of them Dedrvis begovic
<i>Nije takog u sandžaku bilo</i>	Who was one and only in the whole sandzak.
<i>Tu su begu turbe načinili,</i>	They made a turbeh for bey,
<i>Viš' glave mu ružu usadili,</i>	Above his head they planted a rose,
<i>Ispod noga kajnak mu izvire.</i>	Under his legs the water springs.
<i>Kad pogledaš poljem Zlatarevim,</i>	If you look along the field of Zlatarevo,
<i>Rekao bi, plugom je orato.</i>	You should think it was ploughed.
<i>Nije pusto plugom podorato,</i>	It was not ploughed
<i>Već sve taze grobljem potkopato,</i>	But covered with new graves,
<i>A Bakonja, zelena planina,</i>	And Bakonja, the green mountain,
<i>Rekao bi, sn'jedom je posuta;</i>	You should think it is covered with snow;
<i>Nije, brate, snijedom posuto,</i>	No, my brother, it is not the snow
<i>Već se b'jele mnoge kosti tude,</i>	But plenty of white bones,
<i>Mnoge kosti konjske i insanske,</i>	White bones human and of the good horses,
<i>Sve nesretne Zlatije svatova.</i> [168-190]	Of the unfortunate Zlatija's wedding guests

Turbeh,¹⁷ rose (by his head), and water (by his feet) are recognisable elements of an epic grave in the waste land, but in the Muslim variant it is a field – not a mountain or forest – and it is not a solitary grave but an extremely luxurious specimen within a densely populated cemetery of guests of a wedding party. What is left unburied in the woods, as well as in the battlefield, are the bones "of horses

¹⁷ Turkish/islamic tombstone.

and men”, exactly those which in Christian epics serve as material for building a fairy town/fortress:

*Grad gradila prebijela vila
Ni na nebo ni na zemlju crnu,
No od jele do zelene jele,
Ne gradi ga klakom i kamenjem,
No bijelom kosti od junaka,
Od junaka i od konja vrana,
Evo joj je preminula građa
Do pendžera i prvog tavana.
Tad se vila na nevolji nađe,
Te mi piše listak knjige tanke
U Perastu Baju Pivljaninu:*

A white fairy built a city
Not in clouds, not on the black earth,
But from one fir tree to another.
She does not build it with mortar and stone,
But with the white human bones,
Bones of men and of the black horses.
Now she spent all material she had
But built the city only up to windows of first
floor
In order to solve this problem,
She writes a thin letter
To Bajo Pivljanin in Perast:

.....
“*Premanjka mi kosti junačkije.*

.....
“I spent all bones of men.

“*No okupi tvoju čet, Bajo,*

But take your company, Baja,

“*Ajde s njima u planinu, pobre,*

And go to the mountains with them, my brother,

“*Ne bi li ti Bog i sreća dala,*

May God and Fortune bless you

“*Da bi mene nabavio građe.”*

To collect some material for me.”

“*Kada Baju sitna knjiga dođe,*

When Baja received the thin letter,

“*I kad vide što mu sitna piše,*

And when he saw what was written in it,

“*Onu čita, brže drugu piše,*

He read it and instantly replied

“*Odasla je u planini vili:*

And sent his letter to the fairy in the woods:

“*Čuješ li me, posestrimo vilo,*

“Do you hear me, my sister fairy,

“*Ne mogu ti nabaviti građe,*

I cannot get you any material

“*Nego ćeš me malo pričekati*

But you will have to wait a little

“*Do vesela danka Đurđevoga,*

Till the merry day of st. George

“*Kad se gora izodije listom,*

When the woods will be in leaves

“*A rudina travom i cvijetom,*

And fields in grass and bloom,

“*Kad okopni snijeg u vrhove,*

When snows melt on mountaintops,

“*Kad presahne voda u lugove,*

When water dries off the groves,

“*Ženiće se Ale od Novoga,*

Then Ale from Novi will be getting married

“*S milom čercom paše od Čengića,*

With the dear daughter of the pasa Cengic,

“*Tadar ću ti građe nabaviti.”*

Then I will collect you material you wish.

[Vuk VII, 47:1-36; slično i SANU II,
59 the builder is Filip the Hungarian]

Thus, the analogies emerge where the least expected, and numen “enters through the narrow door” even if its presence was permanently and skillfully avoided. This could, probably, explain why the dead are not buried in the woods throughout the Muslim songs: it is not about their cultic impurity (it stays the same in the field as in the woods), but in the fear of dangerous and dreadful place with

which the Islamic tradition and culture in the Balkans did not have any correspondences. "In the Balkans" is a very important location here because the Balkan Muslims are not a unified ethnicity of similar individuals, but a conglomerate of nations, traditions, and cultures conjoint by the same religion. They are mutually different by their ways of life, by cultural paradigms, by political geography etc. In the Balkans, the Muslim epic singers by the greatest percentage come from the converts (Christian to Muslim), people who – together with the new religion – also adopted a new attitude towards the close and open space. The socio-political relationship between the Turks/Muslims and the raya/Christians was reencoded in the epics as a relationship between the open-space-(gora)-protective/Christian and the close-space-(town)-offensive/Turkish. Because of that, *gora* cannot be anything else for the Muslim singers but a battlefield, i.e. not a place for burials but for leaving without looking back [cf. Detelic 1992].

It is interesting, though, that it took only 2 or 3 centuries to lose this important relationship with the *gora*/woods, i.e. the time between the arrival of Ottomans (in 15th century) and the first tides of converting (not before 17th century). Muslim convert singers of epic songs with a solid repertoire emerge only that late in history, and by that time the idea of Muslim graves in the woods was completely extinguished.

CORPUS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Vuk I: *Српске народне пјесме*, скупио их и на свијет издао Вук Стеф. Караџић, *Књига прва у којој су различне женске пјесме*, у Бечу, у штампарији јерменскога манастира, 1841, Сабрана дела Вука Караџића, књига четврта, приредио Владан Недић, Просвета, Београд, 1975.

Vuk II-IV : *Сабрана дела Вука Караџића, Српске народне пјесме*, издање о стогодишњици смрти Вука Стефановића Караџића 1864-1964 и двестогодишњици његова рођења 1787-1987, Просвета, Београд, 1986-1988.

Vuk VI-IX : *Српске народне пјесме* 1 - 9, скупио их Вук Стеф. Караџић, државно издање, Београд, 1899-1902..

SANU II-IV : *Српске народне пјесме из необјављених рукописа Вука Стеф. Караџића*, Српска академија наука и уметности, Одељење језика и књижевности, Београд, 1974.

SM : Сима Милутиновић Сарајлија, *Пјеванија црногорска и херцеговачка*, приредио Добрило Аранитовић, Никшић, 1990. [*Пјеванија црногорска и херцеговачка, сабрана Чубром Чојковићем Црногорцем*. Па њим издана истим, у Лајпцигу, 1837.]

- MH I-IX : *Hrvatske narodne pjesme*, skupila i izdala Matica hrvatska. Odio prvi. Junačke pjesme, Zagreb, 1890-1940.
- KH I - III : *Narodne pjesme muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini*, sabrao Kosta Hörmann 1888-1889, knj. I-II, drugo izdanje, Sarajevo, 1933.
- Narodne pjesme muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini*, Iz rukopisne ostavštine Koste Hörmanna, redakcija, uvod i komentari Đenana Buturović, Sarajevo, 1966. (KH III)
- EH : *Muslimanske narodne junačke pjesme*, sakupio Esad Hadžiomerspahić, u Banjoj Luci, 1909.
- ER : *Erlangneski rukopis*, novo čitanje na adresi <http://www.branatomic.com/er/> Begović : Никола Беговић, *Српске народне пјесме из Луке и Баније*, које је сакупио за штампу Никола Беговић, у Загребу, 1885.
- Koželjас: Љубиша Рајковић Кожељац, *Јато голубато. Лирске народне песме из источне Србије*, Зајечар, 1991.
- Đul девојче: *Ђул девојче. Лирске народне песме из белопаланачког краја*, група аутора, Ниш, 1979.
- СБНУ: *Сборник за народни умотворения наука и книжнина*, от. кн. 27. *Сборник за народни умотворения и народопис*, МНП (от кн. XIX изд. Българското книжовно дружество, а от кн. XXVII – БАН), София, 1889.
- Miladinovci: Братъя Миладиновци Димитрія и Константин, *Български народни пѣсни*, собрани одъ – – –, и издани одъ Константина, Загреб 1861. Доступно на: <http://litternet.bg/folklor/sbornici/miladinovci/index.htm>.

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THE HEALING POWER OF HERBS AND PHYTOTHERAPY TODAY

ABSTRACT: Although in the last century the sources of natural medicines have expanded to include microorganisms, marine organisms, fungi and animals as well, plants continues to be the major source of biologically active natural products which may be utilized. Several analysis carried out in recent years have revealed that about 30% of all prescriptions issued in Europe and USA, contained herb, purified extracts or an active compound derived from the herbs. In others, developing countries, herbs can be present in 70-90% of the prescriptions. Therefore in spite of the substantial advances that have been made in synthetic chemistry, herbs and their constituents still remain an integral part of modern therapeutics in most of countries in the world. For centuries plants have provided mankind with useful, sometimes life-saving drugs. Healing with medicinal plants is as old as mankind itself. Many plants and their constituents that are used in modern pharmacotherapy were known by ancient civilizations and used throughout the millennia. The earliest documented records, about uses of medicinal plants dated from 60.000. BC. Today, modern phytotherapy (*Rational Phytotherapy*) is science-based empirical approach to the use of medicinal plants in the treatment and prevention of diseases. All herbal drugs used must be standardized, and their efficiency must be proved by experimental and clinical trials. Here we describe the significance of medicinal plants through mankind history, and the position of phytotherapy in modern medicine.

KEY WORDS: phytomeicine, traditional medicine, natural products, rational phytotherapy, *Hypericum perforatum*, biologically active compounds, chemopreventive activity, hepatoprotective drugs

Plants have been used since ancient times as medicines for the treatment of a range of diseases. In spite of the great advances observed in modern medicine in recent decades, plants still make an important contribution to health care. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), because of poverty and lack of access to modern medicine, about 65-80% of the world's population that are living in developing countries depend essentially on plants for primary health care. In addition, in highly developed countries herbal medicines have become very popular in the last 10 years and more are a part of conventional medicine.

History

The earliest documented record, which presumably relates to medicinal plants, dates from 60.000 BC in the grave of Neanderthal man known as Shanidar IV. Shanidar Cave is an archaeological site in the Zagros Mountains South-Kurdistan in Iraq). In the Cave pollen of several species of plants were discovered: *Achilea millefolium*, *Althea officinalis*, *Senecio vulgaris*, *Centaurea umbellatum*, *Ephedra* sp. Furthermore, a study of the particular flower types suggested that the flowers may have been chosen for their specific medicinal properties. This led to the idea that this man (Shanidar IV) could possibly have had shamanic powers, perhaps acting as medicine man to the Shanidar neandertals. All these plants are still important today in the phytotherapy not only in Iraq but in many country and civilization all around world. In ancient Peruvian burial sites dating around 2500 BC, coca (*Erythroxylum coca*) leaves were found in the graves, “apparently to assist the dead in their final journey”. In the leaves of plants psychotropic alkaloid cocaine and tropococaine were identified. Both compounds are still used in modern medicine as strong analgesic and anesthetic substances. Mescaline, anhalonine, lophophorine, pellotine, and anhalonidine have been identified in alkaloid extracts of a prehistoric specimen of peyote cactus (*Lophophora* sp.) from a burial cave in west central Coahuila, Mexico. The specimen is associated with radiocarbon dates of A.D. 810 to 1070 and is one of the oldest materials ever submitted to alkaloid analysis. There are archeological evidences that mescaline, main psychoactive compound from peyote leaves was used in ancient civilization for 5700 years. Today mescaline is used in modern psychiatry practice. In ancient Sumerian, plant remedies for common illnesses were discovered on clay tablets. In 3100 BC Sumerian ideogram denotes opium poppy as ‘plant of joy’. In India, the Rig-Veda a sacred Hindu text lists herbal medicines and created the Ayurvedic health care system in this Asia country. The ninth Mandala of the Rigveda, also called the Soma Mandala is devoted to the “God’s remedy “SOMA that was recently recognized as poisonous and hallucinogenic mushroom *Amanita muscaria*, with its main psychoactive constituent being the compound muscimol. This remedy was used as analgesic, adaptogen, hallucinogenic. In Indian Herbal “Charaka Samhita” 500 plants are describe. *Rauwolfia serpentina* or „snake root“ is known in Indian traditional medicine for more than 4000 years and applied against snake-bite, epilepsy, menthal disorder. Today we known that this plant conatin alkaloid reserpine one of the most powerfull hipotenzive agent. The Egyptians had extensive knowledge of plants derived from their technique of embalming. The Ebers papyrus (about 1550 BC), the most important medical papyri of ancient Egypt, present description and recipes for nearly 900 drugs, that are still of great importance (castor seed, opium, aloe, cassia, myrrh, menthe, thyme etc). Chinese herbal

remedies have a history that dates back more than 5,000 years ago. The discovery of herbal remedies is ascribed to legendary emperor Shen Nung (2696 BC). It took approximately 2,000 years before the work of Shen Nung and his followers were documented in a book called *Shen Nung Pen Ts'ao Ching*. However the true author of this book is unknown. The book recorded over 365 medicinal substances. In this herbal the recipe for so called Desert wine - Ma huang is given. Later Ma Huang is recognized as the plant *Efedra sinica* or chine efedra. This plant contain ephedrine, alkaloids that is widely used in medical therapy against cough, fever, asthma, headache, severe chills, flushing up, hiccups, and dizziness. Today Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has formed a unique system to diagnose and cure illness, and is recognized all over the world. Knowledge of the virtues of medicinal plants later spread to Greece and other countries of the ancient Western world. Many authors of antiquity described plants that could be used as medical drugs. Among them Hippocrates, Theophrastus, Pliny the Elder, Dioscorides and Galen. The Greek scholar Pedanius Dioscorides (AD 40-80) collected information about 600 plants and remedies and collected them in his seminal *Materia medica*, a term used to define the knowledge of drugs for many hundreds of years. Actually, for over 1500 years the classical and most influential book in Europe had been Dioscorides *De Materia medica*. If Dioscorides was "The father of Medicine", Galen was "The father of Pharmacy". Regarded as pivotal Graceo-Roman authority in medicinal plant, he wrote extensively about the subject and also proposing a research agenda for establishing the power of remedy. In the middle ages medicinal plants began to be catalogued according to their therapeutic action. In the 15th century several so-called herbals were published containing information, with pictures on medicinal plants. During 16th and 17th centuries medicinal plants continued to play a primary function in medicine. During 18th and 19th century plants and crude drugs were still being used as powders, extracts or tinctures. However, during this period began the isolation and chemical identification of pharmacologically active compounds from crude drugs. The first one was alkaloid morphine, isolated by Friedric Serturmer in 1803., than strychnine in 1817, quinine and caffeine in 1820, nicotine in 1828, atropine in 1833 and cocaine in 1855.

In the first half of 20th century many natural products were isolated and further used in medical therapy. Some of the most important events were: discovery of antibacterial properties of fungal metabolites, such is benzylpenicillin, by Florel and Fleming (1928). In 1947. diosgenin, an steroid sapogenin, obtained from the *Dioscorea sp.*, is used as major raw material for the commercial synthesis of several medically important steroids hormones. In 1947 the structure of tubocurarine and calebacurarine was established. These alkaloids are isolated from arrow poison known as CURARE traditionally used by South American indigenous people for hunting. Tubocurarine is used in modern medicine for muscular relax-

ation during surgery. In the same period antihypertensive agents from the *Veratrum* sp., and rezerpine from *Rauvolfia serpentina* were isolated and their structure was established. Important anticancer substances such are vinblastine and vincristine from *Vinca catharantus*, and podophyllotoxin from *Podophyllum* sp., was also discovered. The second half of 20th century is characterized by the development of synthetic organic chemistry, which began generating a stream of pure new, synthetic drugs. Although in the same time many natural products were isolated and further used in medical therapy. The later part of 20th century saw a rapid expansion in knowledge of secondary plant products, their biosynthesis biological and pharmacological effects. A large number of natural products or their derivatives were introduced in medicine, including many anti-cancer agents, anti-malarial, anti-dementia. Furthermore there is now better understanding of the genetic basis and biochemical basis of many important illness.

Phytotherapy today

Phytotherapy can be defined as the form of both conventional and traditional medicine, which uses drugs of plant origin as therapeutic agents. Today two kind of phytotherapy can be distinguished. One is medical herbalism (or Herbal medicine), practiced by medical herbalist, draws on traditional knowledge, but interpreted and applied in a modern context. The other is, recently proposed and accepted, *Rational Phytotherapy*, a science-based empirical approach to the use of medicinal plants in the treatment and prevention of diseases. In rational therapy the preparations used must be standardized, and their efficiency must be proved by experimental and clinical trials. However, research in this field is very complex and multi-disciplinary, involving broad spectrum of research activities: taxonomy study, chemical characterization of plant extracts, bioengineering, farm cultivation and commercialization of selected medicinal plants, biosynthesis of secondary metabolites, *in vivo* and *in vitro* study of biological activity and pharmacological and clinical trials of selected plant constituents or extracts. Below some of the healing properties of the most popular plant species in the modern phytotherapy are presented:

Drug acting on the central nervous system (CNS)

Include the centrally acting (mainly opioid) analgesics, anti-epileptic and anti-Parkinson agents as well as those for psychiatric disorder. Drugs of plant origin are important in all these areas, although not usually for self-medication.

Herbal Anxiolytics/Hypnotics and sedative: Some of the most popular are: Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis* L., *Valerianae radix*,) Kava (*Piper methysticum* Forst., *Piperis methystici rhizome*), Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis* L., *Melissae folium*), Hops (*Hunulus lupulus* L., *Humuli lupuli strobuli*), *Passion flower*, (*Pas-siflora incarnate* L. *Passiflorae herba*) etc.

Valerian: is among the best documented of all medicinal plants, particularly in Northern Europe. Valerian-root tea or tincture is used as a sedative in nervous tensions, restlessness, and difficulty in getting to sleep and in stress and anxiety states. The main components of valerian are the volatile oil and the iridoid, valepotriate constituents. Biochemical study have indicated that specific plant constituents may lead to increased concentration of the inhibitory neurotransmitter GABA in the brain by inhibiting its catabolism, inhibiting uptake and/or by inducing GABA release. Several clinical trials confirmed anxiolytics effects of valerian. Adverse or toxic effect of valerian drug is not documented.

Herbal antidepressant: St John's wort (*Hypericum peroratum* L., *Hyperici herba*) has a history of medicinal use, particularly as a "nerve tonic" and in the treatment of nervous disorder. In our folk medicine it is employed as antidiarrhoeal, against rheumatism and gout. The oil is used for healing wounds, and for burns. In modern phytotherapy it is commonly used to treat mild and moderate form of depression. St John's wort contains a series of naphthodianthrone, which include hypericin and pseudohypericin and prenylated phloroglucinols such as hyperforin and adhyperforin. Results of biochemical and pharmacological studies have suggested that plant extract inhibit synaptosomal uptake of the neurotransmitters, serotonin, dopamine, noradrenaline and GABA. Although inhibition of MAO (monoamine oxidase) by hipericin was believed to be the primary mode of action, more recent data suggested that hyperforin inhibits the synaptosomal uptake of above mentioned neurotransmitter. St John's worth is approved for the treatment of depression mode and anxiety with several clinical trials. Although its safety profile is much better than synthetic antidepressants there are a few adverse effects: gastrointestinal symptoms, dizziness, dry mouth, restlessness and headache. However recent studies report about the herb-drug interaction with conventional drugs which are metabolized by hepatic enzymes or eliminated through induction of P-glycoprotein. By this way St John' worth extracts can activate and increase their activities and reduced the efficacy of drugs and therapy. In addition the symptom of central serotonergic symptom (mental status changes, tremor, autonomic instability, myalgia etc) is described when St John's worth is given in parallel with conventional antidepressants.

Drug used for cognitive enhancement and in dementia: Today are a few treatments for improving memory, especially dementia. One group is drugs act as inhibitors of enzyme acetylcholine esterase, but with varying degrees of success.

One is rivastigmine semi-synthetic derivative of physostigmine, alkaloid found in Calabar bean (*Physostigma venenosum*) highly poisonous plant from West Africa. The other is galantamine, isolated from the snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*) and introduced around 2001. These drugs appear to slow down progression of the disease temporary, but do not cure it, and have side effects.

GINKGO, (*Ginkgo biloba* L., *Ginkgo folium*): Ginkgo is an ancient “fossil” tree indigenous to China and Japan and cultivated in various part of the world. Ginkgo is the oldest tree on the earth, more than 200 million years old. It is very hardy and is reputed to be the only species to have survived nuclear explosion. Ginkgo contains two major classes of actives, both contribute to activities: ginkgolides A, B and C, and bilobalide (diterpene lactones) and biflavone glycosides. The most important use of ginkgo is to reduce or prevent memory deterioration, due to the ageing and milder forms of dementia, including early stages of Alzheimer’s disease. The effect is thought to be by improving blood circulation to the brain and also due to the anti-inflammatory (antagonism of the activity of the pro-inflammatory agent, platelet-activating factor (PAF)) and antioxidants effect. Ginkgo has generally been safe. Adverse effects most often reported in clinical trials were stomach complaints, nausea, headache and allergic skin reactions. Caution should be used when it administrated with anticoagulants and anti-platelet drugs. In fact documented herb/drug interactions include spontaneous bleeding when taken with aspirin and intracerebral hemorrhage when taken with warfarin.

Plants and Cardiovascular systems

Congestive heart failure (CHF): A number of herbal medicines contain potent cardioactive glycosides which are potentially useful for treatment of CHF. Cardiac glycosides increase calcium concentration in the cardiac muscle, thereby increasing contraction of atrial and ventricular myocardium. However they have a low therapeutic index, and hence, the use must be carefully controlled. The best known herbs containing cardiac glycosides are foxglove, which consists of the drive leaves *Digitalis purpurea* or *Digitalis lanata*. Accidental poisonings and even suicide attempts with ingestions of plants containing cardiac glycosides are abundant in the medical literature. This is why one other plant with quite different chemical constituents and low toxicity draws attention of scientists. Today hawthorn (*Crategus monogyna* Jacq.) stands out as an important cardio-stimulant herbal medicine, with efficacy in CHF. The activity of hawthorn is attributing to phenolic compounds (flavonoids and anthocyanidins) Experimental study have shown that hawthorn possesses many pharmacological effects which are beneficial for cardiovascular systems. It inhibits arrhythmia, dilates coronary blood vessels,

reduced serum cholesterol and triglyceride levels, reduces symptom of angina and CHF and has a hypotensive action due to peripheral dilation of blood vessels. Hawthorn has been extensively studied and almost all studies showed therapeutic efficacy of hawthorn. The mode of action is *via* inhibition of enzyme cAMP phosphodiesterase (PDE) and thus increases the intracellular concentration of cAMP (cyclic adenosine monophosphate) in myocardium, which is responsible for increases of myocardium contractions. No serious diverse effects were reported for hawthorn therapy. However the concomitant use of hawthorn and cardiac glycosides can markedly enhance the glycosides activity.

Phytotherapy of hypertension: most of the herbal treatments for hypertension probably act as a peripheral vasodilators. Some of the most important are garlic, olive, snakeroot, evodia, mistletoe etc. Garlic (*Allium sativum*) contains large number of sulphur compounds which are responsible for the flavor and odour, as well as for medicinal effects. Garlic has a lot of health benefits as antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal, chemopreventive activity against carcinogenesis. The hypotensive effects of garlic have been demonstrated in experimental studies, although the exact mode of action is not known. For garlic compounds hipolipidaemic activity, antioxidant and antiplatelet and antiatherosclerotic effect were demonstrated in several *in vitro* studies. For hypertension dose of 600-900 mg of dried powder extracts are recommended.

Phytotherapy and inflammatory diseases

Inflammation is triggered by the release of chemical mediators from injured tissue such as amine (histamine), lipids (prostaglandins, leukotriens and PAF) and proteins (cytokines such as interleukins and TNF). Characteristic inflammatory response is redness, pain, heat and edema.

The most important anti-inflammatory plants are: arnica (*Arnica montana*), willow bark (*Salix alba*), Indian olibaum (bosweia, *Boswellia serrata*), Devil's claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*), feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*), rosmery (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) etc. Although plants with anti-inflammatory activity play only a minor role in the treatment of inflammatory conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, compared to steroidal and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, some of them have shown promising clinical efficacy associated with to mild adverse reactions. Various plants and their constituents reduce inflammation by different mode of actions. Devil's clove is African plant, widely used in South African traditional medicine to cure rheumatic diseases, fever, stomach upset etc. Preclinical studies in humans suggest that anti-inflammatory activity of this plants is related to inhibition of lipooxygenase, enzyme responsible for leukotriene bio-

synthesis. For the activity iridoids harpagoside is most responsible for plant activity. On the contrary willows bark contains salicin, compound similar to aspirin, but has a more prolonged action without adverse effect on stomach mucosa as aspirin has. Nettle (*Urtica dioica.*) is also promising anti-inflammatory herbal drug. Experimental biochemical studies show that nettle leaves extract inhibit both cyclooxygenase and lipoxygenase enzymes and thus inhibits prostaglandin and leucotriens production. Beside nettle leaf extract reduced cytokine production. Modern uses of nettle extracts are focused mainly on benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) and adjuvant treatment of arthritis and rheumatism.

Hepato-protective herbal drugs

They are remedies which help to reduce the damage to the liver from hepatic stressors and diseases. Among many plants recommended (artichoke, menthe, turmeric, liquorices, schizandra) to treat liver diseases, only efficiency of milk thistle (*Silybum marianum*) is confirmed in long-term clinical practice. Its hepato-protective effects are accomplished via several mechanisms of action. The most important is stimulation of liver regeneration, antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects. It is shown that the main bioactive substance is flavanolignane complex, silymarin, which stimulates RNA polymerase which by several further steps result in stimulation of regenerative capacity of liver.

Plants with phytoestrogens

There are many plants that contain oestrogenic substances (phytoestrogens) and pharmacological and epidemiological evidence suggests that they act as mild oestrogens or, in certain circumstances, as anti-oestrogens (by binding to estrogen receptors and preventing occupation with natural oestrogens). They generally have beneficial effects, including cancer chemopreventive activity. The main chemical types of phytoestrogen are isoflavone, coumestans and lignans. The most important plants rich in phytoestrogens are red clover (*Trifolium pretense*) and soya (*Glycine max*). Recent clinical trial suggests that consumption of plant rich in phytoestrogens can reduce the risk of breast cancer, reduce level of cholesterol and LDL. There are also some other plants that contain substances that have the capacity to regulate hormone levels without necessarily being oestrogenic: Black cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*), chasteberry (*Vitex agnus castus*), evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*). These plants were shown to be effective in reducing premenstrual and postmenstrual symptoms in women, as well as BPH in man.

Phytotherapy in cancer chemoprevention

Several recent epidemiological studies have demonstrated that dietary factors may reduce the incidence of cancers. Almost 600 “chemopreventive” agents are known and they are usually classified as inhibitors of carcinogen formation (ascorbic acid, tocopherols, phenols), inhibitors of initiation (phenols, flavons) and inhibitors of postinitiations events (terpenes, carotene, retinoids). Many are food constituents and are called “functional food” or nutraceuticals. Recently a great attention is devoted to the plants belong to Brassicaceae family (mustard, radish, cabbage), especially those containing sulphur compounds known as glucosinolates. According to several authors, dietary intake of glucosinolates (from broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and especially brussel sprouts) might have a protective effect against colon cancer. Degradation products of glucobrassicin, especially indol-3-carbinol interfere with metabolism of carcinogens: they inhibit procarcinogen activation and induce some enzymes (glutathione S-transferase and NADPH quinone reductase) which detoxify metabolites that may induce carcinogenesis in cell. It was found that prevention can be achieved by regular consumption of brussel sprouts (300g/per day). Anticancer activity of some other plants such as Mistletoe (*Viscum album*), and *Aloe vera* are confirmed by several clinical trials. In the last 30 years nearly 300.000 natural chemopreventive agents are discovered. The most of them were found in microorganisms and fungi about 180 000, than in plants 114 000 and 16 000 in marine organisms. Unfortunately only negligible number is confirmed by clinical practice. Although a great number of natural bioactive products are isolated and investigated, nature is still an endless source of medical drugs that are waiting to be discovered.

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EDITORS' NOTE

The book *Plants and Herbs in Traditional Serbian Culture: A Handbook of Folklore Botany* consists out of nine papers, in Serbian and in English, and an anthology of Serbian folklore texts. What the research papers and the anthology have in common is the interest in the botany and the beliefs connected to the plants and herbs in the past (as reflected in the rituals and healing practices, and in the oral literature). All of these present the basis for research of the modern folk beliefs and knowledge on the botany, the application of the knowledge and the use and abuse of herbs in folk medicine nowadays. The book was meant to serve as a handbook for the students of the International Summer School of Serbian Folklore, organised by the Centre for Serbian Folklore Research of the Department of Serbian Literature and held at Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad and should be used primarily for that purpose. On the other hand, the papers in the book cover a wide range of research material and reference books, use various approaches and present significant results, so they go beyond their initial purpose. They can also be treated as small studies of the problems they address and can also be examined as an indication of the exceptional ethics and poetics of the herbs in the traditional Serbian culture. I hereby kindly thank our colleagues Biljana Sikimić, Tatjana Vujnović and Valentina Pitulić for their contribution to our Anthology of folklore texts on plants and herbs. It is important to say that the poems quoted in the papers were translated literally (it was impossible to retain their poetic characteristics and value), so the readers can get, at least, a glimpse of their contents. The verses in the paper by Mirjana Stefanović have not been translated due to their hermetic nature, and they are kept in the original in the English version as well.