

# SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE FAIRY TALE COLLECTION CROATIAN TALES OF LONG AGO BY IVANA BRLIĆ- MAŽURANIĆ

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## SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE FAIRY TALE COLLECTION *CROATIAN TALES OF LONG AGO* BY IVANA BRLIĆ-MAŽURANIĆ

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper analyzes the fairy tale collection Croatian Tales of Long Ago by the Croatian author Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, interpreting its social functions. Several important social functions are considered in fairy tales: national and supranational (Slavic) imaginary, Christian values, and patriarchal order. These social functions are analyzed in individual fairy tales, considering the thesis of Dutch scientist André Jolles that the primary social function of fairy tales is to express the community's idea of justice and injustice.*

*Keywords: Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, Croatian Tales of Long Ago, social function, justice*

## FUNZIONI SOCIALI DELLA COLLEZIONE DI FIABE *RACCONTI CROATI DI UN TEMPO LONTANO* DI IVANA BRLIĆ-MAŽURANIĆ

### SINTESI

*L'articolo analizza la raccolta di fiabe intitolata Racconti croati di un tempo lontano dell'autrice croata Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, interpretandone le funzioni sociali. Le fiabe vengono esaminate nell'ottica di diverse importanti funzioni sociali: l'immaginario nazionale e sovranazionale (slavo), i valori cristiani e l'ordine patriarcale. L'analisi delle funzioni si basa sulla tesi proposta dallo scienziato olandese André Jolles, secondo la quale la funzione sociale primaria delle fiabe sarebbe quella di esprimere il concetto della giustizia e dell'ingiustizia proprio di una data comunità.*

*Parole chiave: Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, Racconti croati di un tempo lontano, funzione sociale, giustizia*

## INTRODUCTION

Although the fairy tale, judging by the different levels of interpretation and definition, as well as regarding the strong theoretical-interpretive appeal over a longer period, seems to be an extremely complex literary genre, the Dutch theorist André Jolles included it in his study (1930) on the so-called simple literary forms. Simple forms, respectively created within the folklore – legend, saga, myth, riddle, saying, case, memorabile, fairy tale, and joke – as elaborated by Jolles, are simple regarding their social functions: each of these forms expresses only one, a prominent social function which is given to it by the community. Therefore, Jolles also sees the fairy tale as a simple form, reading from it only one, dominant social-literary function. However, it does not refer to the opposition of good and evil, which we are accustomed to considering as the inherent meaning of a fairy tale, but to the articulation of the so-called naive morals of the community, as Jolles calls it. In other words, the fairy tale does not talk about what the community considers good and what is evil and does not deal with moral articulations or interpretations of the narrated events; instead, the fairy tale expresses what the community considers just and what is unjust. Jolles argues his thesis with the interpretation of several fairy tales, the most impressive of which is the analysis of Perrault's *Puss in Boots*, in which we are forced to reject moral judgment to properly understand the fairy tale. Namely, the protagonist in boots breaks all moral codes (he lies, cheats, steals, threatens, and is violent) to crown it with murder at the end – and yet, as readers, we are not inclined to consider him a negative character. On the contrary, we are ready to consider the final situation that is achieved by murder as a “happy ending”, precisely in opposition to the ethical code of the community, which would be more inclined to sanction lies, fraud, robbery, and murder. Instead, the Puss is not only rewarded for all its evil deeds but also receives social recognition in the form of a noble title. Jolles interprets this in the context of the social function of the form, which has the task of expressing the community's expectations and demands that the unjust initial situation is corrected by the end of the fairy tale, regardless of whether it is a moral or amoral act. On the trail of this interpretation of the social functionality of the fairy tale, which Jolles applies also to the auctorial fairy tale (Perrault's, the Brothers Grimm, etc.), I will analyze the fairy tale collection *Croatian Tales of Long ago* by Croatian author Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić,<sup>1</sup> which is considered the best fairy tale collection in Croatian literature and is part of its canon. Namely, I see the social functionality of this collection in its imagological-ideological layer regarding several social codes relevant to the creation and reception of the collection. The first of these codes concerns authorship, i.e., the fact of the author's gender, which not only significantly marked the initial reception of the

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1 Quotations from the fairy tales in this paper are taken from the English translation by Fanny Copeland, published in 1924, in which the author's name is given as Berlić-Mažuranić.





Fig. 1 and Fig. 2: Book cover (left) and first page (right) of *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, English translation (1924), illustration by Vladimir Kirin (Wikimedia Commons).

collection but was (and partially remains) the primary code for the social valorization of the author's work in Croatian culture.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the collection was published in 1916, at the time of the First World War, while Croatia was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and therefore the theme of the articulation of national identity was rather socially attractive. This topic is ambitiously but strangely shaped in this collection as an amalgam of Slavic mythological remnants and Croatian traditional patterns. And finally, the important meaning code of the collection refers to the affirmation of the patriarchal order, and it is precisely in this segment that I see the most expressive ideological action, which I will show in the following analysis.

2 In this context, it seems interesting to note that Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić mentions her reluctance to assert herself creatively, considering it inappropriate for her gender (cf. Zima, 2019). Furthermore, although at the time of her literary activity, female authorship in Croatian literature is no longer so rare, female authors are extremely underrepresented and subordinated. In 1935, Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić was proposed for membership in the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, but the proposal was not accepted, and, as can be seen from the minutes, the author's gender was one of the reasons for the rejection. In the second attempt (1937), she was elected to the membership of JAZU as a corresponding member, and as the first woman ever in this Academy since its establishment (cf. Zima, 2014 for more on that).

## FAIRY-TALES AND THEIR SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

*Croatian Tales of Long Ago* by the author Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić were published for the first time in 1916 in Zagreb, by Matica hrvatska, as a collection of six fairy tales.<sup>3</sup> At the time of publication, the author is no longer a literary beginner – it is her fifth book. However, all her previous books had very limited publishing and reception reach: the first booklet, a collection of children’s poems and stories entitled *Good and bad*, small in scope and reach, she published by herself, for family needs – as a Christmas gift to her children in 1901. The second book, a collection of children’s poems and stories, *School and Holidays*, was published in 1905 by the Croatian Pedagogical-Literary Association, a publisher specializing in children’s and pedagogical publications, with relatively limited distribution and reception. After that, she published a collection of poems, again by herself: a booklet, more precisely a 24-page brochure with the title *Pictures*, published in 1912, a few years later (1916) she will designate as her favorite book. In 1913 she published the children’s novel *The Strange Adventures of Hlapic the Apprentice*, again published by the Croatian Pedagogical-Literary Association, this time with a significantly more favorable reception outcome: although pedagogical and children’s-literary editions at that time did not have a serious reception, the novel will reach Antun Gustav Matoš, the central literary figure of Croatian modernity, who will publish an extremely favorable review of the book, not to say a panegyric, in the magazine *Savremenik* (Matoš, 1913, 615–616).

Matoš’s designation of “classic book” which he called *The Strange Adventures of Hlapic the Apprentice* permanently marked not only the novel itself but also its canonical representation. When, therefore, three years after the appearance of that novel, Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić published the collection *Croatian Tales of Long Ago*, she correctly felt that the audience would react more favorably to an already well-known name, and rather ambitiously changed the publisher, moving from a small, narrowly profiled publisher to Matica hrvatska, which at that time was not only among the leading Croatian publishing houses but also had a clearly defined and implemented publishing policy of promoting the national cultural identity, into which *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* fit perfectly.

When the collection was published in December 1916, the critical reception that followed, although extremely positively intoned, was quite cautious about genre determinations and placing the collection in the children’s and/or adult

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3 In the first edition, the collection contained the fairy tales *How Quest Sought the Truth*, *Fisherman Plunk and his wife*, *Stribor’s Forest*, *Little Brother Primrose and Sister Lavender*, *Reygoch* and *Bridesman Sun and Bride Bridekins*, and illustrations by Petr Orlić. The collection was published a second time in 1920 by the same publisher, textually unchanged, but without illustrations. In the third edition, in 1926, the collection was published with two new fairy tales (*Topoko the Wanderer and Nine Princes and Jagor*) and with new illustrations by Vladimir Kirin. On the circumstances of the publication of the collection, cf. Zima, 2019.

literary system. Until then, the literary form of the fairy tale did not appear in the genre grid of Croatian (adult) literature of modernism, and apart from Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, only Vladimir Nazor would affirm it to some extent in that period.<sup>4</sup> Antun Branko Šimić, writing an account of Brlić's collection, explicitly calls the literary form of the fairy tale a simple genre and writes his positively intoned criticism despite this "simplicity", favoring the author's stylistic and semantic virtuosity against the limiting features of the genre. At the beginning of the 20th century, the fairy tale is still very firmly connected to the folklore domain, and critics of Mažuranić's collection are hesitant to interpret the fairy tale as part of canonical literature. This literary genre would receive full affirmation only a few decades later, with the nominations of the *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* for the Nobel Prize for Literature in the 1930s<sup>5</sup> and with the first literary-historical forays into recent Croatian literature, in which Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić would appear primarily as an author of *Croatian Tales of Long Ago*.<sup>6</sup>

Among the most striking interpretations of this collection in the first wave of reception is certainly the account of Antun Branko Šimić, published in the newspaper *Obzor* on February 27, 1917. Šimić, whom himself would enter the canon of Croatian poetry four years later with the collection *Transformations* (1920), at the time of this review was only 18 years old; this youth is seen in the presumptuousness and even the impudence with which the young man approaches *Croatian Tales of Long Ago*, in the introduction clearly expressing an extremely underestimating attitude towards female literary authorship.<sup>7</sup> If we exclude the author's mentioned remark about the fairy tale as a "simple genre", Šimić's conclusion, which loudly echoed in subsequent presentations and largely determined the fate of the collection, refers to the emphasized national identity articulated in Mažuranić's fairy tales: "Ivana Brlić Mažuranić," claims Antun Branko Šimić, "is so specifically Croatian as the Croatian region, Croatian costume and Croatian wines" (Šimić, 1917, 1). This thesis is complementary to another important imagological-ideological complex affirmed in fairy tales – the notion of Slavic or all-Slavic identity. The collection is deeply immersed in the Slavic mythological imaginary at the level of motifs and narration, and especially at the level of character design, mostly based on

4 About the fairy tale in the fin de siècle period in Croatian literature, cf. Žmegač, 1995. In the collection *Istrian Tales* (1913), Vladimir Nazor writes several stories with features of the literary form of the fairy tale.

5 Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature four times (1931, 1935, 1937 and 1938). The nomination documentation is signed by Gavro Manojlović, who was at the time of the first two nominations the president of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, and who has written a study on the fairy tales for the nomination procedure, in which he affirms the literary form of the fairy tale in the context of canonical literature. More about the nominations and Manojlović's study in Zima, 2014.

6 On the treatment of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić in histories of Croatian literature cf. Zima, 2018a.

7 The first sentence of his review states: „Women have never written well in our country“ (Šimić, 1917, 1).

Russian mythological and folklore material, which the author referred to as a source for certain motifs in her fairy tales. When, in the mid-1920s, the collection was translated first into English, and then into other European languages, the reception abroad saw this very element of the collection – the connection with Slavic folklore and mythological storytelling – as the most expressive, even to such an extent that in 1929 the author, in a private letter to her son Ivo, needs to clarify that it is an author's work and that she imitates, but does not take over, folklore structures through the narration. At the time of the creation of the collection, the author, as she explains in that letter, was reading a study on Russian folklore and mythology by the Russian folklorist Aleksandr Afanasyev,<sup>8</sup> and she shaped individual characters by adopting some of the written features or motifs. Later research (cf. Kos-Lajtman & Horvat, 2011) will show that, apart from Afanasjev, among her sources were Anton Tkany's lexicon *Mythologie der Alten Deutschen und Slaven* (1827), the collection of folklore tales (1858) by Matija Kračmanov Valjavac and the writings of Ivan Kukuljević-Sakcinski (1851) on folk mythology, but, as Brlić-Mažuranić emphasizes in the aforementioned letter to her son, the plot arrangement and narration are entirely her own.

An example of this creative process can be cited, for example, the character of grandmother Muggish in the fairy tale *Bridesman Sun and Bride Bridekins*; Muggish, which is the name of the supreme Slavic female deity (according to Katičić 2011), in that fairy tale is an important character who initiates the plot and has some of the epithets recorded in Slavic mythological tales, but the narration refers to the love affair between Bride Bridekins and Oleg the Warden, in which Muggish is a catalyst, not a central character. The process with the character of Muggish perfectly outlines Mažuranić's creative process. In his interpretations of Balto-Slavic pre-Christian beliefs, Radoslav Katičić (2011) interprets the goddess Muggish as the wife of the supreme god Perun who, together with her husband, is the mother of the Sun; Katičić metaphorically shows the ambivalent character of that mythical figure. An important element of the mythical syntagmatic associated with Muggish is its relation to water, contained in the name (which alludes to water and wet); water often boils in Muggish's mythical repertoire, and Katičić also interprets this motif lexically, connecting boiling water and the motif of the (golden) key that unlocks spring, also associated with Muggish. Furthermore, her role is also connected with death, and in her repertoire is also the function of the mother of the graves, that is, the guardian of the passage to the underworld/death. In the fairy tale *Bridesman Sun and Bride Bridekins*, almost all motifs of this repertoire are transmuted and reinterpreted in the storytelling: one of the most important motifs in the fairy tale is the lost key, the central fairy tale structure refers to a wedding that can be fatal for both the bride and the groom due to the anger of the empress who

8 „The poetic outlook on Nature by the Slavs“, 1865–69.

was offended by their actions, and the Muggish is initially benevolent towards Bride Bridekins, but in the continuation of the story, she turns against her, angry because of girl's disobedience. The resolution of the fairy tale is brought by the Sun, grandson of Muggish (in Slavic mythology, it is a maternal relationship, not a grandmother: Muggish is the Sun's mother), and in the finale, Muggish opens the land under the emperor's army and is thus connected to the fungus, earth, and ruin, i.e. with the epithet of the mother of the graves or the gatekeeper at the entrance to the underworld.

Such a peculiar creative process, as well as the undoubtedly strong affirmation of the idea of national identity located by Šimić, can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, Viktor Žmegač (1997) interprets the poetic elements of relying on mythological storytelling and affirmations of mythical thinking as elements of neo-romanticism, one of the poetic systems at the period of the *fin de siècle*, in which the turning to mythical thought is the central link with the romanticism contained in the name. On the other hand, the social-ideological position of these fairy tales can also be read against the background of the author's extra-literary or social-political ideas, whereby the idea of all-Slavic unity is located as a kind of family heritage, as the author herself will formulate in her *Autobiography* (1916), in which she will attribute her "love" for Slavism to her parents' influence: "The first conscious feeling that arose in me in my parents' house was love for the Croatian homeland and for that broad, enthralling notion of Slavism, of which this love is the core. This is not only the first feeling, but in a way, it is the original, from which my other feelings were later created" (Brlić-Mažuranić, 2013, 129–130; translation mine). This romanticized remark, however, can also be connected to the political sympathies of the author's family, first of all, the grandfather, and then the father,<sup>9</sup> and it is not uninteresting to see in the author's fairy tales the fusion of the national and supranational imaginary – Croatian and Slavic – in the context of the idealization of heroism, fidelity, modest existence, and patriarchal order.

Jack Zipes (1988), writing about the social functions of the fairy tale, sees its connection with the process of constituting national identity as one of the key functions of fairy tales in romanticism – in the process in which the fairy tale transgresses from the folklore domain to the literary canon. The process of the national constitution that European countries went through in the 19th century will leave its traces in fairy tales as well, Zipes claims, exemplifying this thesis with the Grimm brothers' fairy tales, that is, with the social and political functionalization of fairy tales in the process of adaptations of folk

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9 The author's grandfather Ivan Mažuranić (1814–1890) and father Vladimir Mažuranić (1845–1928) are both prominent public figures – Ivan Mažuranić is a politician and the first Croatian ruler who did not have noble origins, while Vladimir was among the highest judiciary in the country and president of JAZU from 1918 to 1921. Both were active in politics, with Ivan being one of the founders of the People's Party, formed on ideas of the Illyrian movement.

tales. Nevertheless, in the period that follows, from the *fin de siècle* to the 20th century, the social functions of fairy tales, especially in the domain of children's literature, change significantly, according to Zipes, abandoning national integration and national constituting functions, and favoring relaxation and entertainment as new postulates of children's literature and culture in the 20th century. The poetics of neo-romanticism, however, which, as Žmegač (1995) claims, is constituted precisely by the thematic and ideological reliance on the mythical and mythological, briefly in the period of the *fin de siècle* will invoke again the national-constitutive sentiment. So, although at the time of the creation of Mažuranić's collection, children's literature was trying to be affirmed independently of social-political functionality, her collection fits into another, also current neo-romantic code, which strives to re-affirm the national as one of the meanings of children's literature.

If we take a closer look at the motifs and meanings of *Croatian Tales of Long Ago*, we recognize primarily the ideologues of longevity and tradition as parts of the national and supranational (all-Slavic) imaginary. The next ideologeme refers to the attitude towards old age, then to the hierarchical social organization, to some elements that are intertwined with Christian ideology such as the idealization of modesty, obedience, and forgiveness, and finally to the patriarchal system as the subtext of all the fairy tales in the collection.

*Croatian Tales of Long Ago* affirm, romanticize, and favor the life patterns of the unspecified past, and in the narrative processes, a happy ending is a return to the original, ancient, pre-situation. The culture of *fin de siècle* is symbolically located in the urban spaces, but in *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* anything urban is omitted, and where the word "city" is used, it has the meaning of "fortress". The stories all take place in rural areas, the events are played out according to pre-modern, emphatically traditional patterns and life models, and urban culture is not represented in them. Contrary to *fin de siècle* individualism, *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* established the interpersonal as a core value. Where social structures are shown, they are based on hierarchy (*Little Brother Primrose and sister Lavender*, *Topoko the Wanderer and Nine Princes*, *Reygoch*), and the privileged social microstructure is certainly the (wider) family based on Christianity (*How Quest sought the truth*, *Stribor's Forest*), patriarchal (*Fisherman Plunk and his wife*, *Bridesman Sun and Bride Bridekins*) and customary values (*Jagor*). Linguistic and stylistic archaism, largely interpreted in linguistic and linguistic studies of the collection, underline the key figure of the spoken language, given that the social communities described in the *Tales* are without exception pre-literate and/or illiterate, therefore they necessarily rely on the traditional transmission of civilizational patterns orally, in narrative mode. No character in the *Tales* writes, writes down, or reads what is written down. Space is conquered by walking or riding a horse, and apart from the boat, no other means of transport is mentioned in the fairy tales; it is interesting, though, that space can be conquered in fantastic ways (for example, flying on a raincoat or

flying in eagle's claws). All communities in the *Tales* are pre-monetary, and value or opulence is expressed by an abundance of means of exchange. All the communities in the fairy tales are rural and dependent on cultivating the land or, in two fairy tales, on fishing, and all communities are firmly connected to natural rhythms. Food in fairy tales implies modesty and a rudimentarily developed process of cultivation – we are talking about basic foods such as bread, eggs, fish, cooked vegetables, honey, and forest fruits.

Furthermore, in all eight tales in the collection, the key element of order is the acceptance of hierarchy and obedience to the bearer of social or gender power. The bearers of social power are presented in the domain of feudal social relations – in the fairy tale *Little Brother Primrose and sister Lavender* power is held by the princess, in the fairy tale *Bridesman Sun and Bride Bridekins* highest authority is empress, in the fairy tale *Topoko the Wanderer and Nine princes* prefect holds the power, in the fairy tale *Fisherman Plunk and his wife*, the authority is royal. Particularly interesting is the fictional coda in the fairy tale *Little Brother Primrose and sister Lavender*, in which the community – the principality – demands the princess and her son to take over the power in the previously stateless community:

*The people of the village got to know the wisdom of the princess and Relya's strength. Presently they remarked how well the Golden Gridle became the princess, and, although none of them had ever seen the princess before, they said: 'She must be our noble princess.' And so they gave Relya and the princess a great piece of land and begged Relya to be their leader in all things and the princess to be their counselor. (...) From all sides, they flocked together and went to the foot of Mount Kitesh to beg Relya to be their prince, because they have heard of his strength and courage and of the wisdom of the noble princess. Wherefore people promised with their own hands to build them a new castle, all fair and stately. Relya accepted the people's offer because he rightly judged that God had given him such great strength and courage, and had delivered him from his hot and cruel temper so that he might be of use to his country. So Relya became a prince; and the princess, who was getting old by now, yet lived to see great happiness in her old age. And when the princess and Relya, with Lavender and Primrose, entered their new and stately castle for the first time, the village children scattered evergreens and sweet basil on their path, men and women pressed round the princess, seized the hem of her robe and kissed it (Berlić-Mažuranić, 1924, 253–254).*

Even in those fairy tales in which there is no direct mention of social power, such as the fairy tales *How Quest sought the truth*, *Jagor*, or *Stribor's Forest*, the narrative is structured hierarchically and the human protagonists accept it, although they are not directly subject to it: in the fairy tale *How Quest sought*

*the truth*, the highest value instance is represented by All-Rosy, an allegory of the Christian God, who sits on top of a glass hill in a golden castle. In *Stribor's Forest*, the title phrase already implies possessiveness, i.e., ownership, and the title character Stribor is a forest elder who rules from the castle. In the fairy tale *Jagor*, on the other hand, which most directly affirms longevity and tradition as core fictional values, the hierarchy is determined by age, and the oldest is also the wisest and most respected; authority is therefore won by old age. It is similar to the fairy tale *Reygoch*, in which the oldest is also the wisest, where wisdom and age are said to be superior to size and strength, given that the giant Reygoch, supernaturally physically strong and superior to all other characters, is subordinate to the weak but wise old men.

Furthermore, the order is regulated by the attitude towards tradition as well as by the high valuation of modesty and poverty. Considering the direct affirmation of Christian ideological topos in four fairy tales,<sup>10</sup> and the indirect one in one,<sup>11</sup> the values of fairy tales in the reception, especially in recent times, are also read as Christian (cf. Milanja, 1977; Hranjec 2003; Špehar & Salopek 2015), especially by privileging submission, but also the idealization of poverty to abundance. Such values are most directly manifested in the context of food. In all fairy tales in which the motif of food or feeding appears, even incidentally, modest but nutritionally hearty food will be positively evaluated, at the expense of an abundance of luxurious food that cannot satiate the heroes. This motif appears most clearly in the fairy tale *Fisherman Plunk and his wife*, in which the title character Plunk despises his poor and tiring fisherman's life, in which he modestly and monotonously feeds on the fish he catches during the day and the cooked greens that his unnamed wife, the protagonist of the fairy tale, picks on the coast. Plunk yearns for abundance and luxury and because of this yearning he is ready to sacrifice his wife and son, but when he finally arrives at the beautiful and luxurious court of the King of the Sea, the choice and very luxurious food offered to him cannot satisfy his hunger. Paradoxically, he asks the Sea King for a plate of humble food, boiled greens. In the fairy tale *How Quest sought the truth*, the values connected to food are further radicalized in the context of

10 In the fairy tale *Stribor's Forest*, Christian symbols and dogmas are directly presented, including God's commandments, the crucifix, and the concept of sin and redemption. In the fairy tale *Little Brother Primrose and sister Lavender*, the crucifix protects the children from pagan evil forces. In the fairy tale *Reygoch*, there are no direct allusions to Christianity, but the world is indirectly presented as the work of God: "And therefor God has caused that little staff to fall down there and the staff held up the pillar under the earth", (Berlić-Mažuranić, 1924, 108) — "Don't be afraid, children" — said Lilio to the shepherds, "The Lord never created that monstrous giant for evil, else he would have killed half the world by now" (Berlić-Mažuranić, 1924, 116), and in petrified syntagms (God's creation, God's will, God's secret) was preserved connection with the Christian repertoire. In the fairy tale *Jagor*, an unworthy father who, under the influence of his second wife, neglected and lost his son, goes to "God's judgment", after he repented and went looking for his son, and died in the process.

11 In the fairy tale *How Quest Sought Truth*, which Cvjetko Milanja (1977) reads as structurally Christian, an allegorical reading finds out Christian elements (paradise, sin, redemption).





*Fig. 3: Vladimir Kirin, illustration accompanying Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's fairy tale How Quest Sought The Truth, 1922 (Wikimedia Commons).*



*Fig. 4: Vladimir Kirin, illustration accompanying Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's fairy tale How Quest Sought The Truth, 1922 (Wikimedia Commons).*

food availability: if food is hard to get and the heroes are struggling to provide food, it will be positively valued, but the easy availability and abundance of food imply moral corruption, and that in so much so that the grandson who has become rich and therefore has food easily available will try to kill the grandfather who disapproves of such behavior.

The motif of food is also connected to another social function: the affirmation of the patriarchal order. This motif is very interestingly manifested in the fairy tale *Fisherman Plunk and his wife*: the gender distribution in this domain is highly symbolic and refers to Plunk's fishing and fish preparation (which is the traditionally male domain of hunting and wildlife) and the woman's picking of a modest wild plant (greens) which is cultivated by water, a vessel and the closed space of the house and in the domain of female competence.

Jack Zipes (1988) sees patriarchy as an implied or explicit subtext of fairy tales since the earliest authorial transmutions of this genre. In *Croatian Tales of Long Ago*, the patriarchal order is the dominant structure, despite the striking inadequacy of the male characters in the fairy tales. The patriarchal order, which Branka Galić (2002) defines as the relationship of male power over social institutions in a dual articulation (the power of men over women and the power of older men over younger ones), in *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* rests on the willingness of the female characters to accept the dominance of the male characters, despite that they are shaped in various ways as insufficient or inadequate: weak, stupid, unreliable, incompetent and otherwise inappropriate. In *Stribor's Forest* the only male character, a young man over whom his mother and daughter-in-law are in conflict, is called a fool, and his stupidity progresses in the narrative. In the fairy tale *Fisherman Plunk and his wife*, in which I will analyze the paradox of the patriarchal order in more detail below, the titular Plunk is a completely inadequate character and visibly inferior in all respects to his unnamed wife. In the fairy tale *Little Brother Primrose and sister Lavander*, the hero Relya is not only inconsistent, but also inadequate in an interesting way, considering that the women (the fairy and the girl) give him instructions on how to behave, and he completes the tasks following their instructions. In the fairy tale *Reygoch*, the titular giant is completely dependent, inexperienced, and incapable of independent functioning. In the fairy tale *Topoko the Wanderer and the Nine Princes*, Prefect Jurina, although he rules the county, is powerless in front of his wife Jelena, and the fable develops from this powerlessness. In the fairy tale *Jagor*, the father of little Jagor is completely inadequate in his role as a father, because of which he dies, and the narrative energy gathers around the stepmother, that is, in the relationship of the conflict between the little Jagor and the stepmother. In short, in fairy tales, female strength is suppressed or is a function of masculinity, except in those fairy tales in which female characters do not appear at all (*How Quest Sought the Truth*). It is interesting, furthermore, that demonic or evil female characters also appear in two fairy tales (the stepmother and the mythical

monster Baba Poludnica in *Jagor* and the cruel empress in *Bridesman Sun and Bride Bridekins*), but they also fit into the scheme of the patriarchal order, showing the danger of destruction of patriarchy – if the female characters do not obey and obstruct the order, they will end tragically: both human female characters, the stepmother and the empress, die a tragic and extremely cruel death.

The fairy tale *Fisherman Plunk and his wife* can be read as an example of the social functionalization of the fairy tale in the context of the patriarchal order. The two titular protagonists are already treated differently by naming them: by not naming the woman, who will take the initiative and the status of the protagonist from the middle of the fairy tale, it is precisely her subordinate position that is expressed. The gesture of naming in the fairy tale is strongly patriarchally motivated: even the male child born by an unnamed woman in marriage with Plunk will be named, although his role in the fable is secondary, and the woman and her late mother, who restore the patriarchal order and rehabilitate the worthless Plunk, remain nameless. The fairy tale is about the disciplining and re-education of the fisherman Plunk, tired of poverty. Plunk longs for abundance and opulence and tries to achieve it by fantastic means, using the power of the fantastic figure of Dawn-maiden, the ruler of fish and the sea. The Dawn Maiden will even listen to him twice: the first time, upon his request for wealth, the Dawn Maiden sends him an unnamed girl who becomes his wife, supplements his modest diet by collecting greens, and in the evening tells him fantastic stories about kings and wealth. Marriage and then fatherhood is not enough for Plunk, however, and he will mistakenly think that his wife is a fairy (because she knows how to tell stories so beautifully), and after he realizes that he was mistaken, he will ask Dawn-Maiden for the second time to afford him wealth and that after physically abusing his wife, threatening to kill her, forcing her to search for the wealth of the Sea King and then leaving her when she lost her son on that search and became speechless from grief. In this sequence appears the motif of miraculous female narration, well known since *The Arabian Nights*, which Karen E. Rowe (1986) sees as a central female function in fairy tales. Female narration in fairy tales overcomes the social silencing of women, i.e. taking away their voice. Rowe analyzes the motif of women's weaving as a metaphor for a secret female code that articulates the female voice in a society that prefers the voiceless woman. At the same time, women's storytelling is situated in the domain of traditional transmission of community knowledge, where the usual figure of the storyteller is precisely the older woman. On the other hand, in *Fisherman Plunk and his wife*, the motif of the female voice/narration and taking away female voice reflects patriarchal order in the situation of a strong (narrative) female voice that the unnamed woman acquires through motherhood, and then taking away her voice when she also loses her function as a mother, that is, when she loses a child by accident. In other words, in patriarchy, a woman has a voice only as a mother. The further

course of the story is as follows: Plunk gets access to the court of the Sea King, and therefore leaves his wife and goes to the luxurious, golden court. And while Plunk gradually has to learn a lesson there and realize that opulence did not satisfy him and that true happiness lies in modest family life, the mute woman mourns in their deserted cabin during that time. It should be repeated here that Plunk physically abused the woman before his disappearance and threatened to kill her, but the woman is still looking for a way to find and get back her abusive husband. She will receive instructions for this undertaking from her dead mother, using the motif of animal language; at her mother's grave, a hind will speak to her in a mute language, apparently representing the spirit of her deceased mother (a motif known from, for example, the Grimm brothers' fairy tales). The deceased mother will convey to her unfortunate daughter the instructions for the restoration of the patriarchal family, twice: when the woman loses hope in Plunk's return, the mother forces her to continue searching for him. A woman embarks on a difficult, adventurous journey full of obstacles to get her husband back, and on the way, she goes through a trial when her lost son appears to her, and she is offered to give up the search for Plunk in exchange for the child's return. However, she rejects the offer and continues to search for a worthless abusive husband. This loyalty of hers will paradoxically pay off in the end: she will succeed in freeing her husband from the court of the Sea King, and her son will return with him. The paradox of such an ending, however, refers to the end of the fairy tale in which the protagonists will forget the whole adventure: Plunk's worthlessness and his violence are forgotten, but so are women's courage, persistence, and strength. "When they sat down that night to their supper of wild spinach, they had clean forgotten all that had happened. And but for those twin pipes, there is not a soul would remember it now" (Berlić-Mažuranić, 1924, 90–91). Patriarchy rests on inadequate and insufficient masculinity: only female consent maintains that order. It is a female acquiescence reinforced by generational transmission: mothers will ensure that their daughters do not question but accept patriarchy and consider such acquiescence a virtue. Similar ideas can be seen in other fairy tales, although not in such a direct way: the idealization of motherhood, the silent suffering of violence and injustice without resistance, the affirmation of the Christian idea of forgiveness, and the expectation of a fantastic reward. On the other hand, male heroism is reinterpreted and recontextualized to a great extent: in the fairy tale *Little Brother Primrose and sister Lavender*, male heroism is portrayed as aggressive and inappropriate, and the hero Relya must "tame" and abandon aggressive behavior to assert himself as a protagonist. In the fairy tale *Bridesman Sun and Bride Bridekins*, the protagonist Oleg ban is the prototype of a traditional heroic male figure and he, the only one of all the male characters in fairy tales, fulfills his function, although his heroism is "softened" by his primary role as a lover for Bride Bridekins. The paradox of male heroism is perhaps most clearly depicted in the fairy tale of *Topoko the Wanderer and*

*Nine Princes*, in which the nine boys will temporarily occupy the male domain and, although they are children, kill the antagonist with swords. This murder, however, although committed by children, is treated as heroism in the fairy tale and the children emerge from it morally uncompromised, similar to André Jolles' interpretation of fairy tales as stories about naive justice demanded by the community and not about good and evil.

If we try to read *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* considering the opposition between good and evil, we are faced with actions and events that resist our understanding of morality: the heroes are murderers (even children) and bullies, and the heroines suffer violence (even children). But, if we read them aware that narration reflects justice and fairness as seen by the community, then we understand how the course of the fairy tale will end the initially unjust situation and re-establish order, whereby this order relies on a sense of justice considering the analyzed social codes.

DRUŽBENE FUNKCIJE ZBIRKE PRAVLJIC *PRIPOVEDKE IZ DAVNINE*  
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## POVZETEK

*Prispevek analizira zbirko pravljic Pripovedke iz davnine avtorice Ivane Brlić-Mažuranić in interpretira njene družbene funkcije. Pripovedke iz davnine, ki so bile prvič objavljene leta 1916, so bile takoj po izidu sprejete z navdušenjem in razglašene za zbirko, ki zvesto prikazuje hrvaško identiteto in samo bistvo hrvaštva. Prispevek se osredotoča na ideološke in imagoške značilnosti te pravljичne zbirke, natančneje na značilnosti, povezane z nacionalno in nadnacionalno (slovansko) družbeno artikulacijo. »Davnina« iz naslova zbirke implicira idejo dolgoživosti in predstavlja identiteto, predvsem nacionalno, kot strukturo dolgega trajanja. »Davnina« sega v čas nepismene, hierarhično organizirane družbe in majhne skupnosti, ki močno ceni tradicijo in starost. Poleg tega zbirka pravljic predstavi nekatere krščanske vrednote, vključno z idejo o grehu in odpuščanju grehov, skromnosti in pokornosti. Nazadnje pa je v pravljicah predstavljen tudi patriarhalni red, in sicer kot nekaj paradoksalnega, z nezadostnimi moškimi liki in močnimi ženskimi liki, ki so pripravljeni ohranjati prevlado moških. Te družbene funkcije analiziramo v posameznih pravljicah, pri čemer upoštevamo tezo nizozemskega znanstvenika Andréja Jollesa, da je primarna družbena funkcija pravljic izražanje ideje skupnosti o pravičnosti in krivici.*

*Ključne besede: Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, Pripovedke iz davnine, družbena funkcija, pravica*

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