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MONOLOGISM OR DIALOGISM OF EPIC VOICE: HEGELIAN AND FUNCTIONAL THEORIES OF EPIC GENRE

Abstract: *This article advocates for the reconsideration of some of the most influential theoretical discussions on epic and its generic features, such as those offered by Hegel, Lukács and Bakhtin. The Hegelian approach to epic, it is argued, also informed later scholars, such as the Chadwicks or Bowra, to posit an evolutionary model that considers oral traditions without long poems as somewhat inferior to Ancient Greek or Vedic, and to require a more complex and advanced social and national framework as the prerequisite for the birth of such long epics as the true realisation and embodiment of epic genre. As I will argue further, these generic distinctions were mostly formulated on a rather small sample of Homeric epics, and the material collected from various oral traditions in more recent times clearly shows the limitations of the earlier theoretical models. I will therefore advocate for a more inclusive, functional generic definition that takes into consideration the specific context in which epic functions in a particular oral tradition. The last section of this paper offers some implications of the theoretical discussion on the Serbian oral epic tradition, in particular to implicitly Hegelian national-romantic attempts to unify short separate songs about Kosovo or Marko Kraljević into great Iliad-like epic poems.*

Key words: *Homeric Epic, Serbian Epic, Genre, Hegel, Lukács, Bakhtin, the Chadwicks, Bowra.*

Epic as Unified Totality

Hegel's famous views on epic, while certainly not the first to be shaped by the model of the Homeric poems, deserve particular attention in the discussion of epic generic features both for their philosophical clarity and for the influence they played on later scholars such as Lukács, Bakhtin, the Chadwicks or Bowra. In this article, I will argue that Hegelian generic distinctions were mostly formulated on the basis of a rather narrow sample of Homeric epics, and propose a more inclusive, functional and contextually sensitive generic definition that takes into consideration wider comparative material and the specific context in which epic exists in a particular oral tradition.

In Hegel's *Aesthetics*, epic represents a unified totality and a comprehensive world. Although he is ready to admit that not all epic traditions gave birth to poems of such length, unity and complexity as Homeric epics, he nevertheless requires of a genuine *Epos* or true *Epopea* to be "essentially an organic whole" (Hegel II 1975: 111). Proper epic, in Hegel's words, describes

a definite action, which, in the full compass of its circumstances and relations must be brought

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with clarity to our vision as an event enriched by its further association with the organically complete world of a nation and an age. It follows from this that the collective world outlook and objective presence of a national spirit, displayed as an actual event in the form of its self-manifestation, and nothing short of this does to, constitute the content and form of the true epic poem (II 1975: 110).

Hegel's definition is both conceptual and historical. On a conceptual level, epic is the epitome of objective spirit, and hence deprived of subjectivity characteristic for lyric and dramatic poetic forms. Here, Hegel follows the Aristotelian line of reasoning about literary genres. Namely, already in the earliest investigation of literary techniques, Plato and Aristotle used the terms *mimesis* and *diegesis* to distinguish different modes of representation in the genre system of Ancient Greek literature. As they argued, tragedy and comedy are characterised by pure representation, in the sense that every word belongs to the characters acting in the scene. In distinction, genres that we commonly associate with lyrical poetry contain only one voice, that of the narrator. As the third distinctive narrative form, epic adopts both modes – this means that the narrator can sometimes speak on his or her behalf, but also relate the events by the voice of the characters. The *Iliad*, for example, begins by the singer's invocation "Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus's son Achilleus", but soon switches to the dialog between Apollo disguised as a priest and Agamemnon (Iliad 1961: 59). Finally, Aristotle recommends that "[t]he poet should speak as little as possible in his own person", and emphasises Homer as an example of such a restrained narrator whose personality and subjectivity do not come to the forefront to hamper or disturb the narrative (Aristotle 1997: 131).

Similarly, Hegel recognises that "the epic poem, if a true work of art, is the exclusive creation of *one* artist", but immediately instructs that "personal outlook of the poet must remain in a connection that enables him to identify himself wholly" with the world he objectively presents (II 1975: 115). In other words, although it is a poet's personal subjectivity that gives rise to a particular epic poem, it is still inextricably bound with a collective outlook and not separated from the national body. Likewise, although for Hegel proper epic heroes are individuals that act from the autonomy of their character, their actions are not subjected to or confronted with the objectified space of laws and norms, and thus retain the "immediate unity of the substantial with the individuality of inclination" (I 1975: 185).

From the historical point, then, the basis for epic is - according to Hegel - certain general world-condition, a "midway stage" in which "a people is aroused from its stupidity". "To this extent", Hegel continues, "these memorials are nothing less than the real foundations of the national consciousnesses" that "every great nation can claim to have". (II 1975: 112). Accordingly,

the separation of the individual's personal self from the concrete national whole is only reached in the later life-experience of a people, in which the general lines laid down by men for the due regulation of their affairs are no longer inseparable from the sentiments and opinions of the nation as a whole, but already have secured an independent structure as a co-ordinated system of jurisprudence and law, as a prosaic disposition of positive facts, as a political constitution, as a body of ethical or other precepts (II 1975: 113).

This later stage, of course, belongs to a more advanced form of social existence, where public life depends on the organised system of government based on general principles, which takes over the sphere of morality and justice that in the epic world depended on the feelings and dispositions of epic heroes.

Lukács adopts this vision of epic and juxtaposes the epic world as a unified totality to the fragmented universe of novelistic

genre. The novel is for Lukács a bourgeois epic that corresponds to modern subjectivity, or "the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem" (Lukács 1971: 56). Being focused predominantly on the novel, Lukács essentially relies on the Hegelian views of epic world as "internally homogeneous", fixed value system whose "theme is not a personal destiny but the destiny of a community" (1971: 66). As such, it has "weight in so far as it is significant to a great organic life complex — a nation or a family" (1971: 67).

Bakhtin also describes epic world as closed, hierarchical and complete. In Bakhtin's view, the constitutive features of epic genre are a national epic past as its subject, national tradition as its source and an absolute epic distance:

By its very nature the epic world of the absolute past is inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual, personal point of view or evaluation... the important thing is... its reliance on impersonal and sacrosanct tradition, on a commonly held evaluation and point of view – which excludes any possibility of another approach... tradition isolates the world of the epic from personal experience, from any new insights, from any personal initiative in understanding and interpreting, from new points of view and evaluations. The epic world is an utterly finished thing, not only as an authentic event of the distant past but also on its own terms and by its own standards; it is impossible to change, to re-think, to re-evaluate anything in it (Bakhtin 1981: 16-17).

Bakhtin hence denies epic the possibility of heteroglossia or multiperspectiveness. It is the novel that is affirmative, opened, polyphonic genre, never finished and fixed. In Bakhtin's view, while novel inherently contains the plurality of different voices, battles between various "points of view, value judgements" etc., epic is precisely the opposite – fixed, monologic, with only one voice, that of aristocracy or the ruling class. He therefore describes literary works that do contain both the plurality of voices and perspectives and epic elements as "novelised", that is, being "transposed to the novelistic zone of contact", or as the disintegration of epic (1981: 33). Thus while we can recognise here the apparent Hegelian line of reasoning about epic, Bakhtin actually inverts Lukács's view in affirmation of the novel on the expense of epic.

Hegelian and Bakhtinian analyses of epic's generic features appear to be more rigid then the Aristotelian one. Aristotle goes only so far as to recommend that the poet's subjectivity should remain in the background, and emphasises Homer as the supreme example of such an approach. This is not the same as to say that epic speaks in only one voice and does not permit an individual, personal point of view or evaluation. For, if epic genre allows different characters to speak in their own words, then surely one should account for the possibility that these characters can express different, even antithetical, standpoints and outlooks.

"Heroic Age" and "Heroic Poetry"

Influential twentieth-century concepts of "heroic age" and "heroic poetry" developed by Munro and Nora Chadwick (Chadwick 1912; the Chadwicks: 1932, 1936, 1940), and later expanded by Cecil Maurice Bowra (Bowra 1952) also derive from this implicitly Hegelian line of reasoning that defines epic predominantly by its content and according to certain presupposed general social conditions suitable for this type of poetry.

Cambridge professor Munro Chadwick in his book *Heroic Age* (1912) initiated the conception that the birth of "heroic poetry" corresponds to a phase in the development of society. It was later expanded in three large volumes of *The Growth of Literature* (1932-1940) jointly published with his wife Nora Chadwick, and modified in Cecil Maurice Bowra's *Heroic poetry* (1952).

As they investigated early epic poetry of the Teutonic people and Homeric epic,

the Chadwicks found many parallelisms. They gradually expanded their research to other traditions, including the Serbian epic of Kosovo, and concluded that those parallelisms arise from "similar social and political conditions" (the Chadwicks 1932: xiii). According to them, those epic traditions refer to a relatively short period and describe the deeds of several generations. That period the Chadwicks identified with the fifth and sixth century for the early Teutonic epic, eleventh century B.C. for the Homeric epic, seventeenth century for the Yugoslav Muslim epic tradition and the fourteenth century for the Yugoslav Christian epic etc. All those songs describe heroic deeds of man and their bravery in warfare. Therefore, Chadwick gave the name "Heroic Ages" for "the period embraced by the common poetry and traditions" (1912: 29) of those people and, consequently, preferred the label "heroic poem" over the wider and less precise notion of epic.

Heroic epic therefore arises from the heroic type of society or, more precisely, from the heroic phase in the development of a society. During the epoch in the history of many societies, which could be described as the "heroic age", great, heroic deeds of man and their exploits were regarded as utmost achievements in the social sphere. The Chadwicks described those similar social conditions as a society "characterised by an aristocratic and military ethos, itself reinforced by the existence of court minstrels who praise the dominant warrior princes" (Finnegan 1992: 247). For the Chadwicks, heroic poems reflect those social formations: "the resemblances in the poems are due primarily to resemblances in the ages to which they relate and to which they ultimately owe their origin" (1912: viii).

The problem is, however, that between the presupposed heroic age, i.e. the historic time of the presented events, the time of the composition and the time of documenting the songs there is often a gap

of several centuries. Which one of these three phases should we perceive as the "heroic age"? The Chadwicks do not distinguish clearly among those periods and see them as basically the same. Therefore they presuppose actual historical background as a source of heroic poems and especially use Serbian Kosovo songs as an argument that heroic songs arise in the cause of the events and more or less faithfully describe historical events and actual persons. But, again, the problem is that the nineteenth century society in which those songs were sung hardly resembles anything like the feudal system from the time when the actual Kosovo Battle took place. Ruth Finnegan criticised Chadwicks' views in a similar way using Yugoslav material: "the kind of poetry widely regarded as 'heroic' or 'epic' does not *just* arise in the situation envisaged as natural by the Chadwicks. The poems of twentieth-century Yugoslav minstrels do not celebrate the deeds of warlike contemporaries, but tell the adventures of a long-vanished, glorious and largely imaginary past to local audiences who had gathered in a neighbour's house in the rural village or in coffee shops in town" (1992: 248). Finnegan expands this argument to a critique of the reflection theory in general: "The notion of direct and literal reflection of current conditions does not work for oral any more than for written literature. The glorious heroes and sumptuous courts in the epics sung by Avdo Mededovic and other Yugoslav minstrels bear little resemblance to conditions in rural Yugoslavia in the 1930s" (1992: 263).

C. M. Bowra describes his influential book *Heroic Poetry* as a development of Chadwicks' findings, and similarly makes the connection with the content of the epic poetry and historical context: "Heroic poetry proper ...is composed in the conviction that its characters belong to a special superior class, which it sets apart in a curious kind of past.... Modern scholarship has usually been able to relate these different

heroic ages to an established chronology" (Bowra 1952: 25). However, he is aware that this scheme is not universal and mentions that in the Yugoslav tradition, besides Kosovo songs, there are other songs as well which are dedicated to both earlier and later events, and even to contemporary battles (1952: 27).

Bowra also limits his research exclusively to heroic poetry, and puts an emphasis on the generic poetical features and characteristics of the "heroic epic". According to Bowra, there is a kind of a universal pattern in the development of primitive narrative poetry. Heroic poetry comes after this earlier stage with predominantly shamanistic and magical narratives, progresses to a phase of narratives like laments, panegyrics and stories about both gods and humans and, finally, ends when the latter separately develop into a narrative about deeds of man without superficial supplementation. Bowra distinguishes heroic poetry from similar poetic forms such as shamanistic poetry which uses supernatural elements, or lament and panegyric where poet's "outlook is limited to the actual present, and he does not conceive of great events in an objective setting" (1952: 12). What gives heroic poetry its distinctive content is the particular valuation of human nature: "What differentiates heroic poetry is largely its outlook. It works in conditions determined by special conceptions of manhood and honour. It cannot exist unless men believe that human beings are in themselves sufficient" (1952: 4).

In general, Bowra describes his study as "both literary and social". In its social aspect, heroic poetry is "the reflection of the societies which practice it and illustrates their character and ways of thinking. It has considerable value for history because it exists in so many countries and ages" (1952: 47). Social aspect of his approach follows the same postulates as the Chadwicks' theory and suffers from the same insufficiencies as theirs. His main contribution is the

attempt to distinguish the generic features of the heroic poetry as a literary genre. In the literary sense, Bowra concludes, this poetry "reflects a widespread desire to celebrate man's powers of action and endurance and display", and "it reflects some of the strongest aspirations of the human spirit... and strength in human nature" (1952: 47). Nevertheless, his approach is too schematic and mechanistic, since he posits a kind of evolutionary perspective where heroic poetry is a posterior and superior form of primitive poetry. Consequently, it can be only a phase in the evolution of poetry and becomes surpassed when it evolves into artistic poetry.

Secondly, despite the emphasis on supposedly universal human values, his definitions of epic genre and content are to narrow and exclusive. "Since these assumptions are not to be found in all countries at all times", Bowra claims, "heroic poetry does not flourish everywhere. It presupposes a view of existence in which man plays a central part and exerts his powers in a distinctive way" (1952: 5). Bowra is not taking into consideration contextual specificity of the particular tradition, and his universal values actually correspond to Western standards derived from the Homeric epic. Thus, Bowra excludes entire oral traditions such as African and Chinese as non-heroic (1952: 12-13). As we will see from the more recent discussions, variety of comparative material demands a more inclusive and contextually sensitive generic definition.

Towards the Functional Definition of Epic

The crucial problem arising from these distinctions is that they were formulated on a rather narrow epic material. As Hegel repeatedly reminds us, Homeric epic serves as the source of all epic generic features in his conception (II 1975: 119). Bakhtin is even more exclusive and, by his own admission, employs the most ex-

tremely narrow description of epic, based solely on the *Iliad* (1981: 287). With the growth of comparative material worldwide, the narrowness of the previous distinctions became apparent. For example, evidences from other, non-European epic traditions, challenged and relativised the previous clear-cut distinctions. Foley thus asks how to define epic by its subject with such examples like *Siri Epic*, sung in matrilineal Tulu society from Southern India, which is almost exactly the same length as the *Iliad* (15 683 lines). In *Siri Epic*, however, "we encounter a female hero, together with a general deprecation of male figures and a virtual absence of violence, none of which the Western model of epic leads us to expect" (Foley 2005: 174). In a similar manner, Richard Martin refers to Joyce Flueckiger's research (Flueckiger 1996) in central India to pinpoint that "even the same long, heroic narrative, like the Dhola-Maru tradition, sung in communities a few hundred miles apart, qualifies as 'epic' in one but not the other. Community self-identification, caste ambitions, and local religious cult all determine whether a people view the epic as its own defining narrative" (Martin 2005: 17). In addition, while relatively short and loosely related, Serbian epic songs fail to satisfy the aforementioned requirements of unity and length, even the length of Homeric epics can fall to be insufficient if compared with the Kirgiz Mana epic with its 200 000 verses, the Mongolian twelve volume Jangar epic or to the 600 000 verses long Tibetan version of the Geser epic, also popular among the peoples of Central Asia, Mongolia and China (Jensen 2008: 46). What is more, Nekljudov's seminal works on the Geser epic tradition showed that it offers instances of a differentiation process by which a longer, unified poem actually becomes separated into shorter parts that further on continue their life separately (1984, 1996). Contemporary scholars thus reconsidered previously set generic boundaries and advocat-

ed for a more inclusive approach to oral epic traditions. However, they did not neglect the fact that, as Martin claims, "despite such *formal* differences, many societies may share a *functionally* similar category" (2005: 9). Nevertheless, they argue that the characteristics commonly associated with epic – length, heroism, history, nationalism – are variable and culturally specific and, as Foley says, need to be considered according to "each tradition's values and perspectives" (2005: 185).

Slavonic scholars showed particular interest in the relation of short and long epics and challenged the Hegelian-Chadwickian evolutionary model that posits the Iliad-like long poems as the generic norm (see: Zhirmunsky 1962: 32-44, Meletinsky 2009: 108-112). Namely, both exemplary modes of Slavonic heroic epic, Russian *byliny* and South-Slav junačke *p(j)esme*, typically consist of short and separate songs or, at best, loosely related epic cycles describing the exploits of a particular hero (such as Ilya Muromec in the Russian or Marko Kraljević in the South-Slav oral tradition). Yeleazar Meletinski thus acknowledges that the short songs are, in principle, older than the long epic poems, but claims that there is no exact correspondence between the two. Meletinsky adds that some national epics, such as Slavonic for example, have reached their classical maturity only in the short form. Zhirmunsky, likewise, classifies Russian and South-Slav epic among the "classical products of the national heroic epic", alongside mediaeval epics of Germanic and Romanic nations (1962: 44).

Recent scholars also point out that the inherited generic distinctions are relative even when we remain within the limits of the Ancient Greek epic traditions. Peter Toohey, for example, reminds us of other forms of epic in classical antiquity such as miniature epic, didactic epic, comic epic etc., and argues that "in classical antiquity there were a variety of elastic, ill-defined,

but nonetheless recognisable subspecies or subgenres of epic" (Toohey 1992: 2). In addition, scholars like Richard Martin, Gregory Nagy and Andrew Ford indicate that our received idea of epic results primarily from the narrow understanding of Homer as the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and that these other forms of ancient Greek epics have been marginalised and excluded from the generic definition. They argue that this culturally specific notion of epic then prevailed as a generic marker for the epic in total, since both classical and Western scholars followed Aristotle's approach to epic with the *Iliad* as a standard (Nagy 1999: 21-32, Martin 2005: 9-19, Ford 1997: 396-414).

Meanwhile, it appears that not even the Homeric epic fulfils the generic demands set by Hegel, Lukács and Bakhtin. According to Charles Segal, for example, while Bakhtin's definition of epic genre may fit the *Iliad*, it forgets altogether the *Odyssey* that corresponds more to his description of the novelistic genre (Segal 1994). In addition, after the seminal works of Morris and Scully, it has become commonplace in contemporary homerology to perceive in the *Iliad* the fundamental tension between the competitive aristocratic values and the cooperative values of the polis (Morris 1986: 81-136, Scully 1990). Moreover, according to Peter Rose, the actual perspective is even more complex, involving various residual, dominant and emerging outlooks; even the layer identified with aristocratic ideology is itself not homogeneous but comprised of various diverse perspectives (Rose 1997: 151-199). Following their insights, Goyet denies *in toto* the idea that Homeric epic describes a harmonious and stable world: "if we place these texts very precisely *in their original context* we recognise that the world they describe is a world that is prey to crisis, disorder, and chaos" (Goyet 2008: 15-27).

Thersites of the Iliad: Textual Dissonance and Epic Contradictions

A brief reference to the Thersites scene from the *Iliad* will illustrate these views and exemplify that epic allows for various perspectives and diverse political standpoints to be articulated from different social and spatial positions. The story occurs in the second book of the *Iliad*. After his quarrel with Achilles, Agamemnon receives a false message in a dream that he will capture Troy if he attacks immediately. He gathers the troops in the early morning to bring them the news but, to test their fighting morale, advises them to board the ships and go home. His plan proves foolish, as the demoralised soldiers rush to their ships. Odysseus manages to prevent the collapse by taking Agamemnon's staff and persuading both commoners and chieftains to continue the siege. Although his efforts finally stop the retreat, the troops are still in a bad mood, and a soldier by the name of Thersites openly opposes the chieftains, insults Agamemnon and opts for their immediate return to the homelands. Odysseus responds to his words by humiliating Thersites verbally, and then beating him with the staff. This brings amusement and laughter to the troops, ends their insubordination and secures a cheerful closure to the episode.

In line with the Hegelian and Bakhtinian view of the *Iliad* and epic in general, we may say that the conflict ends with an apparent reaffirmation of aristocratic values. The brutality with which Thersites is silenced and subjected to the order seems to leave little grounds for a claim that the scene in any way questions or challenges the existing hierarchy and social structure of the Homeric world. According to Alan Griffiths, Thersites's "exemplary humiliation ensures that never again in the *Iliad* will the exclusive discourse of the nobles be so rudely interrupted" (Griffiths 1995: 86). In addition, as John Marks re-

marks, Thersites "alone of speaking characters in the *Iliad* is provided with neither homeland nor patronymic, in contrast with such heroes as Achilles and Odysseus, for whom physical beauty and distinguished ancestry are emblems of heroic identity" (Marks 2005: 4). In short, the narrative presentation, description and treatment of Thersites offer clear arguments in favour of the Hegelian and Bakhtinian claim that an aristocratic point of view permeates the narrative.

But how to reconcile such a view of epic with Thersites's speech, in which he openly accuses Agamemnon for his greed and selfishness:

Your shelters are filled with bronze, there are plenty of choicest

women for you within your shelter, whom we Achaians

give to you first of all whenever we capture some stronghold.

Or is it still more gold you will be wanting, that some son

of the Trojans, breakers of horses, brings as ransom out of Ilion,

one that I, or some other Achaian, capture and bring in...

My good fools, poor abuses, you women, not men, of Achaia,

let us go back home in our ships, and leave this man here

by himself in Troy to mull his prizes of honour

that he may find out whether or not we others are helping him (I1961: Ch II, 225-38).

A number of recent homerologists pointed out several positive elements in Thersites's character and speech, and argued that the whole episode abounds in ambiguities without definite resolution and straightforward closure. For instance, Stuurman describes it as a "polished piece of crafty rhetoric", while Donlan and Kirk recognise its "pungent and effective style" and "elaborate syntax and careful enjambment and subordination" (Stuurman 2004: 183, Donlan 1999: 242, Kirk 1985: 140).

Moreover, Peter W. Rose in his analysis of the scene goes so far as to question the assumption that "the text itself makes a decisive bid to persuade its own target audience of the superiority of one of these positions" (Rose 1997: 164).

Contemporary homerologists, in short, agree that aristocratic values dominate in the Homeric poems but, in distinction to the Hegelian and Bakhtinian notion of Homeric epic, also argue that this is not the only perspective presented in the poems. Several scholars, like Ruth Scodel, Walter Donlan or Alan Griffiths, investigate in particular these anti-aristocratic elements in the early Greek poetry (Scodel 2002: 182, Donlan 1999: 241), while Stuurman and Morris acknowledge that aristocratic values are dominant but also point out that "the narrative does not take them for granted" and that "in such complex poems, the ideological messages are not simple or direct" (Stuurman 2004: 173, Morris 1986: 124). What is more, Rose even argues that "a relatively straightforward ideological commitment on the part of the poet is by no means as self-evident as is often assumed", and indicates that "[i]n working through the examination of the social and political hierarchy, the poem certainly gives voice to a variety of perspectives" (Rose 1997: 164, 184).

Finally, it should be emphasised that all the above-mentioned, of course, fully appreciate that epic typically, as Hegel says, displays "the collective world-outlook". Contemporary scholars readily admit that oral performer composes in the mode that "occurs at a level beyond the individual" (Beissinger 1999: 8) and embodies "more or less collective voice" (Ranković 2007: 300). Actually, as Foley suggests, oral tradition could be investigated on three levels – individual or idiolectal, local, and national or pantraditional (Foley 1993: 11).

Serbian Epic vs Hegelian Views of Epic

A convenient parallel to the Thersites scene in the South-Slav tradition, typically comprised of many short separate epic songs, can be found in the songs about Marko Kraljević. Vladan Nedić, for example, argued that hajduk Tešan Podrugović pictures Marko as a hajduk rather than a mediaeval knight, whereas the blind singers from Srem, who frequented nearby monasteries and churches and often performed on religious holidays and in churchyards, celebrate Marko as a protector of patriarchal family values or portray him as a more noble and Christian hero (Nedić 1990: 140-146). Moreover, Marko is sometimes presented as a negative hero. For instance, Starac Milija from Kolašin in his song "Sestra Leke Kapetana" portrays Marko as a brutal, violent elementary force. Similarly, Mirjana Drndarski informs us that Marko is often a negative character in the oral tradition from Dalmatia (Drndarski 1997: 129-144). But, while such a picture of Marko in Dalmatia, according to Drndarski, can be associated with the late nineteenth-century ethnic animosity of the local Roman Catholics towards Orthodox Christians as the bearers of Marko's cult in Dalmatia (1997: 139), no such case can be made about Milija's songs. His implicit critique thus seems to derive from specific regional social values and demands. Namely, Karadžić's friend Dimitrije Frušić informs him about Sima Milutinović's findings in Montenegro "that Kraljević Marko had his share in the fall of the Serbian Empire", and similar criticism of Marko for his loyalty to the Sultan can be found even in Njegoš's *Gorski vijenac* (Karadžić 1989: 699). Nevertheless, one cannot exclude an explanation that relies on Milija's personal affinities. Jovan Deretić and Petar Džadžić, for example, pinpoint certain unique and distinctive features of the songs collected from this singer (Deretić 1978, Džadžić 1994). What is

more, Deretić notices that "the same singer in one of his songs ["Banović Strahinja" – A.P.] forgives the hero's wife for her infidelity, while in another one brutally punishes another woman for a far lesser sin" (1978: 66). This all illustrates different perspectives expressed in South-Slav oral songs and the possible tensions between personal, local and pantraditional aspects of oral tradition, showing that different singers can adopt quite a distinctive, even critical approach to their local or national oral tradition.

While it may be a truism to say that the Serbian oral epic tradition, in distinction to the great and unified Homeric poems, consists of numerous unrelated or, at best, loosely connected short songs, the theoretical consequences of such a truism have hardly been fully explored in previous scholarship. Serbian epic apparently fails to fulfil the generic demands for the genuine *Epos* set by some of the most influential theoretical discussions on epic and its generic features, such as those offered by Hegel, Lukács and Bakhtin, which also informed later scholars, such as the Chadwicks or Bowra. Within such a theoretical framework, short Serbian songs and other similar traditions should either be considered as incomplete or imperfect or, as the Chadwicks did with the Kosovo songs, accepted insofar as they appear to comply to the form of a on(c)e great unified poem. However, as I argued further, these generic distinctions were mostly formulated on the rather narrow epic material of Homeric epics, and the materials collected more recently from various oral traditions, as well as the works of Slavonic scholars on short forms such as Russian *byliny* and South-Slav *junačke p(j)esme*, clearly show the narrowness of the earlier theoretical models. I therefore proposed a more inclusive, functional definition that, instead of positing a uniform scale for the evaluation of 'epicness', one takes into consideration

the specific context in which epic exists in a particular oral tradition.

Serbian epic with its numerous separate short songs is, therefore, not an aberration or rudimentary, elementary, unfinished etc. epic form, but a fully developed and complete epic tradition in its own way. Consequently, all those implicitly Hegelian national-romantic attempts of "reconstructing" the "former" great poems about Kosovo or Marko Kraljević are missing the point, and are incompatible with the spirit and character of the Serbian oral epic tradition.

In conclusion, the abundant evidence speaks strongly in favour of claims raised by contemporary oral theorists that "Bakhtin's version of epic has never existed – indeed, as a theory it ignores what has always been present in epic's dialogic voices" (Beissinger 1999: 7). Thus, while Hegelian and Bakhtinian far-reaching theoretical assumptions about epic are based on a quite small body of textual evidence, specialists in the field of oral studies emphasise the variety and complexity of different epic traditions and articulations, rejecting the idea that epic speaks only one voice and could be simply identified with the view characteristic of the dominant class or ruling ideology.

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МОНОЛОГИЗАМ ИЛИ ДИЈАЛОГИЗАМ ЕПСКОГ ГЛАСА: ХЕГЕЛИЈАНСКЕ И ФУНКЦИОНАЛНЕ ТЕОРИЈЕ ЕПСКОГ ЖАНРА

Резиме

У овом чланку разматрају се неки од најутицајнијих теоријских радова о епици и њеним жанровским карактеристикама, као што су Хегелов, Лукачев и Бахтинов. Хегелијански приступ епици, како се тврди, утицао је и на касније проучаваоце попут Мунроа и Норе Чедвик или Сесила Бауре, чији еволуциони модел види епске традиције које нису изнедриле дуге епове као инфериорне у односу на старогрчку или ведску, те предвиђа сложенији и напреднији друштвени и национални ниво као предуслов за рађање таквих дугих епских песама као пуног остварења епског жанра. Затим је показано да су оваква жанровска одређења махом заснована на прилично ригидним разматрањима хомерских епова, те да нису у складу како с проучавањима краћих епских форми (поглавито руских биљина и јужнословенских јуначких песама) у радовима словенских фолклориста, тако ни с многобројним примерима сакупљеним из различитих усмених традиција у новије време. Овај се чланак стога залаже за свеобухватније, функционално схватање и жанровско одређење епике које сваку појединачну епску традицију посматра у складу са специфичним контекстом у којем се она јавља.

Неадекватност ранијих дефиниција илустрована је на примерима епизоде с Терситом из другог певања *Илијаде* и јужнословенских песама о Марку Краљевићу. Како је истакнуто, српска традиција и сличне епске традиције које се састоје од мноштва самосталних или, у најбољем случају, лабаво повезаних кратких песама не представљају почетну, недовршену фазу у настанку великог епског спева, већ специфичне и целовите епске традиције.

Према томе, низ показатеља говори у прилог тврдњама савремених фолклориста да хегелијанско и бахтиновско схватање епике, заправо, превиђа инхерентну полифоност епског дискурса као конститутивну одлику жанра. У најкраћем, док теоретичари као што су Хегел и Бахтин представљају епику у оквиру њихових свеобухватних теоријских разматрања и класификација књижевних врста, специјалисти у области студија усмене културе истичу разноврсност и сложеност различитих епских традиција и одбацују идеју да епика говори само једним гласом који може бити једноставно идентификован с погледима који припадају доминантној класи и у складу су са званичном идеологијом.

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