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## THE FUNCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF FORMULA IN SERBIAN DECASYLLABIC EPIC POETRY

*Abstract:* The subject of this paper is application range of Parry-Lord's definition of epic formula within the Serbian decasyllabic epic poetry criticism. Advocating the thesis that "Homeric question" is not the most desirable research context for epic poetry in short meter (decasyllabic) and only by exception longer than 1000 verses, the author offers eight elementary prepositions as a start point for discussion on possibilities and problems connected with definition of epic formula in general. Key words: "Homeric question", epic formula, formulaity, constructive text borders, cliché, communication, relational and deep information.

Serbian decasyllabic epic poetry is a complex phenomenon in the oral literary tradition which opens up not only one but several analytic levels. On the versificatory level, it is sung in a meter which emerges almost untouched from praslavonic antiquity (Jakobson; Ivanov & Toporov; Gasparov), so by its mere structure it "memorizes" more than is usually found in the words that are put into it. On the history of genres level, it is classified as a high medieval epic with national conscience and pathos as its fundamental characteristics (Meletinski), therefore its acute ideological attitude (to protect and defend the state, church, and nation). On the theory of literature level, it belongs to the "aesthetics of identity" (Lotman), which means that it cannot be well studied or adequately understood without some substantial knowledge about the specific type of culture in which this aesthetics is logical as a valuation system. Finally, on the level of poetics nothing can be achieved unless all the above were kept in mind - in fact, no specific poetic problem can be solved unless that solution is satisfactory on all the other analytic levels as well.

The epic formula problem is not an exception. Though there's no doubt it should be solved as a question belonging to the epic genre theory, the scientific interest was focused on it not in this, but in the context of "Homeric question". For Serbian decasyllabic epic poetry that was both good and bad. The good side of it was that, mainly because of the American well-known sense for praxis, from the very beginning the exploration of formula covered the widest space of oral literature profusion, both in geographic (Europe, both Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia) and historical sense (from archaic epics to contemporary epic tradition wherever it could be found, and even to the patterns of speech in everyday verbal communication).<sup>1</sup> The gain was not only in new and interesting data, but also in a huge comparative body to be used for checking old and testing new theories. However, the bad thing was its starting point - two Homeric epics with verses both long (hexameter) and plenty (27000 verses). As the shortness and length in the domain of poetics do not merely result from the quantitative differences in the phenomena with similar or exactly the same properties, but imply substantially different treatment in all relevant points concerning meter and text composition, the results of Homeric studies only partially and with great reservations can be extended to the epic song in short meter (decasyllabic) and only by exception longer than 1000 verses. Unfortunately too, the main event concerning formulas - Parry's and Lord's work on the spot - was motivated by the need to show in practice whether the oral versemaking of a long epic was possible or not, which is understandable - the crucial question of Homeric studies being the authorship of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. So it happened that the greatest scientific event in the twentieth century homerology was founded on a, by that time, decadent epic poetry of a few Bosnian Moslem singers who - with no personal blame and, though, probably gifted - were by no way true epic bards any longer.<sup>2</sup> Having their final goal in mind, both Parry and Lord, as well as their followers, circumvented the high decasyllabic oral poetry, not even using it to correct

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1 Ong, 1982. for example.

2 Ljubinković, 1991. In the oral literature studies they are usually spoken of as epigons, with the exception of Avdo Mededović who is valued as an exceptional poet and not a singer only (Kravar, 1979). Even if this opinion (highly far fetched, as far as we are concerned) on Mededović's gift is accepted, there should yet be reservations considering the anachronism of both the phenomenon and the circumstances of his singing, which certainly has some significance from the point of view of genre criticism (see Meletinski, 1963, 1964).

some of their general conclusions, the effect of which was often far-reaching.<sup>3</sup>

Anyway, this great American enterprise - though for Homeric and folklore studies its value cannot be overestimated - didn't prove the same in the Serbian decasyllabic oral epic studies.<sup>4</sup> Even from the beginning, with the first appearance of Parry's definition of formula and Lord's three principles,<sup>5</sup> it was obvious that following that course can end only in the conclusion: "There's nothing in the song that is not formulaic".<sup>6</sup> If that is understood literally, almost immediately there emerges the need for massive redefining of terminology already in use in oral literature studies. Besides being senseless, it was also by no means either Parry's or Lord's intention. Being classical philologists by profession and keeping always in mind the final goal of their work (proving the possibility of oral origin of Homeric epics), at a certain moment they lost track of two tiny things which linguists and folklorists (having, by definition, to cope with living structures) spotted at sight:<sup>7</sup> a) formulaity is not characteristic of epic language only, but - more or less - of verbal communication "*in concreto* as the practice of language *in abstracto*";<sup>8</sup> b) therefore it is necessary to discern between formulas coming from everyday speech (and necessarily going through changes while adjusting to metric-syntactic pattern of asymmetric decasyllabic verse)<sup>9</sup> from the formulas as an important element of technique, style, and composition in traditional epic versemaking.

3 The epic repetitions in one of Salih Ugljanin's long poems, if not compared to the same kind of repetitions - for example - in "The Mother of Jugovichi" or "The Death of Ivo of Senj", and if they figure as the only reference in validating the aesthetic and stylistic qualities of this epic technique in Serbian decasyllabic verse poetry, will always lead to conclusions such as those by G. S. Kirk in *Homer and the Epic*: that South Slavic epic poetry is unsuccessful in effect and "naive in technique" compared to Homer (p. 20) and that the antique aoidoi "were primarily creative poets while the latter /*guslari*/ are primarily if not exclusively non-creative and reproductive." (p. 24)

4 See about it Maticki, 1982; Kravar, 1979; Ljubinković, 1991.

5 "By formula I mean 'a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea'. This definition is Parry's. By formulaic expression I denote a line or half line constructed on the pattern of the formulas. By theme I refer to the repeated incidents and descriptive passages in the songs." Lord, 1964, p. 4.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

7 Criticism of this kind was given, for example, by Hoekstra (1964), Hainsworth (1969), Kravar (1978), Ong (1982), Мальцев (1989).

8 Kravar, 1978, p. 95.

9 On this, see Petković, 1990, pp. 201, 203.

According to this, any definition pretending to solve the problem of relation between formula and formulaity and to offer an acceptable measure for it, should above all pay attention to the following: the epic formula is a tool resulting from the "working" of formulaity within the framework of the secondary linguistic system of epic poetry; the relation between them is a generic one, formulaity being only one of conditions necessary for creating formulas and not identical with them. Naturally, such a definition could not help being systemic,<sup>10</sup> and for that reason it would not be welcome in Homeric studies. Nevertheless, starting from the fact that formulaity is a paradigmatic element of every primary linguistic system and promoting that position as the only valid one for defining it as the "essential property of oral literature to make formulas in order to use them as a basic tool of expression and artistic modeling"<sup>11</sup> - therefore property, and not the tool which is yet to result from that property, it is valid for us from the very point where it becomes useless for homerology, because it turns us back to the epic itself and the regulations of its modeling in the language which is an artificial, secondary, and from the natural language derived system.

The same qualities of derivativeness and artificiality are naturally characteristic for all other elements of epic poetics. From the beginning to the end, an epic song is a construction built according to the given rules and on the structural basis which is known in advance. Besides all this, it is also an act of orality which comes into being during the communication process that largely exceeds the borders of text itself, regardless of the means of its performance (singing, reciting, with or without an instrument etc.). It is usually forgotten that within the cultures of literacy the person who reads is used to recognize text borders at many different levels: starting from the material body of the book as an object, via outer limits of its text (title and "the end" on the last page), to its diversely nuanced inner borders, i.e. chapter, graphic design of stanza and verse, and so on. From the reader's point of view, those are all conventions understood per se and therefore not expected to be carriers of any relevant literary information. Nevertheless, it is precisely owing to them that literary universe is efficiently and clearly

10 Which means it needs additional defining (of formulaity, primary and secondary linguistic systems and so on) and usually cannot be used without them. Nevertheless, as a relational assertion, it is good because it is true - until a better one is found. Lord himself - in *The Singer of Tales* - probably felt this same need for system as he put his three main definitions together.

11 Pešić & Milošević Đorđević, 1984, s.v. Formulativnost.

separated from the world of reality, for the reader in every single instant is given an unequivocal sign that - from the very moment he enters that universe - he dwells in a different chronotopos dominated by the time of reading.<sup>12</sup> In the case of oral literary communication, where there is no dominant but both time and place of listening are actualized to the same degree, neither singer nor his audience can count on conventional short cuts of the kind. An obvious need for them is, therefore, to be satisfied in some other way. Besides, in an oral performance context, which itself is not convenient for distinguishing a colloquial from a poetic idiom, signaling that one stops and the other starts must by all means engage more than one instrument of sending information of such importance, and more than one communication level for its transfer. On the performance level it doesn't have to (although it might) exceed the testing of the "channel" clearance (gestures, silencing the audience, coughing, adjusting the instrument if it is going to be used, etc.), but on the message formalization level the choice of tools is reduced to potentials of language itself. Though these potentials are by no means small, at this stage the flexibility and power of formulas as carriers of specific code information are fully stressed. They are acting like "shifters",<sup>13</sup> signaling not only that a poetic idiom is going in and out of the spoken chain (initial and final formulas), but also that one structural segment is ending and the other one beginning in the process of composition of poem (inner formulas). Although this means that formulas for an audience that listens fulfill the same purpose which in the case of a book-as-an-object is done by its graphic design, their part in the very making, relating, and transferring of an oral text is far more significant and profound.

### *Toward the rehabilitation of the term " cliché "*

Proceeding from the fact that segmentation the construction principle all acts of speech are built upon, the aspect of principal categories is the very context in which a literary text will have to distinguish itself from the natural language as a secondary, artificial, derived system.

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12 Of course, it doesn't mean that literary text borders don't carry other and different informations. They certainly do, but only if they were brought out of their conventional framework, and if observed in context of literary work of art as a conceptual - not material - entity. If this were the case, the very principle by which a linguistic material is organized into literary text, i.e. its very structure - comes in the forefront.

13 Within Serbian literary criticism, this term was promoted by N. Petković (*Ogledi iz srpske poetike*, Beograd, 1990, especially the chapter O klasifikaciji i prirodi književnih tekstova, p. 21 and on).

First of all, its borders are absolute (its beginning and ending cannot be changed unless a new text is formed), compared to fluctual and spontaneous borderlines of natural speech. Further on, in the case of epic song it is also a speech in verse, verse being a subject to rules of segmentation according to metric principles that imply an additional arrangement of the spoken chain, thus automatically becoming far more strict than anything that is valid for natural language system. Within the given limits, submitting to metric-syntactic pattern of asymmetric decasyllabic verse, an epic song is getting organized as a literary text by modeling its linguistic material into smaller entities, i.e. into segments arranged in chains, the same way as - generally - half-verses are bound into verses, verses into stanzas, stanzas into poem as a whole. Therefore, an epic song has, beside the outer, many inner borders formed in-between the successive segments on the points of their contact. These are the points of constructive significance in the making of the song. Because they are significant and stressed, those borders - as well as the outer ones - can also be defined as constructive.<sup>14</sup> *All constructive borders in an epic song are marked (stressed as significant) by epic formulas. Why?*

From the point of view of text, the beginning and the end are subject to the greatest semantic tension because they are absolute and they mark the borders of a unique universe which has sense only within those borders and thus exists only within them. In oral communication these two points carry an extra burden since - as we have already said - they have to be distinguished from the noise in the situation of speech. Because of this, even if the poet would like it otherwise, the poem cannot begin its narration in medias res: it needs shifters not to make the communication more efficient (as is usually supposed), but merely to make it work. From that point of view, the epic shares the fate of other, more or less similar narrative genres of oral literature.<sup>15</sup> There too, especially in the case of fairy-tale, the beginning and the end have the function of being distinguished from noise, of leading in and out from the real world to a fictitious one and vice versa. Therefore, they suffer pressure greater than usual, they have tendency to become petrified, to gain a fixed and easily recognizable, highly communicative form.<sup>16</sup> In other words, they are becoming clichés.

14 On this term (constructive borders and their function) see N. Petković, *Ibid.*

15 See, for example, Samardžija, 1988.

16 Such a form, as a form of cliché, is also named sense-creating form (see Petković, 1990, 20).

The same tendency can be observed in case of smaller entities and their borders, what we have already named as epic poem's segments, and what in fact is nothing else but Lord's "theme". An epic poem, being an oral interpretation, every time created anew and only for the present and unique purpose, naturally becomes irreversible. This means that - differently from written text - one cannot examine it up and down and right and left, so the significance of a cliché in the process of its making and relating overruns by far the limitations rendered to it by definition. Emerging on the points of contact between poem's constructive segments, cliché - *inter alia* - marks the rhythm of its narration; no other poetic device could do it better for the epics which is deprived both of rhyme and stanzas. Besides, including by large scope the "themes" themselves and not only the points of their contact, cliché - by its rigid form - enables the transversability of "themes" to different texts and different genres. Thus, narration becomes lighter and the attention is turned from unimportant and less important to its central elements. Finally, in some special cases (which are not rare at all), cliché of an initial formula can pattern the structure of a poem as a whole, as was argued by Schmauss on the example of "raven the news-bearer".<sup>17</sup> This is exactly the point where one can easily see that cliché with its petrified form - which outside of Lotman's "aesthetics of identity" gets only negative connotations - in fact conserves the most ancient semantic text layers, that "something" which could easily be called a *prae-text* and which would, without that petrified form, be lost to us forever by a long-lasting process of degradation and trivialization.

Advocating, therefore, the rehabilitation of the term cliché in oral literature criticism, we can now go back to the epic formula, keeping always in mind that in this paper it is defined as a special type of cliché.

### *The "essential idea"*

Organizing rhythm of narration by pointing out the constructive text borders is easy to prove empirically. For that reason, it might be used as a check-point of applicability of Parry-Lord's definition of formula as a "group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea". Keeping in mind that no other definition of formula is nowadays seriously in circula-

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17 Schmauss, 1971, III, pp. 334-355.

tion,<sup>18</sup> it is important to examine its compatibility with goals of research significant this time not for homerology but for Serbian decasyllabic epics, and to solve it as a kind of "preliminary question".

From that point of view, our attention is at the first place drawn to the lack of precision in the formulation "given essential idea", especially when it comes to so called inner formulas. By this term - "inner" - they are named after their medial function, which means that they can never and under any conditions be situated either at the beginning or at the ending of a poem: in fact, they are devised only as a means of smooth connection between the successive segments of a poem, so their dependence on the direct semantic environment is twofold. It may also be stated that they have two open joints: first, or upper one (by analogy with written text, we could imagine the text flow of epic poem as a vertical line), connected with the aspect of past (what ended in the previous segment), and the second, or lower one, connected with the aspect of future (what is yet to come in the next segment). At the beginning of a poem, this upper joint would remain unconnected (before the poem started nothing else existed), and at its end the same would happen to the lower one (after the poem is finished, nothing else will exist). Besides, being open on both sides, inner formula inevitably becomes lexically and syntactically flexible. Thus, under direct influence of its context, one and the same inner formula appears in many varied forms, for example: "Kad u jutru jutro osvanulo", "Kad im sjutra jutro osvanulo", "Kad ujutru beo dan osvanu", "Kad je jutru o zorici bilo", "A kad sjutra dan i zora dođe", "Kad četvrto/deseto jutro osvanulo", "No kad jutrom sunce ogranulo"<sup>19</sup> and so on. Outer formulas (initial and final), being open at one end only, are less submissive to variations of the kind, but they exhibit the tendency of multiplying (or system constructing) which cannot be observed with inner formulas. Poems very often both begin and end by a chain of two, three or more corresponding formulas, for example: "Još zorica nije zab'jelila, / Ni danica lica pomolila, / Bijela je vila pokliknula / Sa Avale zelene planine"; "Zdravo Šćepan u Bijograd dođe / I dovede Tursku bulu mladu, /

18 Homerology offered (and still offers) many different definitions of epic formula (see VanGennep, 1909; Bowra, 1952; Nagler, 1969), but Parry's definition is most in use. In fact, no definition is generally considered either better or more convenient than this one.

19 "When at the dawn the morning dawned", "When tomorrow the morning dawned to them", "When in the morning the white day dawned", "When in the morning it was about dawn", "And when tomorrow the day and the dawn came", "Then at the dawn of the fourth/tenth day's morning", "But when at the dawn the sun rose".



Nabavio dvan'est kaluđera, / Krstiše je i zlamenovaše, / I uze je za vjernu ljubovcu. / To je bilo kad se i činilo, / Već za slavu Boga da molimo / I za zdravlje vladike svetoga, / Amin, Bože, vazda te molimo!"<sup>20</sup> (Vuk II,95). This strategy is motivated by the need to stress the beginning and the end as constructively strong points of a poem and to underline them as the carriers of a special kind of code signal (as we already mentioned before). On the contrary, if sequenced, the inner formulas should draw massive attention upon themselves (which, in fact, is the point in sequencing and multiplying), and consequently disorganize the flow of narration. In both cases, therefore, the position of formulas defines their function, and this function, then, defines their variability.<sup>21</sup> The essential idea, whatever it might be, if this were not built into it, loses its adjective and remains merely an idea.

In accordance with diversity of situations and great number of actions that take part in the plot of epic poem, there are many different types of inner formulas. At this point we shall be satisfied with only two extreme cases.

The most numerous are the inner formulas of the following type: "Alabanda, zametnu se kavga", "Kad ujutru jutro osvanulo", "Pramen se je magle zadenuo", "Malo bilo, ništa ne stanulo", "Da je kome stati pa gledati"<sup>22</sup> and so on. Information they carry is always identical to itself, which makes their constructive-rhythmical function only more obvious. In fact, there is no reason to burden this function by any additional service, and the essential ideas distributed this way ("a quarrel burst out", "the dawn broke", "fog came down after gun shooting", "soon after", "it was worth seeing") are not significant by themselves. Formulas of this type acquire sense only if they act as shifters, as highly economic and functional tools which mark the type of changes brought by a new segment into an already fulfilled narration. Those markers, as even such a poor number of examples can show, are usually temporal and situational, but they can also be local ("Dok se

20 "No white dawn has broken yet, / Nor the North star shown her face, / The white fairy cries, / She cries from Avala the mountain"; "Stephen came to Belgrade in good health, / And he brought a fair Turkish girl with him, / He fetched twelve monks, / To christen and to baptize her, / And he married her his fateful wife. / It occurred when it happened, / But to praise God and to pray for glory / And for the health of his holy eminence, / Amen, God, we ever pray to you!". (Translation is literal.)

21 There is, in Матъцев (1989, p. 53), the term "variation field of formula".

22 "Alabanda, the quarrel burst out"; "When at the dawn the morning came"; "A trace of fog came by"; "Short time passed, no time at all".

prašak magle zamaglio, / A iz magle dobar junak skače", "Pramen magle polje pritiskao")<sup>23</sup>, and often even extra textual ("Da je kome stati pa gledati", "Da da ti je bilo poslušati"),<sup>24</sup> whenever there is need for a singer to intervene not as a story teller or a participant of narrative action, but as a participant in the very act of communicating the poem.<sup>25</sup> This special case of direct communication with the audience confirms both the significance and the role of shifters in epic text. Although its action is inconspicuous, it nevertheless implies a few very important things, i.e.: stepping out of the narrative context and coming back into it, a sudden and short lasting shift of narrator's optics, a breach in the process of sending the message, a change in the way of its reception. The only purpose of doing so is to draw the attention to what is about to come, by which the borderline between what has already been and what is yet to be is automatically stressed. This shows again that the "essential idea" cannot be separated from the position of formula and its function. In this particular case, for every single example and for all of them as a whole, the essential idea goes as follows: "this is over, now something new starts".

Another type of inner formulas is much more rare and very much different. Its unusual and exceedingly significant characteristics might very well be a subject to quite a large study, but on this occasion we shall focus on one of them only, on the formula "Kad su bili gorom putujućii".<sup>26</sup> On this example we shall try roughly to show its importance for epic poetry in general.

While in the case of the first cited type of inner formulas some essential idea could be derived from the formula itself without knowing its context, in the case of "Kad su bili gorom putujućii" it will not be possible - unless the essential idea is defined as a mere assertion that some people were traveling through a forest. But, knowing that after

23 "A trace of fog came by, / And from this fog a brave hero jumped out", "A trace of fog lay on the field".

24 "If anyone were there to see this": "If only you were there to listen to it".

25 Formulas of direct speech can also be variable. For example, "watching" formulas thus used exhibit both types: "When he saw it..."; "Somebody sees it and somebody doesn't"; "If you only saw..."; "Stop and watch it ..."; "If you could only see it with your own eyes"; "If you were only to see ..."; "If you were only to stop and to watch..." and so on.

26 "And as they traveled through the forest trees". All citations from the poem "The Wedding of Milich the Ensign" come from the book *Marko the Prince. Serbo-Croat Heroic Songs*, translated by Anne Pennington & Peter Levi, Duckworth, London, 1984.

this the oncoming verse says: "Stiže urok na konju đevojku",<sup>27</sup> even if the title of the poem is hidden to us ("Ženiđba Milića barjaktara" /The Wedding of Milich the Ensign/) and its plot unknown, the information we receive is nevertheless complete because there is no doubt that the introduction of "urok" (evil/charm) will bring a crucial change into narration (whatever it might have been so far).<sup>28</sup> Thus, the function of punctuating the borderlines between the narrative segments of the poem is also performed. However, if the essential idea from the above definition is understood as a leading (i.e. semantically loaded to the maximum) and not as a rudimentary one (semantically loaded to the minimum) - for both are logically possible, we shall see that such an idea in the case of the "forest" and the "charm/evil" is very difficult even to describe, let alone to define in one or two sentences of general type.<sup>29</sup> Besides, the complex meaning of this distich is equally distributed between both its components, but only one is a part of formula (forest) and the other (charm/evil) is free. The truth is that any announcement of going in or through an epic forest by the means of formula, will activate the connotations of forest as a chthonic place and prepare audience for a suitable event.<sup>30</sup>

Although the source of this information is always known in advance, although the conditions of its reception are equal for every member of audience, the influx of meaning this information carries on will not be the same for everyone. The most of it will be made by a

27 "The evil came to her on her own horse". For the word "urok", charm (meaning magical charm) is better translation. Bound by existing book of translations, we shall use both of them in the form "evil/charm".

28 Like all inner formulas, this one too have lose joints. Depending on context, it can be observed in many different forms, for example: *A kad bili usrid gore crne* (after this betrayal and punishment of infidel wife follow); *A kad bili u gori zelenoj* (after this "hajduks" attack wedding party and assassin the groom); *A kad bili nasred crne gore* (introducing the exhibition of miracle) and so on.

29 In "The Wedding of Milich the Ensign" this evil/charm is an impure and supernatural force acting as magic of words. Expressing his adoration, Milich unknowingly utters death penalty for his bride-to-be. Neither time nor place this force will be activated in is chosen by chance: epic forest is a chthonic space by eminence and thus the natural resort of impure powers. It is also the place these powers are banned to by magic charms. Indications like "the evil came to her" advocate this. More about it Detelić, 1992, s.v. Gora.

30 In this sense the essential idea really is inseparable and important element of epic formula and its functions. Yet, poetic tools of such a force are very scarce not only in Serbian but in oral epic poetry in general. If such a high criteria should be applied consequently, only a few formulas would survive (not more than twenty in case of Serbian epics). It is hard to believe that Lord and Parry did have this on mind.

person who knows the proper way of decoding categories "forest" and "charm/evil", that means for the person accustomed to the connotations forest and charm/evil inevitably acquire through correlative relationship of epics and Serbian traditional culture.<sup>31</sup> Such a person does not receive message only on one, nominal level (as was the case with formulas of the first mentioned type - the relational information about structural function of formula set aside), but on as many semantic levels as his knowledge allows. If all participants in communication of epic poem belong to the one and same type of culture, the exchange of information (incoding and decoding of message) is proceeding on the same level, the equal measure of knowledge being shared by whole community. On the contrary, the same instant this optimal balance is disturbed no matter how, the danger of superficial or incorrect interpretation and misunderstanding grows unpredictably. A special case of this is total alienation of one who reads transcription of an oral epic poem.

As it is, the greatest damage was done to oral epic poetry when it was considered a complex of "naive" texts, when it seemed that the most important thing was to decide what is false and what true from the historical point of view.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, even the greatest achievement of Parry-Lordian method - *The Singer of Tales* - is a kind of dead end because what it's really doing is in fact describing the mere technique of versemaking and singing accompanied by "gusle", while to the questions of genre aesthetics and poetics it offers no satisfactory answers.<sup>33</sup> So, although its argument might seem different, *The Singer of Tales* shares the same attitude with those who classify epic texts as naive, a mere act of interpretation which transpires within the narrow passage from a generic poem to its actual variation. But whenever it was analyzed with profound and serious knowledge of tradition

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31 Any oral literature is correlative with the culture it belongs to and all traditional cultures share the same basic characteristics. Seeing that this relation is universal, for a relatively exact decoding of this information a simple conclusion by analogy is good enough.

32 Like all works of art, oral epic poetry knows for one truth only - its own. That truth is never jeopardized by any participant in an epic poem communication. What is more important still, such a truth cannot be separated from epic tradition in general, and good epic singers always knew that. Even the latest among them (songs about rebellion and Montenegrin historical poems) had to adopt this traditional attitude in order to be sung at all. This omitted, their subject was not considered an epic event.

33 See Мальцев, 1989.

it belongs to, oral epic poetry exhibited all its potentials, offering a picture of complex and multilevel phenomenon the meaning of which exceeds by far the borderlines of text itself - no matter how wide they might be. From the point of view of formula, this discrepancy between the meaning of the whole and the sum of the meanings of its elements cannot be either perceived or understood properly without elementary knowledge of cliché - how it's made and how it works.

Of all genres of oral literature, proverb is characterized by the simplest form of spoken cliché. A proverb is also a trope (a complex, secondary sign), because description of some initial situation, event or image that performs its subject material, is not a goal by itself (as it should be in a natural language), but is used to describe other and different but compatible situations, events, and images.<sup>34</sup> Therefore it is obvious "that cliché is a creation more complex than an ordinary linguistic text, because it is doubled: first, text is formed from linguistic units, and then this text as a whole serves as a new unit of description."<sup>35</sup> So, proverb has a structure of trope, the elements of which can also be different tropes (simile, metaphor, etc.). Out of this close mutual relation (trope within a trope), a potential source of additional meanings is formed and activated with every new application of the proverb, so its semantic field remains always open. Because of all this, successful proverb gains the influx of meaning and thus widens and enriches its initial material without limitations, even though its starting point might be forgotten or untraceable.<sup>36</sup> To answer to all these needs, a proverb has to "act" in a way most properly described as "linear dissipation". A network of its spreading or developing is made by intersections of the *meaning taken* and the *meaning brought*, that is of the old and the new application in every single case. By that, very rich meanders are made and the meaning is widened but not deepened. To make it work in deep, this process must be adversely oriented. In that case, the activation of new meanings is no longer triggered by the application of cliché, but by the initial situation generating the cliché. In proverbs, this initial situation is drawn to the very surface and exhausted, so it can no longer be considered a source of new relevant information. In epics, it's the opposite case.

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34 See Petković, 1990, pp. 21,22.

35 Ibid, p.22.

36 On this, see Detelić, 1985, pp. 349-375.

An epic formula "works" in deep. Its linguistic form is, according to Mal'cev, "a point of the iceberg",<sup>37</sup> message the codes of which can be changed with no influence on the meaning built into it. Within the general theory of information such a case is impossible, and even the sentence by which it is described would be considered invalid and illogical. Nevertheless, it is true in this specific context, because the source of meanings for epic formulas is not epics but tradition, which means that - as far as the epic poetry is concerned - what we have to cope with in fact is the question of acceptable decoding. To abridge the hierarchical level chasm between epics and tradition, formula is needed as a form that generates meaning despite the code changes. By this quality, it can be described as a sense-creating form. In other words, the influx of meaning in the way an epic formula works is oriented from the bottom to the point of "an iceberg", i.e. from a traditional culture as a mutual source of meanings for the oral literature as a whole, to a genre and its actualization (epic poem). If this is true, the confirmation should be found in "close reading" of text.

### *Formula "remembers"*

As an example, we could take the afore mentioned "The Wedding of Milich the Ensign" (Vuk III. 78). By many characteristics, this poem is rightly considered one of the highest points of Serbian decasyllabic epic poetry, and for that reason it is usually unavoidable in the study of this genre poetics. In the monograph *The Mythical Space and the Epics*<sup>38</sup> we have already dealt with it - from the point of view of mythopoetics of epic topos, concentrating especially on the motive of death during the wedding as a variation of general motive of death in the forest. This time we shall approach the analysis from the aspect of formulas, which was not within our previous consideration.

What is first to be observed here is the great number (I-X) of duplications<sup>39</sup> (verses: I 3-5/17-19; II 73-76/77-81; III 94-98/102-106; IV 154-163/165-175; V 178-180/243-245; VI 186-188/231-233; VII 190-193/252-255; VIII 212-213/216-217; IX 257-258/282-283; X 266-268/274-276). Adding the repetitions which are not literal (verses: 1/8; 20/24; 43-45/67-70; 194-201/248-251; 269-273/277-280), we shall see

37 Мальцев, 1989, p. 68

38 Beograd, 1992; also Detelić, 1989.

39 Not repetitions but duplications (when the attention is paid that repetitions should never be more than two).

that of 284 verses (total number of verses in this poem) even 112 are inflicted by this technique. Of the rest, a major part is dealing with the description of the wedding party going for the bride (48-55) and coming back with her (140-146), or in describing the bride's beauty (25-40) and the beauty of her dowry (114-139), which is pertinent to the same scheme but in a more casual way. This means that a little over one half of the total linguistic material of this poem (156 of 284 verses) is used to fulfill a given structural pattern which now can be named as parallelism.

Independent from their number, these duplications are themselves split in two unequal groups, the first and more numerous one consisting of stylistic tautologies (structurally unrestricted duplications as: direct and indirect speech - duplications I, II and VIII, direct speech with the change of speaking voice - duplications III and IV, duplications functioning as reports - VI, and duplications of final formulas - IX). Being tautological, doesn't mean these duplications are of no use or of lesser significance. On the contrary, they generally carry an exquisitely complex meaning (especially duplications III, IV and VI), but from the aspect of text composition there is no need for duplicating. As one of the most ostentatious elements of epic style, they are fully justified as carriers of specific, relational information which becomes significant only in the context of the poem as a whole.

A smaller number of duplications (V, VII and X) is not based on tautology but on parallel flow of events and actions, so they can be named true parallelisms. While in the former case the most important issue was *what* is duplicated (so the duplication for narration, strictly speaking, is useless because it becomes mere retelling), in the latter group *what* and *how* and *where* and *when* is duplicated are of same importance. It is best shown in the verses themselves:

#### Duplications V

<i>The bride's man takes her from her horse's back</i>	<i>When Milich the Ensign came in to it</i>
<i>And lays her down to lie in the green grass</i>	<i>He lay down on that bed so softly spread</i>
<i>He lays her down, she breathes her soul away.</i>	<i>He lay down and he breathed his soul away.</i>

*(Dever skide sa konja devojku, / Pa je spusti na zelenu travu, / On je spusti, ona dušu pusti. // Kako dođe Milić barjaktare, / On se spusti na meku postelju, / Dok se spusti, on dušu ispusti.)*

## Duplications VII

<i>And they cut out her coffin with sword-blades</i>	<i>And they cut out his coffin with sword-blades</i>
<i>And dug her grave out with their pick-axes.</i>	<i>And dug his grave out with their pick-axes.</i>
<i>And so they burried that beautiful girl</i>	<i>So there they burried Milich the En- sign</i>
<i>Towards the rising of the splendid sun.</i>	<i>Towards the setting of the splendid sun</i>

*(Sabljama joj sanduk satesaše, / Nadžacima raku iskopaše, / Saraniše lijepu devojkju / Ot-  
kuda se jasno sunce rada.//  
Sabljama mu sanduk satesaše, / Nadžacima raku iskopaše, / Saraniše Milić barjaktara /  
Kuda jarko smiruje se sunce.)*

## Duplications X

<i>.And when the sun sinks into his west</i>	<i>But when the sun rises into his east</i>
<i>The mother of Milich comes out to it.</i>	<i>The mother of Milich comes out to it.</i>
<i>She speaks and her eye follows the sun down:</i>	<i>And she speaks and her eye follows the sun</i>
<i>'Now it is sweet to me, O my God.</i>	<i>'Here is my daughter, it is sweet to me</i>
<i>There is my son, now it is sweet to me!</i>	<i>She brings water, she carries cold water.</i>
<i>Now he is coming home from his hunting</i>	<i>She wants to take my place, old as I am.'</i>
<i>Bringing his mother game of every kind!</i>	<i>No daughter and no news of a daugh- ter.</i>
<i>Neither her son nor any news of him.</i>	

*(Kada bude na zahodu sunce, / Tad' izlazi Milićeva majka, / Pa govori, a za suncem  
gleda: / "Blago mene i do Boga moga! / Blago mene, eto sina moga! / Eno g' majci, de iz  
lova ide, / Nosi majci lova svakojaka!" / Ni bi sina, ni od sina glasa //  
Kada bude na istoku sunce, / Izilazi Milićeva majka, / Sunce gleda pake progovara: /  
"Blago mene, eto mi snašice! / Ide s vode, nosi vode ladne / Hoće mene staru zam'jeniti!" /  
Ni bi snahe, ni od snahe glasa.)*

Parallelism is in practice a deceiving figure of style so it should be always approached with reservations. In this particular case, to know what is parallel to what and under what conditions, we should review some important details the cited verses cannot be understood without. First of all, this is a poem about a wedding (which is obvious even from the tittle), or - at least - about an intentional wedding which is not in the tittle but can be found in the text as a formula of miracle (7 times: "Mili Bože, čuda velikoga!" verse 1; "No da vidiš čuda



iznenada!" verse 8; "No ti hoću jedno čudo kazat" verse 20; "Čudo ljudi za đevojku kažu" verse 24; "Svi svatovi nikom ponikoše, / I u crnu zemlju pogledaše, / Ja od čuda lijepe đevojke" verses 91-93; "Al' da vidiš i čuda i fale!" verse 114),<sup>40</sup> and once even as an announcement ("Najbolji mu šure peškeš daju, / Najbolji je, najžešćijeh jada! / Svoju seku šure zetu daju" verses 129-131).<sup>41</sup> With the same purpose another form of insinuation can be found in this poem - the initial formula generally used at the beginning of the poems about epic weddings, but this time with an alternate meaning:

*Kad se ženi Milić barjaktare,  
On obiđe zemlju i gradove  
Od istoka pake do zapada,  
Prema sebe ne nađe đevojke:  
Glavit junak svakoj manu nađe;  
Ženidbe se proći hotijaše;  
No da vidiš čuda iznenada! (2-8)<sup>42</sup>*

Comparing this beginning to the classical initial formula of epic wedding, the difference is automatically observed:

*Kad se ženi Srpski car Stjepane,  
Na daleko zaprosi đevojku,  
U Ledanu gradu Latinskome,  
U Latinskog kralja Mijaila.  
Po imenu Rokсандu đevojku;  
Car je prosi, i kralj mu je daje (Vuk II,29: 1-6).<sup>43</sup>*

Poems about epic weddings with obstacles, the most numerous wedding poems of this genre which alters the topic by keeping in sight only the "male text" of the ritual wedding complex, are realized through the plot that always starts with the verse: "Na daleko zaprosi đevojku" /He looked far off to find himself a bride/. From the point of view of epics, a "far off" betrothal is a wrong move and cannot be ac-

40 vs. 1: "Merciful God, a great wonder!"; vs. 8: "But suddenly, Oh look, a great wonder!"; vs. 20: "But I will tell you of a great wonder"; vs. 24: "And miracles are spoken of that girl"; vs. 91-93: "All of them bowed a low bow down, / turning their eyes down to the dark earth. / Ach! She was a wonder of beauty"; vs. 114: "But, O the wonder and O the honour".

41 vs. 129-131: "But the brothers brought him the best present, / the best present and the hardest of sorrows, / they brought their sister to the son-in-law".

42 "When Milich the Ensign was to be wed / he traveled the land over, town by town, / into the east, round to the west again, / he did not find a girl fitted for him. / a handsome boy finds fault with all the girls. / His mood was to let the wedding plan go hang, / but suddenly, Oh look, a great wonder!"

43 "When Stephen Tsar of Serbia married, / he looked far off to find himself a bride, / he looked in Ledjan the Latin city, / city of Michael, of the Latin king, / and the name of the princess was Roxana. / The Tsar asked for the princess in marriage, / and King Michael consented to the match". Cited from the same book of translations ("Stephen Dushan's Wedding", vs. 1-8).

complished without serious consequences.<sup>44</sup> That means that wedding, to become an epical topic, first has to be reduced to "male text" only, and then promote some action of disorder. In the case of Milich the Ensign, differently from the poems about epic weddings with obstacles, disorder is brought not only into the chain of regular wedding events (what is prone to be interpreted as a break point in endogamy-exogamy relationship), but - and this is particularly stressed - the sin of vanity is committed also ("Glavit junak svakoj manu nađe" /A handsome boy finds fault with all the girls/).

Beginning like this, the poem tends to stress this line of action and to lead it to the point where it is no more logically needed. The next step on this line is irregular betrothal ("Nit' je prosi, ni jabuke daji, / Već ti kupi kićene svatove, / Pak ti idi Vidu po devojku" verses 43-45),<sup>45</sup> which is finally formulated in the verse "Potegli smo na Boga i sreću" (69)<sup>46</sup> Milich addressed his future father in law with "Namjera"<sup>47</sup> and "sreća" (fortune), especially as a context of citing God's name, in Serbian traditional culture have special characteristics and by their meaning are closely connected to the motive complex of destiny, which is fully documented in folklore.<sup>48</sup> Interpreted like this, cited verses are verified as an intention and preparation for the introduction of "evil/charm" which is brought into action immediately after. It is actually by them that responsibility for meaning, development, and outcome of events are clearly and definitely transferred into the world of higher powers where only numen decides and disposes absolutely. By this, human world is devoid of substance and becomes a theatre of shadows where actors never give up and never stop searching for the meaning because they are not conscious of the leading hand. Thus outlined, this vertical axes is not a figure of style but a vital axes of epic poetry existence in general, for it provides continuity and

44 More on this: Detelić, 1992, pp. 221-254

45 "Do not go ask, give no golden apple, / only gather the party finely dressed, / and go to Vid and bring back the girl".

46 "Trusting in God and fortune we set out".

47 That is, "namjera" from the verse no. 12: "Pred crkvom ga namjera namjeri" / and fortune brought him there outside the church". By this, the stress goes on the way Milich got information about his future bride. Serbian word "namjera" has a complex meaning. In this case it is used to signify something in between divine providence and accident. Milich met Maleta the Duke by chance, but this chance was prearranged by an invisible and unnoticeable higher (divine) power.

48 In charms, fairy tales, legends. More about it: Detelić, 1992, pp. 63-64, 290-292.

connection between layers of meaning different by provenance and duration.

Using formula as a main vehicle to accomplish this, epics is not bound to activate all the layers along this axes every time it confronts them, as well as - if it actually happens - it doesn't have to give evidence of its purpose. As an example, we could consider the "watching the wedding guest party" formula. In general, it is most often in poems about the abduction and christening of Turkish maiden. In "The Wedding of Milich the Ensign" it is used out of this context, but still in accordance with the plot:

*Kad su bili prem' Vidovu dvoru,  
Na pendžer se Vide naslonio,  
Psa kad vide kičene svatove,  
Sam je sobom Vide govorio:  
"Mili Bože, lijepijeh svata!  
Čiji li su, kud će po devojku?" (58-64)<sup>49</sup>*

On the contrary, in another epic poem - "Zaručnica Laza Radanovića" (Vuk II,7) - the use of the same formula:

*Kad su svati blizu dvora bili,  
Besedila devojačka majka:  
"Idu, ćerko, kičeni svatovi,  
U čije će dvore ulaziti?  
Čija će i majka dočekati? Čija l' braća konje privatiti?  
Čij' li baba vinom poslužiti?  
Čija l' seja darom darivati?" (9-16)<sup>50</sup>*

doesn't suit the plot for the maiden is regularly spoken for, so the wedding party doesn't come to fetch her unannounced.<sup>51</sup> This formula (in the form of questions and answers, i.e. duplicated) can be found in folklore ritual lyric poetry as a separate poem, which means that in ritual it has its proper place and doesn't need any explanation. Whether

49 "When they came opposite to Vid's house, / Vid leaned at the window of his house, / he saw the wedding party finely dressed, / and Vid spoke to himself in these words: / 'Merciful God! a handsome wedding party? / Whose is it, what girl is it fetching home?' " (vs. 58-63).

50 "When the wedding party was near the house, / Girl's mother said: / 'Daughter, wedding party finely dressed is coming, / Whose house they will enter? / Whose mother will welcome them? / Whose brothers take the horses? / Whose father serve them vine? / Whose sister give them presents?' " (This poem is not included in *Marko the Prince*. The present translation is literal and word-for-word rendering of the very meaning of cited verses.)

51 With the exception of Slavonic antithesis, rhetoric question is not standard figure of style in oral epic poetry. From the aspect of plot (what is immediately either before or after it), this formula is still insufficiently motivated, as if something is still lacking within the narrative chain. The question could probably be solved through comparative analysis of ritual wedding lyric poetry (e.g. Vuk I, 16. 89) and alike.

or not it is of substantial significance for the interpretation of such its irregular use in epics, is immaterial for our present purpose. Seemingly unnecessary, it is yet the only connection between the beginning of the poem (initial formula) and its crucial event: bride's quarrel with her mother and the curse resulting from it ("Mila kćeri, i tebe ne bilo! / Ni doprla tamo, ni ovamo! / Već ostala sredi gore čarne" verses 100-102).<sup>52</sup> So it happens that a small and unimportant detail (watching the wedding guest party) introduces indirectly the following segment which both poems share, and which is for both of crucial importance, i.e. the death of bride-to-be at the same spot (forest) and under the same conditions (of curse or evil - in both cases the magic of word). We might never be able to decode correctly and completely all the layers of meaning in this extraordinary formula, but we shall always succeed in marking such its motive function (bringing disorder) as the epic one, no matter the contextual extravaganzas.

On the other hand, the death from curse or evil, silent and bloodless as it always is when the higher power causes it,<sup>53</sup> forest as the place of its performance, and the way corpses are buried on the spot, introduces the whole specter of questions and problems that cannot be solved without knowledge of fundamental categories of Serbian traditional culture, that is without involving its basic ideas about this world and the other, life and death, ordinary and sacred space, and so on. This sphere is too vast and too complex to be incorporated in anything (on the contrary - everything else is incorporated in it), let alone the thematically limited paper on so called "lesser questions". It is important to show here how the formulas are managed in this context, so it's high time to review the parallelisms of our types V, VII and X cited above. The first and the most important thing to bear in mind is that the epics knows not of accident.<sup>54</sup> If the curse and evil are the cause of

52 "Dear daughter, may you not be! / May you not come either here or there! / But may you rest in the middle of a dark forest".

53 This way of dying has its own formula: "Dole leže, gore ne ustade" ("Down he lied, up he never got again"). Thus Marko the Prince dies by "God, the old hangman". For a specific interpretation of this particular formula see Nodilo, 1981, p. 345.

54 This is also the result of "action" along the cited vertical axes. Epic heroes, being human, may have the impression that things are happening hazardingly, they may even strongly believe in this, but above (or off) the events of their own world other forces are active. They, and not men, decide about the way and outcome of events, and for them the accident or hazard simply doesn't exist. There are many ways to express it through an epic poem: by a place with some special significance

death in the forest it is not because the singer likes it that way or because it suits the plot the best, but because forest is a chthonic space, the place evil, curse, and the like are regularly sent to by the magical charms, for it belongs to them as a waste, alien, and insubordinate to human order.<sup>55</sup> If a person should die there, there he or she will remain forever not only because such a place is impure by cult (and so is the deceased who is not permitted to the sacred space of graveyard), but also because such a person is already where he or she should be - in the world of dead where their existence goes on in a special way. This double functionality is characteristic of everything that goes on in the forest. Poem doesn't lie when it says that the water brought above the maiden's head, the bench around the water, and the roses on its both sides are labeled for the living: to the thirsty to drink, to the tired to rest, and to the young to adorn themselves "for the sake of beautiful maiden's soul". It simply doesn't feel the need to interpret what its proper audience already knows: that everything that goes "for the sake of one's soul" in fact belongs to the dead - water because they are always thirsty, money to pay for the entrance into the other world, roses to keep their souls. So, being the point where two opposite worlds meet, epical forest is the place of two realities, the place of transition and, for that matter, a dangerous place. And yet Milich's bride is buried on that place towards the east, "towards the rising of the bright sun".<sup>56</sup>

If it were not for this burial towards the east, the parallelism of Ljeptosava's and Milich's deaths should be devoid of all sense. The poem bears no indications whatsoever that the place of Milich's death (his home) is to be considered chthonic and impure: on the contrary, it is quite opposite, as well as the orientation of his grave (towards west, "where the glowing sun sets") is quite opposite to the situation of his bride's grave. So it happens that one element of equivalence (death by

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(forest, water, road, crossroads), by supernatural creatures that dwell there (dragons, fairies, vipers, beings with three heads, black Arabs, saints and angels, God himself), by forces the influence of which can be experienced there (evil/charm, curse, death, fate).

55 In charms. See Radenković, 1986.

56 Although this verse in translation from *Marko the Prince* goes: "towards the rising of the splendid sun" in both cases (of Milich and his bride), the actual word describing the sun is "bright" for the bride, and "glowing" for the groom. Poem insists on the difference between bright and glowing and has - as we shall soon see - special reasons for it. Because of that, we shall abandon *Marko the Prince* and stick to the literal translation.

higher power) brings along the whole chain of binary oppositions the significance of which is crucial for the tradition it belongs to: west-east, home-forest, male-female, pure-impure. It may freely be stated that such a parallelism is not bound by what is equal in it, but by what is different within the identical.

Now, if we split those pairs into parallel lines of identity, this will result in the following: west-home-male-pure and east-forest-female-impure. The first we observe here is the incompatibility of their elements: west and east seem to have exchanged their places by error<sup>57</sup> or to have erroneously even come into this context. And yet the poem literally insists on the connections west-male and east-female, not only in the middle of narration (on the burial of bride and groom) but also at its end - at the point which is itself marked as a strong one, when Milich's mother addresses west and east sun as her son and daughter in law. It is hard to believe that epics make errors in the matter of such importance.

What really is possible and acceptable, and what regularly happens not only in the epics but in oral literature in general, are various kinds of contamination, resulting usually from two combined processes: by overlapping of two or more genres, and by overlapping of many different layers of meaning within one and the same genre. In this particular case it is possible to find indications of both.

Tracing our steps backwards, the first approached layer is in fact the one in which the relationships male-female and pure-impure are not problematized but promoted as a standard element of custom-ritual wedding complex. As both the epic and lyric poetry exhibit their proper solutions for it, there is no reason for genre overlapping of any kind and we shall not observe them within this layer. The next step leads to semantic layer of opposition home-forest - one of the most general and the most potent generative principles of traditional culture. It includes the previous layer and enlarges it by new relationships (this world-other world, living-dead, human-numen, own-alien). Through the action of charm/evil, the man precisely here - as a vehicle of death

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57 East is, by tradition, male side of things and element of positive divisions (right hand side, the pure by cult - both the church altar and the house saint's icon face east, life - the folklore dance "kolo" faces east, and so on), while west is quite opposite: "kolo" for the dead faces west (in this poem too), the other world is on the west, when somebody dies in the house the corpse is brought out through the door that faces west, wife sits at the table on the left hand side (facing west), and alike.

by the magic of word - shows the indications of lethal principle for the first time. So, in the opposition male-female he is logically situated on the west side with all the consequences. On the other hand, forest - as a place of transition - has the power to change the significance of things going on in it and to transform momentary properties into permanent. Thus, the momentary cult impurity of betrothed maiden becomes permanent by her death and burial in the forest ("Ni kod moga ni kod tvoga dvora"), as well as the momentary chthonic property of the groom, after it enabled him to pass the forest alive and well, becomes permanent and thus makes his life at home impossible.<sup>58</sup> The activation of demon world (evil/charm, "namera", fortune, fate) at the place it belongs to and giving it the full power of influence, makes a part of lower mythology where the abstract functions of ancient pagan deities become concrete and enter the phase of nomination.<sup>59</sup> Within this layer the first genre overlapping are observed, as a great number of lyric poems offer the picture of abduction and death for the fetching of the bride, and for the parting with her form of ritual lamentation.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, at the deepest semantic layer - where the opposition east-west is branched into pairs: bright sun arising - glowing sun setting, daughter in law - son, Ljeposava-Milich - overlapping are twofold to the extreme, by their meaning connecting with solar myths, and by the genre with ritual lyric poetry. The poem gives manifold and significant indications about it, starting with the description of Milich's bride ("Ili si je od zlata salila? / Ili si je od srebra skovala? / Ili si je od sunca otela")<sup>61</sup> and of her influence on others ("Kroz marame zasijalo lice, / Svatovima oči zasjenile / Od gospodskog lica i ođela"),<sup>62</sup> through the cryptogram of forenames (Vid - name of bride's father, variability of Milich's name)<sup>63</sup> and number of Vid's daughters (nine), to the formula

58 Lazo Radanovich doesn't cause his bride's death, so he doesn't suffer the same fate. Death in the house and the burial towards west could also be interpreted as a short life of the Sun which dies at the end of every single day (see Nodilo, 1981, p. 199).

59 *Мифы народов мира*, 2, с.в. Славянская мифология. The functions of ancient deities get their individual names: Fate, Fortune, Misfortune, Justice, Injustice, Death. The very name of God acts the same way ("bog" giving "bogat", "ubog" and so on).

60 Vuk I,2,8,27,42,56,82,115,123; SANU I,3,4,5,43,55,60 and so on.

61 "Did you mould her from pure refined gold, / did you strike her from silver in the fire, / or did you steal her from the sun's body?"

62 "Her face was glowing under her kerchiefs, / so that her fine dress and her noble face / dazzled the eyesight of the wedding guests".

63 As a footnote to this poem, Vuk says: "Instead of Milich the Ensign, some singers

of Milich's traveling in the form of petrified phraseologism ("On obidje zemlju i gradove / Od istoka pake do zapada").<sup>64</sup> All this is documented in wedding lyric poetry too. Thanks to this, measure of wild guessing in this analysis could be at least lessened when it comes to solar attribution of wedding ritual participants:

*Veseli se, ženikova majko!  
Tri ti sunca dvore obasjala:  
Jedno sunce momak i devojka,  
Drugo sunce kume i devere,  
Treće sunce kičeni svatovi. (Vuk I,77).<sup>65</sup>*

West as the orientation of male movement in fetching the bride:

*Sunce nam je na zahodu, brzo će nam zač',  
A nevjesta na othodu, brzo će nam poč'. (Vuk I,59:1,2).<sup>66</sup>*

East as female orientation:

*Vila Jovu govorila:  
"Što livadu kopjem mjeriš?  
No s' obrni s desnom stranom,  
S desnom stranom put istoka,  
Deno divno kolo igra,  
Tu je tvoja vjerenica,  
Svakim dobrom ispunjena,  
I ružicom od proljeća,  
I grinjicom od bisera". (Vuk I,92:6-14)<sup>67</sup>*

And, finally, ambiguous state of veiled bride whose ritual of transition is symbolically accomplished only by the half:

*Bela moma prebela  
Od večera do sveta,  
A od sveta do veka. (Vuk I,124)<sup>68</sup>*

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mention Ilija of Sarajevo". Ilija (Elijah) is the saint supposed to have taken the characteristics of Sun god and Thunder god. About Vid, Sun, 9 young suns, Dawn and their family and matrimonial relationships in epic tradition and myth, see Nodilo. 1981, pp. 115, 159, 170-185, 341 and on.

- 64 "He traveled the land over, town by town. / into the east, round to the west again".
- 65 "Be merry, the groom's mother! / Three suns shine on your house: / First sun the groom and the bride, / Second sun the best man and groom's brother, / Third sun the wedding guests finely dressed." Translation is literal.
- 66 "The sun is going west, it will soon set, / The bride is on her way, she will soon be gone".
- 67 "Fairy spoke to Jovo: / Why do you measure the plain by the spear? / But turn you by your right hand side. / By the right hand side towards the east, / Where the wonderful dance is danced, / There your bride is, / Full of every goodness, / Of spring roses, / And of pearls".
- 68 "White maiden, the whitest, / From the eve to the dawn, / And from the dawn to the end of her life". For Milich's bride, the second half of her initiation never accomplished, the last two verses have the same meaning: the attribution she had "from the eve to the dawn" coincide with her death. Beside those cited, in Vuk I similar examples could be found in poems: 24-26, 68, 73, 78, 79, 81, 91, 93, 96, 100 i 101.



Close connection between two intersected realities: numinous and human, i.e. epical and mythical is still possible in epics, supposedly because it is no more bound by ritual. The image of world projected in it may rightly be termed mythopoetic. Will it be decoded this way depends completely on elements both in- and extra-textual at the same time.

To the analytic option within text the most important is the way material is organized into whole, i.e. the way its constructively significant points are distributed. In the "Wedding of Milich the Ensign" we spotted and marked several such points and on each of them we observed formulas of certain type (initial and final, inner in the form of tautological duplications and true inner formulas on the borderlines of sequenced segments). The general idea of binarity is also projected to the global sphere of this poem composition, so the greatest measure of functionality the cited formulas gain in the first half of it - precisely, up to the position of inner formula "Kad su bili gorom putujući" (verse 147 - only five verses after the half). Such a function, which can be termed as relational because it insists on the structure of the poem and the kind of relationship between its elements, from that point on goes out of sight, and to the forefront come the formulas of different type, the effect of which is sense-creating and deep as far as they serve to make direct connection between the poem and the extra textual sources of its meaning. Schematism of this functional review of the poem is quite grotesque comparing to elegance of its structure and it is no worthy the creative skills of its author. Anyway, it is justified by our need to stress the symmetry and binarity as general principles of composition according to which this text is oriented in both its projections: inner and outer.

### *General aspect*

"The Wedding of Milich the Ensign" is not an ordinary poem. Among others, it is outlined by the exquisite balance of its structure and by interlayers transversability which is neither hermetic (and so doesn't compromise the singer's job of versemaking), nor is prone to the dangers of trivialization. That in fact was the reason we chose it as the subject for this analysis, seeing its purpose was to show complex relations formed during the text constructing process.

Nevertheless, the most important propositions of this analysis are still applicable to the epic genre as a whole because they belong to

general poetic questions and so they naturally outgrow any, no matter how particular, singular case by their scope and significance. At the first place there is double identity of the epic literary universe, resulting from the mythopoetic image of the world built into it. Any character, any event, any "story" an epic poem sings about, exists at the same time within the horizontal plane of the "ordinary" but theatrically structured epic universe, and within the vertical plane of its mythical environment measured by height as well as by depth. Sliding along the axes of projections thus formed, narration activates the points of their intersection and, recognizing them as constructive borderlines of text, it marks them in a special way so as to stress their significance. Epic formula is the vehicle it most often uses to accomplish this.

Seeing that those planes are not parallel but crossed, the points of their meeting cannot be organized in a linear but in a discreet flow. By this, two good points are accomplished: the network of strong places is formed and the automatism in distribution of epic formulas is avoided. Within the structure of an epic poem a strong place is one that carries the greatest number of literary relevant information different by origin. If a formula is used in such a position, it has to respond to its properties and, in turn, to share them. As a sense-creating form, such a formula keeps these properties in an extra-text and even in an extra-genre position, but would not activate them until it finds a strong place its function is compatible with. As an oral creative act is, by definition, irreversible and momentary, the probability that these two will coincide cannot be equal for all formulas in the same way. As an outcome, the epic genre offers a vast specter of formulas in different phases of applicability, or - better - in different phases of cliché making at the same time. The impression that therefrom results a fund or reserve of ready-made formulas to be used by a certain ethnic, social or situational group of epic singers is fundamentally wrong. The only mutual fund of the kind all singers equally share by mere fact that they belong to the same traditional culture - is the very culture itself and the tradition it is based on.<sup>69</sup> Therefrom comes the influx of new or additional meanings which keeps oral word alive, but whether it will find its way to a poem in a form of a motive, poetic image, figure of style or something else -

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69 We do not have any intention to overview transculturality and all its consequences. It is really made possible by the fact cultures of the same type are extraordinary similar, sometimes even the same in concepts of the greatest significance (see for example Ivanov & Toporov, 1965: 1974).

is, in fact, a technical question, i.e. a question of poetic tool choice which every epic singer should solve by himself.

Epic formula is, therefore, a strategic poetic tool the use of which can be traced on a wide range sliding scale that starts with transmission of relational information about the way literary text is made and "working" by itself, and ends by keeping and displaying a deep reaching information about the way tradition "acts" within the text and out of it. Between these ends, two opposite processes are permanently active: one restrictive (which tends to restriction and economy in choosing among the poetic tools), and the other abundant (which tends to the abundance through multiplying and developing of what is already chosen). If a case is ideal, these two tendencies are balanced and then anthological poems, as here cited "Wedding of Milich the Ensign", are made. Disbalancing any of them deprives the text of one of its vital functions, and thus - by increasing the restrictive factor the historical poems are made (e.g. Montenegrin poems about intertribal and Turkish wars), and more or less uncontrollable growth of abundance in the poems like "The Wedding of Bokchevich-Stephan" (Vuk VII,19) show unbiased traces of style and structure chaos. How and with what success the formulas will be used in an epic poem depends directly on how the balance of these two processes is measured. The epic poetry as a whole being a fluctual phenomenon with parallel and permanent existence of all its possibilities (both good and bad, successful and abortive, transcribed and not), the ideas of development and progress in this context being quite absurd, formulas - as well as other poetic tools pertinent to the epic genre - exhibit the appropriate show and as a special problem of epic poetics they should be explored one case at a time.

All this considered, definitions like the Parry-Lord's cited at the beginning of this paper generally have a poor prognosis if they aim both at accuracy and wide spread applicability. To be operative, they should be concise and reasonably short, but to be accurate and precise they yet should focus on details. Of three syntagms Parry's definition of formula is built on (group of words; metrical conditions; essential idea), even if the first two were accepted without discussion as there is no need to search for a shorter and better formulation of what is thus described, the third - "essential idea" - opens up a complex of questions that must not be overlooked.<sup>70</sup> Because it is so vague, this term

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<sup>70</sup> It looks as if Lord was not particularly interested in widening the potential applicability of "essential idea". On the page 65 he says: "From the point of view

really is the most general definition which lists every singular case and every class of similar or identical phenomena with the same (in)efficiency, with no consideration for depth and scope of differences that occur in their meaning and use. Yet, it is from these differences that most important knowledge about formulas should be excerpted. Information acquired from this source constitute in fact that group of "details" based on which the discussion about formulas overcomes mere "description of phenomena" and enters the phase of making conclusions about them, gaining during this process a general theoretical basis. From that point of view, the term "essential idea" is neither right nor wrong but irrelevant. To some extent, even Lord himself did have a few dubious feelings about it, lest he wouldn't have added two extra definitions to Parry's existing one: "formulaic phrase" and "theme". Both were, perhaps, meant to fixate Parry's too casual formula at one point as a phraseologism, and as a construction unit at the other. Although the problem was very well observed, Parry was an authority great enough to make a different approach to the material impossible, so this well aimed intervention had in *The Singer of Tales* no substantial consequence. Even if it had had a better chance, Lord's triad would not have passed a scrutinous exam of its theoretical competence without some massive interventions within the basic definition. As an illustration, our example could be proposed. In this paper which cannot boast of completeness and circumspection either by scope or by depth of its approach, even eight elementary presumptions were observed that cannot be found in any actual definition of epic formula.

- As a phraseological unit, epic formula is a tool resulting from the "working" of formulaity within the framework of the secondary linguistic system of epic poetry; the relation between them is a generic one, formulaity being only one of conditions necessary for creating formulas and not identical with them.

- Within the genre level, epic formula is a special kind of cliché. Therefore, as a form able to create meaning without respect to code changes, it can be named sense-creating form.

- The influx of meaning in the way an epic formula works is oriented from a traditional culture as a mutual source of meanings for oral literature as a whole, to a genre and its actualization (epic poem).

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of usefulness in composition, the formula means its essential idea: that is to say, a noun-epithet formula has the essential idea of its noun." Here, both formula and composition are simplified to the point of inefficiency.

Thus, formula abridges the hierarchical level chasm between epics and tradition.

- All constructive borders in an epic poem are marked (stressed as significant) by epic formulas.

- The position of formulas defines their function, and this function, then, defines their variability.

- In an epic poem a strong place is one that carries the largest quantity of literary relevant information of different origin. If a formula is used in such a position, it has to respond to its properties and, in turn, to share them.

- As a sense-creating form, such a formula keeps these properties as its potential both in an extra-text and an extra-genre position, but would not activate them until it finds a strong place its function is compatible with

- For that reason, one and the same formula within different poems may have not only a different meaning but also a different use (in the scope from a petrified phraseologism to a carrier of intertextual and intergenre connotations). Potential of such a formula can be spoken of only in the case of systematic survey of its literary use in epic poetry.

If all this were not kept in mind, it may occur that definition, supposed to be accurate and precise, fail to provide the most important information about formula. At the other hand, if these eight points, even reduced to the maximum, were incorporated in any definition, even the best one will collapse and fall apart, and become inoperational. In that case it would not be able to satisfy one of its two main existential principles. So it finally happens that metatext shares the destiny of its text, this time uttered through the opposition short-precise.

## ФУНКЦИЈА И ЗНАЧЕЊЕ ФОРМУЛЕ У СРПСКОЈ ДЕСЕТЕРАЧКОЈ ЕПСКОЈ ПОЕЗИЈИ

### Резиме

Као полазну позицију за дискусију о могућем одређењу епске формуле, текст нуди осам тачака добијених на основу анализе Пери-Лордове познате и усвојене дефиниције и њене применљивости на грађу и проблеме везане за српску десетерачку епску поезију. Те су тачке следеће:

1) Као фразеологизам, епска формула је средство произашло из "рада" формулативности у оквирима другостепеног језичког система епске поезије; однос међу њима је генерички, при чему је формулативност само један од услова за настанак епске формуле и никако се не може идентификовати са њом; 2) на нивоу жанра, епска формула је посебна врста клишеа. Услед тога, као форма која генерише значење без обзира на промену кода, може се назвати смислотворном; 3) прилив значења у дејству епске формуле усмерен је од традицијске културе као заједничког извора значења за свеукупну усмену књижевност, ка жанру и његовој конкретној реализацији (епској песми). На тај начин она премодулује хијерархијски јаз између епике и традиције; 4) све конструктивне границе у епској песми обележене су (истакнуте као значајне) епским формулама; 5) место на коме се формуле употребе одређује њихову службу, а служба, потом, њихову варијантност; 6) оно место у структури епске песме које може понети већи број књижевно релевантних информација различитог порекла, сматра се јаким. Формула која се на таквом месту употреби мора одговорити захтевима које јој оно поставља, те и сама добија његова обележја; 7) као смислотворна форма, она та обележја потенцијално носи и кад се нађе изван текста, па чак и изван жанра у ком је настала, али их неће активирати све док се не поклопи са јаким местом које јој одговара; 8) због тога једна иста формула у различитим песмама може имати не само различиту употребу већ и различити значај (од окошталог фразеологизма до носиоца међутекстовних и међужанровских конотација). О потенцији такве формуле може се говорити тек на основу системског прегледа довољно великог броја типова њене службе у епци. Ауторово је мишљење да дефиниција која претендује истовремено и на тачност и на оперативност мора обухватити бар неке од ових тачака.

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