

**RAZISKOVALNE METODE IN  
INTERPRETACIJE LJUDSKEGA  
IZROČILA**

**METODI DI RICERCA E  
INTERPRETAZIONI DELLA  
TRADIZIONE POPOLARE**

**RESEARCH METHODS AND  
INTERPRETATIONS OF FOLK  
TRADITIONS**



# The Feminine Imaginarium in Traditional Legends about Fate (The Predestined Death – ATU 934)

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*This paper deals with the presentation of female characters in legends about fate (ATU 934) from Serbian sources. They appear as the Fates, a bride, or a sister, and express various aspects of the feminine imaginarium. The Fates are chthonic in character and appear in a negative aspect. If the legends are reviewed in the light of rites de passage, they prevent the separation of a male hero from the chthonic world towards the status of a bridegroom. In some variants, the figure of a bride appears, as another aspect of the feminine imaginarium that sacrifices a part of her life, thus bringing about the hero's successful separation and new integration.*

**Keywords:** fates, folklore, legends, rites de passage, separation, chthonic, folk belief tales.

The sources that shall be dealt with in this paper belong to legends about fate classified in Aarne-Thompson-Uther's index under number ATU 934 as *Tales of the Predestined Death*. This type encompasses a number of subtypes. In his classic monograph about stories and legends about fate in European folklore, Brednich singled out 12 of them (Brednich: 78-152); the Bulgarian index of Daskalova-Perkovska confirms that national indexes always entail a modification of general classifications. In contrast to this, structuralist research (Milošević-Đorđević 2000: 56-61) has suggested a scheme common to both stories and legends: prophecy-counteraction-fulfilment. Uther's revision also unifies many former types under a single number.

The general scheme is as follows: a new-born child's death is predicted, to occur in his/her youth, on a particular day; most often, it is determined by three female demons of fate, *suđenice* [the Fates], although there are others who perform this role; there is an attempt aimed at preventing this, but the predicted fate, for the most part, is fulfilled.

Our proposal for a sub-classification of Serbian ATU 934 sources (based on examining printed and manuscript sources from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) would be as follows:

1. Death from a snakebite on one's wedding day (upon the hero's birth, his elder sister hears the decision made by the Fates, whereupon she tries to prevent it from happening; often enough, this takes the form of a taboo on speaking, that is to say, she must not mention to anyone that she heard the demons' talk),
2. Death from a snakebite on a foretold day (the hero/heroine is imprisoned in a tower, but a snake hidden among bunches of grapes or in a similar manner fulfils his/her fate in the end),

3. Death in a well (the well is often sealed shut, but the hero still dies beside it on the designated day),
4. Being killed by a wolf (also on one's wedding day; usually linked with the predicted bride, ATU 930A)
5. Death by drowning + Alcestis (ATU 899) (the hero's predetermined fate is to drown on his wedding day, which does happen, usually in the course of returning from the bride's home; sometimes fate behaves like a trickster, so that the hero does not drown in a river but in a drop of water from a horse's tail, for example; the bride gives him some of her years of life and he comes back to life),
6. Death coming from a frog/turtle (the hero mocks the idea that such a small animal could be the death of him; what happens, for example, is that, in the course of mowing, the scythe bounces off a turtle's shell and cuts the hero, so that he dies).

Legends can be divided on the basis of criteria other than on the basis of the arrangement of motifs and the manner of death. For instance, on the basis of the sex of the protagonist, one could distinguish between male and female legends, in the manner of Holbek's division into male and female fairy tales (Holbek 1987). 'Male' types of legends and stories are made up of: death in a well, drowning + Alcestis, death coming from a frog. Being killed by a wolf and death from a snakebite can be both male and female types. There are no types that are solely female.

Based on another criterion, legends could be divided into those in which fate is fulfilled and those in which the life of the hero is saved. This difference does not pertain to their structure but to their ideational-didactic tendency. The Alcestis type has a happy ending, as is often the case with death from snakebite on one's wedding day.

There are several semantically determined motifs in these texts. Death by *drowning* – whether it happens in a well (or beside it) or in another subtype, in the course of a wedding procession – is almost as a rule connected with *a young man*. The day determined by the Fates for a tragic death is often a *wedding day*, and this motif often occurs in other subtypes, such as being killed by a wolf or death from a snakebite. A great number of variants exist in which the day of death is not a wedding day, but the Fates determine that the hero is to die at an age that, in a traditional culture, was the age of getting married (eighteen, twenty). In the initial part of these texts, when the three Fates find themselves beside a new-born child, they offer their proposals: the first that he/she should die right away, the second that he/she should die somewhat later (for example, at the age of ten), and finally, the third one proposes that he should die on his/her wedding day, at a mature age, in other words; the proposal of the last of the Fates is accepted by the other two. Death by drowning on one's wedding day or death on a particular day are not essentially different; at the semantic level, they activate the *chthonic symbolism of water*, but in designating a well as the scene of death, such semantics are better preserved. We shall attempt to analyse the semantics of these motifs, or perhaps it is better to say, their symbolism, and especially the *imaginarium (imaginaire)* of the feminine.

We shall first examine legends about the death of a bridegroom on his wedding day. One example:

*And so, one fellow was fated to drown on his wedding day. And one traveller heard what the Fates said, and he told that man: 'When your son is to get married, you should call me! For when he was born, he was fated to be drowned.' And so he called him, and he ordered that the well be sealed shut. They went off to get the bride, brought the bride home, and there was plenty of merriment, and when night came it was time to sleep. The bride looked – no bridegroom to be found! They looked here and there... the well was sealed shut. As it turned out, he lay down beside the well that was sealed shut and died. And thus, he was fated to die that day, and there was no other way about it (Marković 2004: 113, no. 137).*

These examples are about an *interrupted life cycle*, an unfulfilled wedding, a violated rite. The life cycle, presented in traditional culture through rites of passage, is thus interrupted. In the case of the death of a bridegroom, the preordained death is not merely a death that is predetermined for a certain time, is not only violent death, but death at a wrong moment, that is to say, *before one's time*. Nevertheless, it happens rarely that the hero dies as a child (for example, at the age of seven, cf. Milićević 1894: 53, or at the ages of five and seven, cf. Nožinić 1998: 71; 74). In narrative terms, the death of a young person on his/her wedding day contains a more tragic tone than the death of a child.<sup>1</sup>

Deceased persons who die before their time are 'bad', dangerous dead persons. Precisely because they did not complete their life cycle during their lifetime, they can return, dissatisfied, after their death to disturb the living. (Hence the South Slavic and Balkan rite of wedding after death, which is supposed to appease them and symbolically complete their life cycle).

As a digression, we may mention that narrators sometimes attempt to explain the behaviour of the Fates, thus entering the realm of anthropomorphisation and psychologisation. In some variants, they will prove merciful in a way, wishing that a child should die so as not to have to suffer in poverty, the way his/her parents do. However, it happens more often that they are presented as being evil. The proposal of the first Fate (that a new-born child should die immediately or in early childhood) is rejected based on the argument that if the child dies young, the sorrow over his/her passing will not be great. 'When a little child dies, little grief is felt' (Đorđević 1988 No. 134) is a formulaic statement illustrating such a decision. If a child dies young, he will not suffer much to be mourned, and this way he will drown on his wedding day *when they come back rejoicing* (Zlatković 2005 No. 163). The negative aspect of the chthonic is psychologised and fashioned as what Lüthi calls 'decorative traits' ('dekorative Züge'-Lüthi 1981), without changing the essential core.

The malicious comment of the Fates to the effect that parents will not grieve over a small child derives from ethnographically confirmed notions and customs. For example, whereas a deceased adult is mourned for one whole year, a child is mourned for 40 days or for half a year (Mijatović 1907: 98). No candle is lit for a small child, his/her hands are not tied because he/she has not sinned, and no coffin is made for the burial (Debeljković 1907: 247). In some parts, when a child dies they do not use the verb 'umreti' [die] but 'uginuti' [normally used speaking of animals] (Nikolić 1910: 254). It was considered that the death of one's first-born child should not be mourned publicly; the parents should be

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting here to compare this with an observation by Northrop Frye, who classifies the death of a child as belonging to a 'low mimetic mode', as being different from a high mimetic tragedy. 'Again, in contrast to high mimetic tragedy, pathos is increased by the inarticulateness of the victim' (Frye 2000: 38-39)

merry and laugh, for it is their first child, and they are still young (Filipović 1939: 463; Nušić 2007: 117). This may be connected with the ancient rule of sacrificing everything that comes first, from the first fruits to the first child; this is certainly understandable in the context of forbidding excessive grief.

Legends of the ATU 934 type should be understood within the framework of the cyclical view of life. As Brednich observed, as early as the initial scheme, all three rites of passage are joined: at the moment of one's birth, his/her death is determined to occur on his/her wedding day (Brednich 1964: 38; 78). Röhrich voices a similar view: 'at birth, death is visible, at the beginning of life, the end of life is determined' (Röhrich 1976: 17). Naturally, liminal rites are nevertheless related, and their symbolism is mutually interchangeable: a wedding is presented as the death of the bride, the funeral is organised as a wedding after death.

*Ancient beliefs, connected with both the fruitful and, to a considerable extent, with the erotic nature of death, have contributed, judging by all indicators, to the creation and solidification of the female image of death in folklore and literature. In this way, the circle was closed – marriage and the emergent death were united within one symbol, marriage became a metonymic replacement for death (Eremina 1991: 132).*

It is precisely in this quality that we also recognise the feminine-chthonic symbolism characteristics of these texts.<sup>2</sup>

Liminality is particularly emphasised in those variants in which death occurs in the course of returning from the bride's house while going across water. That is why it is often stressed that the hero will ask for the hand of a bride who lives far away (Zlatković 2005 No. 164; 164/1), across a great expanse of water (Bovan 1980 No.89), in a far-off land (Čajkanović 1927 No. 86), in another village (Zlatković 2007/9). In a variant (LMS 43), the best man (St Elias) even says: 'Do not ask for a girl's hand beside waters, or near waters, but in a dry region.' The traditional cultural notions of the opposition of two families, the bridegroom's and the bride's, are very much alive here, as reflected in the notion of two spaces, one's own and another's. This is visible in agonistic types of wedding-related lyrical poetry, and in Serbian epic poems about heroes' weddings. In these poems, the conflict between the bridegroom's side and its opponents occurs precisely during the return of the wedding procession home. Furthermore, in ballads a curse befalls a bride or a bridegroom precisely in the space in-between, on the borderline between two worlds, and yet again in the course of returning home (Detelić 1994). As is well known, a liminal state is dangerous in any case, for a person in such a state may succumb to the influence of evil powers. The space a wedding party occupies, both in epic poems and in these legends, is a kind of space in-between, a borderline space between two worlds, which corresponds to the liminal state of the bride and bridegroom. The same kind of liminality is recognisable in a death that occurs at the point of passage between spaces. The notion of liminality

<sup>2</sup> It is characteristic that in Serbian oral creations the word 'suđenica' is used to refer both to a demon of fate and to a bride (one who is predestined by fate). The Greeks use the word "fate" as a synonym for a wedding (in women's talk). We can mention here the new Greek belief that there exist three *moiras*, each one separately watching over birth, wedding and death respectively; the dictum about the three evils of fate refers to these three events (Lawson: 127).

thus contains the narrative potential of tragedy, which is manifested in ballads, and also in this type of legend.

In epics, tasks are not performed by the bridegroom but by his substitutes. In prose variants about fate, one can see this same passivity on the part of the bridegroom. The best man or the wedding elder take care of him. Such a position is conditioned by the wedding rite itself, in which the bridegroom does not have a prominent place. However, in these prose forms, that passivity is also the result of the actual narration about the supremacy of fate, which, as in other types, suppresses the hero's independent action and makes him merely an example of the action of a higher order.

However, legends essentially differ from epics when a marriage is realised. The victorious return from the bride's home corresponds to the spirit of heroic poetry, which Vuk Karadžić referred to as 'male' poetry. For a wedding rite to be completed, it is also necessary to fulfil some other 'requirements'. What is necessary is to lead the newlyweds into the marital chamber, which may be postponed for a few days, and during that interval the bride's brother-in-law spends the nights with her. The wedding itself lasts for three days. The full integration of the bride – and the wedding is for the most part viewed as a story about female initiation – ends only after some time, for example, when she ritually brings water into the bridegroom's house (from the well, which is a part of everyday life, but also a part of the ritual), or by a visit of her family to her husband's family (Grbić 1909: 194). 'A passage from one stage in life to another, in the view of ordinary folk, cannot be abrupt' (Eremina 1991: 95).

The genre of legend itself seems *exemplary*: the death of the bridegroom serves to illustrate the unchangeability of fate. As Röhrich puts it:

*Those are exceptional ways in which death occurs, worthy of attention, accidents and catastrophes of many kinds. The normal way of ending one's life, death from old age or illness, is rarely the subject of the decision passed by the Fates; that would constitute no reason for developing a legend. Only that which is exceptional is worthy of being narrated afterwards* (Röhrich 1971: 44).

Sedakova observes that the devices used are contrast (death on a day filled with joy, not just the wedding day but also on the eve of a holiday, such as Easter<sup>3</sup>) and doubling: two families will mourn: both the bridegroom's and the bride's (Sedakova 2007: 219). Faith in fate is the ideational core of a legend; a narrative about an interrupted life cycle comes into being as an illustration; by way of emphasising death right before a passage is to occur, on the wedding day, a tragic note is achieved.

What is ethnographically important is also the manner in which death occurs. In folk life, *drowned people* (it should be emphasised here that this is a living custom, not a reconstruction of archaic notions) were considered to be the unclean dead. That is why they were not buried together with the other dead in a cemetery, but outside one, along with unbaptised children and suicides. Even the hero's fate after death is predetermined by the Fates in a bad way; the death that befalls him is 'bad' in a number of ways. In etymological terms, the Serbian and Slavic word for death, 'smrt', is explained as deriving from the ur-Indo-European root starting in 'm' (to which a prefix with a positive connotation

<sup>3</sup> In Bulgarian variants, rarely among the Serbs, cf. Hadži-Vasiljević 1909: 340-341.

was added, thus 'smrt' = 'good death' (Gamkrelidze, Ivanov 1995: 806). Moreover, 'good' would mean 'one's own', not occurring before its time and not violent, and this meaning was retained in expressions in other European languages.<sup>4</sup> In one variant, the bridegroom's father says, when offered to bring his son back to life with his own years of life, 'I cannot die on another's day'" (Bušetić 39-1-2-3).

Recent research by Loma has produced an interpretation according to which the abovementioned prefix has a different meaning, so that a good death would not constitute an evaluation of the life in question and its end, but of the manner in which the burial is conducted; namely, it is a good one if the deceased is incinerated (in keeping with the rules of the clan), which enables a happy existence for him after death (Loma 2004: 59-61). In Serbian folk beliefs of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, this notion obviously also functions when it is connected with a different manner of conducting the burial, entirely distanced from the ancient rites. (In the epic poems of many peoples, quite opposite to what is mentioned above, there is fear of dying peacefully in one's bed. A good death for a hero is considered to be one occurring on the battlefield, which is undoubtedly a poetic reflection of the ideology of an ancient class of warriors; Miller 2000: 220-222). While the deceased become the protectors of the clan through their death, those dying before their time or in a violent manner did not die 'their own death', and a succession of rites is required in order to prevent their return (Vinogradova 2001; Vinogradova 1999).

In most cases, death is determined by the Fates, which corresponds to South Slavic and Balkan sources, considered by Brednich to be the original ones. The Fates are also dominant in the type dealing with death by drowning, as well as death from snakebite on the wedding day. There may also occur male determiners of fate, usually regionally designated, connected with western Serbs of the south of Serbia. The Christianisation of determiners of fate occurs somewhat more rarely. Variations are more in evidence in the case of predestined death from a wolf attack, and in particular in the case of death from snakebite in a tower. In the type of death caused by a frog, there is no such determination in the initial position. It appears that it is possible to see an isomorphic connection (to use Gilbert Durand's expression) between death by water and the Fates themselves.

Sedakova has observed that death comes from chthonic animals (Sedakova 2007: 191). Indeed, it is not difficult to recognise chthonic symbolism in a snake or a frog (alternatively: a turtle) that brings death. That same chthonic-feminine imaginarium can also be recognised in death by drowning. It should be mentioned here that the wolf also has a chthonic character in Serbian and Slavic beliefs. Old papers by Čajkanović are based on the thesis that a lame wolf was the epiphany of the supreme Serbian deity in the reconstructed pre-Christian religion (Čajkanović 1994a). However, recent research focusing on the contemporary folklore of Slavic peoples (Gura, Mencej) also indicates a chthonic character. A connection with underground treasure, turning a deceased person into a wolf and legends about the creation of the wolf by the devil are sufficient indicators of a chthonic character (Gura 2005: 90-91; 94-96), also preserved in Christianisation (Mencej 2001: 161-163). Such a meaning also exists in other traditions: Hades wears a cloak made of wolf skin, the Etruscan god of death has a wolf's ears, in a German myth the world is ruined by the chthonic wolf Fenrir. Thus, a wolf may be viewed as the equivalent of water

<sup>4</sup> For prose texts, of particular importance is the conclusion of etymologists that the word for fate is semantically connected with death, not just in the Indo-European but also in the Mesopotamian and Egyptian tradition (Iavorskaia 1994: 116-117; Gamkrelidze-Ivanov 1995: 721).



in death by water types, or of a snake as well; all of those are symbols of the chthonic world, but the symbolism is not feminine. In wedding rites, a wolf is used as a marital symbol of the opposite clan, where the bride is going, a symbol of the brother-in-law (Gura 2005: 92), and its erotic symbolism (Mencej 2001: 243-245) actually points to its role in the cult of fertility (Mencej 2001: 196-247), which is another aspect of the chthonic. In variants in which the bride is the doomed one, death carries a sexually complementary symbolism, as does water in the other ones. Also worthy of attention is the thesis that, be it in calendar or life rites, a wolf is connected with 'crossing a borderline and various borderline, decisive moments' (Gura 2005: 116). As a prophetic animal, the wolf corresponds to deities of destiny.<sup>5</sup>

The chthonic character of the Fates is recognisable: they were originally most likely connected with the cult of ancestors (Schneeweis 1961: 5; Machal 1964: 249; Niederle 1926: 134-135; Lovmjanjski 1996: 69-70; Čajkanović 19946: 251; Nikolić-Stojančević 1974: 422), probably as far back as the pre-Christian era as part of the house paganism (Schmaus 1971: 245-246), which is indicated by the term 'babe' [grandmothers, old women, hag], or 'golden grandmother/old woman' among the Bulgarians (Schneeweis 1961: 5), which is also encountered among Lusatian Serbs (Gasparini s.a.: 35).<sup>6</sup> Various theories have been proposed about the relations between demons of fate, clan ghosts and demons of childbirth (cf. the Slovenian and Kajkavian term *rojenice*, comparable with the Old Russian *rozhanitsa*). We leave aside debates about the advantage of ur-Slavic and ur-Indo-European origin or the Graeco-Balkan influence,<sup>7</sup> which is occasionally characterised by outdated migrationism (Lovmjanjski 1996; Grafenauer 1945), as well as the thesis that they are connected to matriarchy, a concept that has been rejected in anthropology (Burkhardt 1989: 138; Matic 1978: 99; also cf. Budimir's thesis on the connection between the term *babice* and the old Slavic and old Balkan cult of Baba; Budimir 1969; see criticism in Gavazzi 1978: 21).<sup>8</sup>

In the ethnographic data of the modern era (and most folklore sources date from the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), notions of the Fates mix with those of demons of childbirth. In contemporary ethnographic data from the same community from which the narratives originate, receiving the Fates belongs to the female sphere of work, which is quite understandable, on account of being connected with the tasks relating to care of the woman in labour and the new-born child. These are related notions, which can become mixed in living belief. Water, the well, female ancestors, goddesses of fate, belong to the same part of the imaginary, which expresses the feminine and the chthonic. At the beginning of the narrative, the Fates are often to be found beside the fireplace, or come through the chimney onto the fireplace, which is a place connected with ancestors (and yet again, with female tasks).

In the Serbian and Slavic area, observance of the sources is connected with St Petka, who, viewed from a diachronic perspective, is most likely a substitute for goddess Mokosh (Ivanov, Toporov 1975: 192; Uspenskiĭ 1982: 113). Loma connects the Fates with the figure

<sup>5</sup> Gamkrelidze, Ivanov, pp. 413-415.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'babe' is also used for a fête cake for a memorial service on Sunday (Kulišić, Petrović, Pantelić 1970: 10), which is carried to the cemetery (there is a parallel among the Russians;—Mansikka 2005: 141).

<sup>7</sup> Today, the thesis about the Indo-European origin predominates; cf. Brednich's recent work for *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, in which he agrees, although he allows the possibility of a greater Greek influence in the Balkans (Brednich 2004).

<sup>8</sup> The thesis about Slavic matriarchy was advocated by Gasparini, a follower of the then popular *Kulturkreislehre*; Eliade, among others, relies on him.

of Mokosh (Loma 2002: 239-242), which is yet again etymologically connected with water. For example, among the Serbs of Gallipoli, a sick man was supposed to sleep for a while near a *well* in the Church of *St Petka* (incubation), where a *snake* would come out of the water and crawl across the sick man (Filipović 1946: 68).<sup>9</sup> Examples from European folklore supplement Serbian legends. Old German Norns determined one's fate beside a well, with which the Fates were connected later (*Voluspa*, 20-*Edda* 2007; Hoffmann-Krayer, Bächtold-Stäubli I 1932: 1672ff). When Christianisation occurred, St Verena or St Bridget became the protectress of wellsprings. Among the Irish, St Bridget is also connected with the eponymous goddess of the river Boyne (Kalygin 2005: 127). Thus, in the later folklore of the west German area, it is female supernatural beings that determine one's fate and are connected to a wellspring (Ganina: 224). The custom of laying a child beside a wellspring dedicated to fairies<sup>10</sup> so that they would determine his/her fate is mentioned in the 14<sup>th</sup> century in a French chivalric romance novel (Brednich 1964: 203). In the German language area, there is a record of a belief to the effect that as yet unborn children are found in wells and fish ponds (Erich, Beitzl 1955: 409). Among the Celts, goddesses of fate (if that is what they were) are daughters of the sea; the Irish banshee, just as the Russian *rusalka*, even though they are not demons of fate like the Fates, may be connected with ideas about predestined death;<sup>11</sup> both the banshee and the *rusalka* are connected with water, especially with wellsprings, and they determine the moment of one's death; they often come into being from drowned women, just like the Lithuanian *laima* (Mihailova 2005a: 206; Mihailova 2005b: 238; 244). In Christianised versions, the image of a water world blends with notions of hell (Mencej 1999: 197-199).

The connection between after-death cults and water is also to be found in the widespread custom of spilling water onto a grave, for example, comparable to the mythical image of the cosmos, where water is the borderline separating the world of the living from the world of the dead. Apart from the transcultural examples of the role of water in after-death rites and mythologies, the thesis that the Slavic religion knew of the mythical notions and rite-connected acts relating to crossing water on one's path towards the after-death world was convincingly presented, relying on examples of comparative Slavic sources (Mencej 1997, especially 142-143; 153-154).

In contrast, the role of water in rites connected with conception and birth is well known, where light is shed on its fruitful and life-giving symbolism (Eremina 1991: 55-62). The chthonic world connects birth and death, and through its polyvalent symbolism, it connects things that appear as opposites to the discursive mind.

This blending of symbols led the approaches such as Jung's, Eliade's or Durand's to make claims about the universal character of symbols. Jung and his followers, for example, are of the opinion that what is manifested through images of death and water (the sea, wellsprings, fish ponds) is the same archetype of Great Mother, which has (just like every archetype) a positive and a negative aspect; it is manifested here in a frightening way, in the form of devouring watery depths; that is why a hero of myths and epics must overpower it, the way Marduk kills the water monster Tiamat, which actually represents a separation of the ego from the unconscious (Jung 2005: 220; Neumann 1994; Jung 1987; Birkhäuser-Oeri 1988: 26; Neumann 1974: 187; 222). It is not necessary to provide a special

<sup>9</sup> In (Western) Bulgarian and Macedonian beliefs, St Petka often takes shape of the snake (Popov 2008: 70)

<sup>10</sup> The Romance term for fairies was derived from the Latin *fata*, connected to *fatum*.

<sup>11</sup> Notions of various demonic beings may blend together.

reminder of the ambivalent position of Jungian interpretations in folkloristics, where the concept of the archetype has fascinated researchers, but they were also severely criticised (allegorisations, projections of schemes created in advance onto the material studied, as well as aspirations towards a universality of symbols that is very difficult to prove). What we are looking at here would be a folklore imaginarium, to use Durand's expression. Nevertheless, we leave aside here the theses about the universality of symbols, and review the image of the female principle in a particular genre and type, taking into consideration the poetics of the genre; we also review the image in the ethnographic context.

A thesis has been proposed, according to which death in ATU 934 constitutes initiation-type death. The Fates as female ancestors are the leaders of the initiation, and drowning in a well would then be a sacrifice to a god of fertility or to the spirits of water (Moroz 1989: 144-145).<sup>12</sup> However, this death does not have an initiatory effect, but quite the opposite; as previously said, it constitutes an anti-initiatory hiatus in rites of passage. While initiation leads to another state, the deceased person does not manage to change his state; the bridegroom does not separate successfully from his previous state and does not become integrated into the community as an adult. Moreover, as we have attempted to show, this unsuccessful separation becomes clear only if we pay attention to the chthonic aspect; that is the decision of the chthonic mistresses of fate: a drowned young man returns to the world from which he came – an underground, watery, ancestral and motherly one. In fact, he never separated from the world of his female ancestors-mothers (in the way he would have separated if the wedding had occurred), but he does not pass into the phase of adulthood. Narration about the interrupted life cycle confirms the power of fate, as well as the power of the chthonic aspect of the feminine.

Against the negative imaginarium of feminine-chthonic, as an expression of fate, there is a male opponent (usually a guest who happens to hear the prophecy), who carries out a counteraction and opposes it. The opponent may be a merchant, emperor, thief, officer, beggar, or a Gypsy; he may be stylised in keeping with the genre of religious tale (as is the case with the example examined below): God, an old man who is actually a saint, God and St Elias, God and St Peter, Christ and St Peter, or St Sava. It is worth noting that in some variants the opponent of fate is St Elias. The Christian God and the Fates are also opposed in some narratives from Southern Serbia (Đorđević 1988 No. 122, 123). However, what is at work here is not merely a clash of two religious layers, but also the opposition between female representatives of the world of ground waters and a representative of the world of heavenly thunderbolt. Specifically, in Serbian folklore, St Elias is the master of thunderbolts, so that it is assumed that the functions of the pre-Christian god of thunder were transferred onto him (it should be pointed out yet again that this is no mere reconstruction, susceptible to criticism just like any other folklore and mythological reconstruction, but constitutes a living folk belief). On another level, the female world of the Fates is opposed to the male opponent of fate. He has the role of the best man, but there is also the active opposition male/female. The hero-bridegroom stands between two worlds. He falls as a victim of female deities and the chthonic element (water, snake). In variants in which fate is averted, the male world defeats the female one. Those who avert destiny are always guest-men, from a Gypsy to God.

<sup>12</sup> "Hence the connection with calendar myths and rites, connected with birth and death" (ibid.).

Nevertheless, chthonic symbolism and opposition of genders, although prevalent, is not to be found in all subtypes. Naturally, in variants in which other beings (male demons) determine one's fate, there is no such opposition. However, we accept ethnographic theories about the secondary and regionally limited character of male demons of fate. Death by wolf, although chthonic, as previously stated, does not carry feminine symbolism. Chthonic symbolism cannot be applied to death by thunder (M341.2.2), absent from the Serbian corpus, but present in Slovenian and Croatian variants (for example Kropelj 1995: 219-220; cf. 125-126; Dominicus 1900: 30-31; Valjavec 1890 No. 2; Stojanović No. xxvii; the Bulgarian index also enlists one variant, as 934E\*). The only variant in Serbian corpus close to it is death by an 'arrow' from the sky (Nušić 2007: 106); (but the structure of this text fits into death on wedding-day subtype). It is significant that word *strela* in Serbian means 'arrow', while in Slovenian it means 'lightning'. In folk belief, thunder and lightning are seen as arrows; stone 'axes' found in the earth are believed to be thunder (Belaj 1998: 78-88). Being attributes of the god of thunder or St. Elias, these examples cannot be seen as part of chthonic-feminine imaginary. It must be observed that the Slovenian, Croatian and Bulgarian examples about thunder and lightning as agents of destiny are strongly Christianised becoming thus close to religious tale. Brednich also enlists other variants devoid of chthonic symbolism (shearing sheep, etc.), but majority of ATU 934 (in the Serbian material at least) is strongly marked by chthonic images.)

We shall see that in the Alcestis subtype the male world does not defeat the Fates on its own but requires the cooperation of the female world.

From the point of view of the feminine imaginary, therefore, the other subtype, that of Alcestis, is significant. Death by water blends with AT 899 so often in the Serbian language area that we can actually view this 'contamination' as a special, regionally determined type (the Bulgarian index singles it out thusly: \*934B2 – Daskalova-Perkovska, et al.). In this subtype, fate is defeated. Alternatively, to put it more precisely: fate itself is not denied, but the bride's decision modifies its fulfilment so that it is virtually annulled. Fate is not changed – the Fates do not retract their decision, the bridegroom's life is not prolonged suddenly; quite simply, somebody else transfers her years of life to him. Viewed in terms of composition, the Alcestis type differs from the structures previously reviewed in another, added episode. However, the schematic characteristic of AT 934 is also fulfilled here, only after such a narrative structure does the introduction of another type follow. That which constitutes a case of 'contamination', in terms of a strict classification, produces a different image of the feminine as a whole on the level of the imaginary, so that it carries a different ideological message at the level of the text as a whole. That which has been determined by women will be annulled by a female character. A successful separation occurs, as does a new integration.

The Fates who initially do not allow the hero's separation prevent his separation and new integration, who keep him within the chthonic element, correspond to the negative feminine imaginary. In the character of the bride, the feminine principle appears under a new guise and takes the hero from death towards life, thereby enabling his wedding initiation. What is at work here is a split in the experience of the feminine: one endangers a man, the other saves him. The image of the feminine is divided into the dangerous, evil Fates and the good bride. That constitutes the mechanism that Holbek, relying on the example of the genre of fairy tales, designated as a split. 'Conflicting aspects of a character

are distributed upon different figures in the tale.’ The characters are usually split into good and bad ones (Holbek 1987: 435-436).

Holbek derived his methodology and terminology from psychoanalysis, while we do not follow his lead in this; however, the actual technique of ‘split’ could be applied to the legends in question. What seems important here is that this kind of symbolism is not something that belongs to the deep unconscious and is unclear to the narrator. The narrator’s comments show not only that there is a firm connection with ethnographically living notions of the life cycle, but also awareness of the importance of separation.

As the bride gave half her lifespan to the bridegroom, the hero will care for her more than for his parents (Đorđević 1988 No. 135). Following the happy ending, God’s comment will be: ‘Care not for anyone but her, not even for your father and mother, brother and sister.’ To this the narrator comments that is why they are husband and wife, they create their own home, and others come after that, being less important (Zlatković 2005 No. 162/1). A comment in another variant (*Venac*) shows an instance of approaching an etiological legend, which is often built into the closing segments of this type: ‘And then God said: “His father and mother shall be kind to their son until he gets married, and from then on his wife shall be kind to him”’. Ascribing this comment to God shows a tendency towards legendary stylisation, also close to these variants. ‘Then St Sava blessed them, so that the woman should always be faithful to the man and the other way round.’ Other closing statements are similar to this: ‘And the Lord decreed that a wife shall be respected more than a parent’ (Zlatković 2007 No.14), ‘While a son is unmarried, he loves his mother. And when he gets married, he does not love his mother but his wife’ (ibid., 15), ‘Since then, a wife began to be respected, and a son was separated from his parents and lived with his wife’ (ibid., 15-1). Such a formulation contains something of the spirit of *etiological legends*. Since then, a blood vessel could be seen on the bride’s forehead (Bovan 1980 No. 89), which provided ‘material proof’ characteristic of this type of legend. The closing statement may also shift events to the past. This, according to the poetics of etiological legends, primarily explains why a son separates from his parents, but the conduct of a girl of marriageable age is also ascribed the exemplary character that should determine the models of conduct of each new bride.

An interesting variant is to be found in the collection compiled by Ristić and Lončarski (Ristić-Lončarski 1891: 1). It does not fit entirely in this group, for the actual motif of fate is lacking, the bridegroom’s death is in fact (as the religious tale would have it) an instance of God putting his parents to a test. When the bride gives away years of her life, Christ says: ‘His mother and father have their son only until he gets married; for after that, no one can be more faithful to him than his wife.’<sup>13</sup>

Variants involving saving the life of a young man predestined to die contain two interweaving layers: one is connected with the bride, the other with Christianisation and legends about saints.

What is pointed out are the activities of saints who attempt to annul the effect of fate. The wedding guests kneel down and pray, St Elias explains the storm in the course of which the bridegroom drowned as a punishment for sins made nine generations ago (LMS 2003: 43). St Sava waves his staff (his attribute in legends), brings the bridegroom

<sup>13</sup> It is a separate question, concerning records dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whether the closing comments may constitute an intervention of the person writing the text down and the publisher.

back to life (Srećković No. 35), crosses himself above the bridegroom, and then blesses the newlyweds (Bušetić 39-6); Christ may appear instead of St Sava (Kordunaš 315-24). In one example, the Fates are superior to God: God and St Michael plead with them to let the wedding run its course. Their conduct is motivated by the observance of customs: God is the best man and St Michael the wedding elder. Even though the Fates say that '[...] they feel no remorse when they decide one's fate', they agree to the act of giving away one's years of life if a person willing to do so can be found (Đorđević 1988 No.135).

Nevertheless, these variants cannot be classified as belonging to the genre of religious tale, for they are not entirely based on the Christian worldview. Saints engage in counteraction, but it is unsuccessful. Salvation only comes from the bride. Her transfer of years of her life is essentially animistic. In a religious tale, God or saints would bring the deceased back to life; here they bargain with the Fates and reach a compromise. Christian characters in a religious tale lead to a turnaround, but the actual turnaround can only be brought about by the bride; instead of a Christian miracle, what is at work here is the notion of the life cycle. (However, perhaps her act of sacrificing her life, close to the Christian notion of self-sacrifice, contributed to attracting religious tale motifs and personages to this type.)

In the subtype featuring death from a snakebite on a predetermined day, the bearer of counteraction is also a female character, but it is a sister.<sup>14</sup> The wedding day is emphasised, and variants in which counteraction does not succeed are rare. This constitutes a clear case of the influence of traditional notions, already familiar from other genres: in Serbian oral lyrical poetry, love between a brother and a sister is often presented as a special or the strongest kind of love.

As there can be no wedding here, the ending must be different. A sister manages to save her brother, but only by sacrificing her life entirely (while the bride only gives away a certain number of her years of life), or (in variants tending towards a happy ending) after her sacrifice, a saint will enable her to come alive again (which leads these variants to a real religious tale). Counteraction is usually connected with the taboo of silence (she must never mention to anyone that she has heard the Fates' decision). It is more important that she postpones getting married herself until she saves her brother, even though she is older than him. Knowing the importance of getting married and the difficult position of unmarried girls in folk culture, a sister's sacrifice becomes all the greater. This can be seen from the narrator's comment: 'It wouldn't do for a brother to be married with his sister still unmarried, but she just won't do it' (Bovan 1989 No. 16). The manner of sacrifice is changed: it is no longer the case of a bride willing to give away a part of her life, but of a sister who, in a way, also gives away years of her life, that is, renounces her own life for the sake of the life of another. The act of giving away years of one's life is not a magical transfer of a part of one's life here, but an act of total dedication. The killing of a snake is just a minor counteraction, subordinated to a sister's sacrifice of her life. The female character does not come from another family; in keeping with the patriarchal system of values, a sister sacrifices herself so that her brother could effect an act of passage – for the family continues through his name. There is still a separation of the image of the feminine, but the initiation-wedding aspect is somewhat suppressed by the exemplary, patriarchal narrative of a sister's sacrifice.

<sup>14</sup> We know of a variant where counteraction is led by an aunt, which is also encountered in Bulgarian sources.

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**Феминини имагинаријум у предањима о судбини  
(Предодређена смрт – ATU 934)**

Немања Радуловић

Тема рада је приказ женских ликова у предањима о судбини (ATU 934) српској. Оне наступају као суђенице, невеста или сестра и изражавају различите аспекте имагинариног. Суђенице су хтонске природе и наступају као негативни аспект. Ако се предања посматрају у светлу обрета прелаза, оне спречавају сепарацију мушког јунака од хтонског света ка статусу младожење. У једном броју варијаната, појављује се лик невесте, кроз који се испољава други аспект представе женског у имагинарном, онај који жртвује део живота и тиме изводи јунакову успешну сепарацију и нову интеграцију. Напоследку, у неким варијантама невеста је замењена сестром. Мада користимо термин „имагинарно“, сагледавамо га унутар етнографског контекста и поетике жанра.

