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THE SLOVENIAN FOLK BALLAD: A GENRE ENIGMA

Abstract: This article discusses the ballad as one of the most enigmatic genre structures in both Slovenia and Europe as a whole. The Slovenian ballad is presented within the international context, along with analysis and synthesis of its fundamental textual, musical, and contextual characteristics.

Keywords: Slovenian ballad, folk, literary, European balladry, typology, themes, motifs, text, texture, context, melody, metric and rhythmic structure, genre

INTRODUCTION

The ballad is one of the richest and best-preserved cultural creations, and even today is one of the more interesting literary and folklore genres as well as one of the most studied. Despite this, it remains enigmatic and, because of its complexity, it is the most difficult genre to define among European folk songs. The ballad is the “distinctive expression” of European tradition, but North American ballads are also known. Its migration has even spread to Asia, where it appears with new local content, and in the form of reworked older versions or new versions of European-based ballad types. Folklorist John D. Niles noted that man is *homo narrans*: a storytelling being¹; that is, telling stories is a deep part of human nature. The core of the ballad is precisely this: the story. A dramatic story in a ballad is more important than its texture or melody, although the melody can have significant influence on its rhythmic and metric structure. The Slovenian ballad is thematically, generically, and rhythmically exceptionally varied and complex and, because the Slovenians did not have an actual “national epic”, narrative songs, or ballads filled this role.

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The current meaning of the word *ballad* differs from its original usage. Coming from the Middle Latin verb *ballare* ‘to dance’, the term accordingly denoted a type of dance tune. The dance ballad (Provençal *balat*) of 12th- and 13th-century Provençal troubadours was a lyrical song that had a particular form with a refrain. In 14th-century Italy the ballad was typically a two- or three-voice song with instrumental accompaniment. In the 18th-century England the word came into use as a descriptor of narrative song. Thomas Percy used it in the subtitle of his 1765 collection *Reliques of Ancient*

¹John D. Niles, *Homo Narrans. The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, p. 3.

English Poetry, in which he wrote that the collection contained ‘Old Heroic Ballads’². The Old Celtic *balad* simply means “song,” and this is why old Scottish folk songs are called ballads. The Germans also adopted the term from the English; as early as 1771 Goethe referred to the Alsatian folk songs he recorded as “German ballads.” The term “folk ballad” today brings to mind the international scholarly term that is used in the standard language, but actual folk singers do not use this expression. The expression can also be replaced by others, which of course differ by nationality; the most commonly used is “narrative song” (Sl. *pripovedna pesem*; Germ. *Erzähl lied*; Fr. *chanson narrative*; Serbo-Croatian *pričalica* or *pripovjetka*; Rus. *byline*; Ukr. *dume*; Scandinavian *vise*; Span. *romance* or *romacero*; and Port. *romanceiro*). Vuk Stefanović Karadžić called them ‘women’s songs’ (*ženske pjesme*), and the terms *corrido* and *canto* may also be found in the Hispanic tradition.³ Slovenian folk singers call them ‘sad [songs]’ (*žalostne*) or ‘old [songs]’ (*stare*).

The development of the folk ballad can be traced from the late Middle-Ages, but its origin is still unclear, despite the popularity of two hypotheses formulated by Erich Seemann. The first of these is that toward the end of the Middle-Ages large epic poems began to break down into shorter poems describing only one central event. These songs were performed using dance and drama. Seemann’s other hypothesis is that short narrative songs with only one central event arose even before the great epics. Singers then incorporated them into larger epic poems or used them independently.⁴ Both of these hypotheses are plausible, but each nation also has its own developmental path. The European ballad tradition confirms that a ballad could arise from a fragment of an epic; for example, the German ballad “Die Geburt im Walde” (The Birth in the Woods), known in Slovenia as “Smrt matere na porodu” (Death of a Mother in Childbirth)⁵, is also known in Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, France, and England; its source can be found in a fragment of the *Wolfdietrich* epic.⁶

² Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, Introduction by Nick Groom, 3 vols., London, Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996.

In modern-day English, the term “ballad” is used in a broader sense and also includes both newly composed and popularized songs; sometimes the terms “traditional” or “popular” are used to denote folk ballads.

³ Even today, *corridos* are ballads that tell of historical events, heroes, murders, killings, incest, suicide, and so on; that is, they have the characteristics of ballads and not romances. [Maria Herrera-Sobek, ‘Indio, Gringo, and Gachupin: Ethnic Construction in the Mexican Corrido’, in: Marjetka Golež Kaučič (ed.), *Ljudske balade med izročilom in sodobnostjo/Ballads Between Tradition and Modern Times*, Ljubljana, Založba ZRC, 1998, pp. 101–109.]

⁴ Erich Seemann, *Ballade und Epos*, Zurich, Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde LI / 3, 1955, pp. 147–183.

⁵ *Slovenske ljudske pesmi* (Slovenian Folk Songs), Volume 5, Song type 250 (2007). Hereafter cited as SLP V/250 or similar.

⁶ This epic was printed multiple times up to 1600. It was probably reworked into a ballad sometime between 1350 and 1400, when the Ortenburg colonists moved to Kočevje, because otherwise they would not have been able to bring it with them. The people of Kostel would have received it from them toward the end of the 14th century or perhaps at the beginning of the 15th century, when the established Slovenian residents and the new arrivals in Kočevje would have already been communicating with ease. The Slovenian ballad consists of trochaic heptameter with anacrusis, the characteristic verse form for Slovenian ballads, which are not strophic. The verses only repeat themselves because of the two-part melody. [Zmaga Kumer, ‘Zur Frage der Deutsch-Slowenischen Wechselbeziehungen im Volkslied’, in: *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 2, 1961, pp. 239–243 and Marjetka Golež Kaučič et al., *Slovenske ljudske pesmi. 5. knjiga Družinske pripovedne pesmi*, Ljubljana, Založba ZRC and Slovenska matica, 2007, p. 122.]

One theory speculates that the carriers or originators of ballads were minstrels, the oldest professional musicians. They were employed by the noble courts and moved from castle to castle. According to this theory, the origins of the ballad lie somewhere in 12th-century France or England, where minstrels were active. However, Scandinavian folklorists suspect that ballads came to them from France even before 1200, probably with the round dance and its musical accompaniment. Seemann (1955) thought that the oldest German ballad dated from the beginning of the 12th century, while Ivan Grafenauer felt that the Slovenian ballad “Lepa Vida: Zvijajna ugrabitev mlade matere” (Beautiful Vida: The Cunning Abduction of a Young Mother) had its origins in a Romance ballad from the 11th century.⁷ The Spanish romances arose in the 14th century and the Russian *byline* in the 13th century.

The widespread collection of ballads began in the Romantic era; transcriptions predating these are rare, but do exist. One of the ballads of Robin Hood from James Francis Child’s collection *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882–1898), for instance, was found in a manuscript from the mid-15th century, and the first printed collection of Danish ballads appeared as early as 1591. In Slovenia the first manuscript collection, by Dizma Zakotnik (1755–1793), dates from about 1775. It includes the heroic ballad of Pegam and Lambergar, the song of King Matthias, and the ballad of the River Man.⁸ Slovenian ballad collectors included Marko Pohlin (1735–1801), Jožef Rudež (1793–1846), Stanko Vraz (1810–1851), and many others;⁹ at the end of the 19th century the most important of these was Karel Štrekelj (1866–1937), whose collection, *Slovenske narodne pesmi I* (SNP, Slovenian Folk Songs, 1895–1923) is still the best-known in Slovenia. It contains all varieties of narrative songs. The new, scholarly collection *Slovenske ljudske pesmi I–V* (SLP, Slovenian Folk Songs, 1970–2007) contains all types of narrative songs except for those about animals and humorous subjects, which will eventually be published in volume 6. This collection also presents the melodies along with the texts, a feature Štrekelj’s collection lacked.¹⁰

The Slovenian genre and content definition of “ballad” mirrors the Western understanding. However, as the genre has attracted a disproportionately large number of researchers, a unanimous definition remains elusive. Sigurd B. Hustvedt called the difficulties with terminology, varying definitions, classification, and other issues the ‘ballad enigma’¹¹, and the Scottish ballad expert David Buchan began his book *The Ballad and the Folk* with the sentence: ‘Ballads are awkward things’,

⁷ “Lepa Vida: Zvijajna ugrabitev mlade matere” (Beautiful Vida: The Cunning Abduction of a Young Mother; SLP V/244) discussed in: Ivan Grafenauer, *Lepa Vida: študija o izvoru, razvoju in razkroju narodne balade o Lepi Vidi*, Ljubljana, Dela / Akademija znanosti in umetnosti v Ljubljani. Filozofsko-filološko-historični razred, 1943

⁸ Pegam and Lambergar, (SLPI/1) “The ballad of the Rover Man” was later published in: Anton Tomaž Linhart, *Blumen aus Krain*, Ljubljana, Eger, 1780, pp. 39–49.

⁹ See also Zmaga Kumer, *Vloga, zgradba, slo slvenske ljudske pesmi*, Ljubljana, Znastvenoraziskovalni center, 1996, pp. 19–24.

¹⁰ This collection is being published by the ZRC SAZU Institute of Ethnomusicology in Ljubljana.

¹¹ Sigurd Hustvedt, *Ballad Books and Ballad Men*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1930, p. 4.

continuing: 'To the folklorist the word 'ballad' refers in general to a narrative song transmitted by tradition, that is, by word-of-mouth rather than print'.¹² The English folklorist A. L. Lloyd stated that 'ballads are the unquestioned aristocrats of the folk song world'.¹³ Alan Dundes called them the 'finest specimens of human tradition',¹⁴ and M. J. C. Hodgart said they were 'as hard to define as they are easy to recognize'.¹⁵ Collector and folklorist Hamish Henderson described the Scottish ballads as 'the flexible formulaic language of the older Scottish folksongs'.¹⁶

Classification by content is also difficult and varies from country to country; for example, the Romanian tradition contains a broad range of legends presented through ballads. Slovenia is similar; after love and family ballads, the largest category is legendary ballads.¹⁷ In German ballads, a combination of the historical and the realistic can be found, which may sum up a vision of human experience.¹⁸ In countries with a very strong ballad tradition, such as Spain, Mexico, Hungary and Italy, ballads can be 'the substance of social commentaries',¹⁹ whereas in Portugal they function as work songs:

Ballad singing only attains its full intensity at harvest time, when its full power is unleashed in the open air. In this setting, the ballad is quite remarkable and striking since it is sung according to a strictly ritualized timetable, in the heat of work, several times a day, by the whole agricultural community.²⁰

The creation and transmission of ballads varies substantially from culture to culture, so it is important to distinguish between ballad singing – or balladry – and ballad writing. In countries where ballads

¹² David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk*, East Linton, Tuckwell Press, 1997, p. 1.

¹³ David Atkinson, *The English Traditional Ballad: Theory, Method and Practice*, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002, p. ix.

¹⁴ Alan Dundes, (ed.), *The Walled-Up Wife: A Casebook*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1996, p. xi.

¹⁵ M. J. C. Hodgart, *The Ballads*, 2 ed., London, Hutchinson University Library, 1962, p. 10. Breandán Ó Madagáin of Ireland states that 'song could function as emotional release on occasions when feelings were such that ordinary speech was inadequate'. [Breandán Ó Madagáin, 'Functions of Irish Song in the Nineteenth Century', in: *Béaloideas* 53, 1985, p. 143.] Barre Toelken defines it thus: 'ballads are made up of songs that portray the features of an event, or a related series of actions, with some kind of dramatic plot or narrative thread'. [Barre Toelken, *Morning Dew and Roses: Nuance, Metaphor, and Meaning in Folksongs*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1995, p. 14.]

¹⁶ Hamish Henderson (reprint, orig. 1980), 'The Ballad, the Folk and the Oral Tradition', in: Edward J. Cowan (ed.), *The People's Past*, Edinburgh, Polygon, 1990, p. 82.

¹⁷ Sabina Ispas, 'Struggle with the Dragon', in: Sigris Rieuwerts and Helga Stein (eds.), *Bridging the Cultural Divide: Our Common Ballad Heritage/Kulturelle Brücken: Gemeinsame Balladentradition*, Hildesheim, Olms, 2000, pp. 162–175.

¹⁸ Jürgen Dittmar, 'Das Geschichtliche Ereignis im Deutschen Erzähltd. Ein gattungsvergleich', in: *Ballata e Storia. 14. Arbeitstagung der Kommission für Volkdichtung der Societe Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore* (SIEF), Firenze, Olshki, 1985, p. 531. (Also published in *Lares* 51, pp. 527–38.)

¹⁹ Beatriz Mariscal Hay, 'From Chanson to Romance: Notes on the Spanish Carolingian Ballada Tradition', in: Rieuwerts and Stein, *Bridging the Cultural Divide*, p. 159. Rolf Wilhelm Brednich (ed.), *Arbeitstagung über Fragen des Typenindex der europäischen Volksballaden*, Berlin, 1979, pp. 44–137.

²⁰ Anne Caufriez, 'The Ballad in Northeastern Portugal', in: James Porter and Ellen Sinatra (eds.), *Ballads and Boundaries: Narrative Singing in an Intercultural Context*, Proceedings of the 23rd International Ballad Conference of the Commission for Folk Poetry (SIEF), Los Angeles, department of Ethnomusicology and Systematic Musicology, 1995, p. 253.

arose as a primarily oral tradition, such as Slavic countries, ballad singing is a different process compared with England, for example, which had a 'literary culture' as early as the Middle Ages.²¹ Erich Seemann identified the European ballad as a song that tells a story. Therefore, the neutral term for a ballad is "narrative song." Its characteristics are: a particular style; oral transmission; a concentration of actual events in the story, or "compactness"; a dramatic plot often, but not necessarily always, with a tragic conclusion; and the ballad's status as sung song, not a literary object.²²

The definition of "folk ballad" in Slovenian and European folklore studies has been more or less clear since 1966, when the first international meeting of ballad scholars, the Ballad Commission (KfV) of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF), was held in Freiburg. Participants there accepted the following definition: 'A ballad is a song that tells a story that is pointedly dramatic'.²³ The first proceedings were published as *Arbeitstagung über Fragen des Typenindex der europäischen Volksballaden* (Conference on the Type Index for European Folk Ballads, 1966). On the basis of the resolution accepted at this meeting, Zmaga Kumer prepared a catalog of ballad types, *Vsebinski tipi slovenskih pripovednih pesmi/Typenindex slowenischer Erzähllieder* (Type Index of Slovenian Ballads), which was published in both English and German in 1974. It is one of the first European ballad catalogs. Since 1966 we have considered ballads to be narrative songs with dramatic emphasis regardless of whether they end tragically or happily. Folklorists assert that the word "ballad" in the sense of narrative song was also brought into literature with Gottfried August Bürger's "Lenore", published in 1774. "Lenore" was a textbook example of an artistic ballad with completely prescribed content, even though it was based on the example of folk ballads and also appears as a folk ballad in other national ballad traditions. In Slovenia it was popularized primarily through Prešeren's translation of Bürger's original; but it also exists, and is still sung, in a folk version, "Mrtvec pride po ljubico" (A Dead Man Comes for His Beloved, A SLP I/59). Internationally, folklorists appropriated the word "ballad" as a technical term from Germany, and the examples of folk ballads were originally taken to be of northern origin, such as the English, Scottish, and Scandinavian ballads. Research has indicated, however, that other European nations' narrative songs do not completely fit this type. Those which Bulgarians call ballads tend to be legendary narrative songs, whereas Lithuanians and Slovenians usually apply the term to narrative songs that are sometimes more lyrical than epic or dramatic. Their best-known narrative songs are ballads about the fates of families and love. In Romania some of the narrative songs in the southern regions have a form

²¹ Albert Bates Lord & Béla Bartók, *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1951, p. 249. Milman Parry & Albert Bates Lord, *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, Belgrade, Serbian Academy of Sciences, 1954.

²² Erich Seemann, Dag Strömbäck, & Bengt R. Jonsson, *European Folk Ballads*, Copenhagen, Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1967, pp. xi–xxxii.

²³ 'Eine Ballade ist ein Lied, das eine Geschichte erzählt, die dramatisch pointiert ist'. [Zmaga Kumer, 'Pogledi na dosedanje delo baladne komisije / An Overview of the Work of the Ballad Commission to Date', in: Golež Kaučič, *Ljudske balade med izročilom in sodobnostjo*, 1998, p. 31.]

more like that of epic poems, but in the north they are more lyrical and akin to ballads. Even some of their Christmas carols have themes characteristic of ballads. The situation in Serbia and Croatia is similar, where some recorded songs have epic characteristics and others ballad characteristics.

A definition of the Slovenian folk ballad could therefore be described thus: It is a compact narrative song sometimes with more emphasis on drama or dialogue structure; with at least three types of rhythmic structure and diverse melodies with or without refrains; with a particular storytelling method (that is, singing); and tragic or happy endings.

THE SLOVENIAN BALLAD

In Slovenian literary history, the term “ballad” denotes short narrative poems about unusual, dramatically pointed, and occasionally horrifying events taken from fairy tales, myths, history, and current events. Their epic content is connected with the dramatic content, and also often with lyrical content.²⁴ The term “ballad” also describes similar folk narrative songs, such as “Desetnica” (The Tenth Daughter), “Rošlin in Verjanko” (Rošlin and Verjanko) “Lepa Vida” (Beautiful Vida), “Kralj Matjaž” (King Matthias), and others, the strong influence of which is discernible in the development of artistic ballads. Slovenian literary historians also began to discriminate between folk romances and ballads according to the example of composed poetry, even though folklorists know that “romance” is merely the Spanish term for a ballad with a particular content. Literary theory describes a romance as a short epic-lyrical poem of Spanish origin, similar to ballads in terms of motifs and themes, but differing in terms of its spirit, mood, and style, as well as its composition. The original Spanish versions also had a particular verse structure.²⁵ Slovenian literary historians have identified some folk ballads as romances due to characteristics analogous to artistic romances. The typical heroic narrative song (or ballad) “Pegam in Lambergar” is therefore considered a romance by literary historians because of its lighthearted character and its setting in the time of chivalry (Kos 1979: 70); folklorists, however, categorize it as a typical heroic narrative song (or ballad) because of all the characteristics given above. Similarly, the songs “Kralj Matjaž rešen iz ječe” (King Matthias Rescued from Prison, SLP I/5), “Kralj Matjaž reši ugrabljeno ženo” (King Matthias Rescues His Abducted Wife, SLP I/3), and “Zvestoba ljubice poplačana” (A Lover’s Faithfulness Rewarded, SLP IV/221), which do not have tragic endings, cannot be romances but must be narrative songs (or ballads), as in the case of “Godec pred peklom” (A Musician before Hell, SLPI/48).

Therefore, Slovenian folklorists prefer to use the term “narrative song” instead of “ballad,” although the term “ballad” remains in use due to its long history of enigmatic connotation. The term

²⁴ Janko Kos, “Balada” in *Enciklopedija Slovenije* I, Ljubljana, Mladinska knjiga, 1987. 173–174

²⁵ Janko Kos, “Romanca” in *Enciklopedija Slovenije* X, Ljubljana, Mladinska knjiga, 1996. 269–270

In the late Middle Ages a type of narrative song arose in Castille that was based on the battles between the Spanish and the Moors, or Arabs. These were called “romances.” These songs were usually sung with dances. Their roots reach far back into the epic poetry tradition of *chansons de geste*. See Seemann et al., *European Folk Ballads*, xvi.

“romance” is no longer used. Literary historians view the rise of the artistic ballad as the end of the folk ballad; but for folklorists, who see the development of the folk ballad as a diachronic process, this understanding is inappropriate. The real-life context of the folk ballad is disappearing, but not the ballad itself – its texture and text. Many folk ballads also became models for later literary re-workings in Slovenian literature from the Enlightenment to today. The most important ballads of this type that have served as models for later intertextual series are “Lepa Vida” (a family ballad about the cunning abduction of a young mother, SLP V/244) and “Kralj Matjaž” (a heroic historical ballad, SLP I/3), both of which present archetypal female and male characters, and which have become spiritual predecessors of diverse literary metatexts from the time of Prešeren’s reworking of both poems up to the present.²⁶

In addition to text, texture (or melodies), and context, the carriers or transmitters of the ballad in Slovenia are also very important; not only do they categorize ballads as either “old” or “sad” songs, they also distinguish these songs from others. These carriers are always individuals, but are, of course, products of the culture of their time, so their selection and interpretation of ballads is unique. There are a number of prominent folk ballad singers, such as Katarina Zupančič (a.k.a. Živčkova Katra) from Vinje (in Upper Carniola), who was a type of ‘traveling or itinerate singer’ that ‘wore nice clothes for Carnival, went from house to house and sang’.²⁷ Other examples include Ana Foladore from Resia, Marija Tekavec (née Skajževa) from Lower Carniola, and Rozika Ofič from Styria, all of whom could sing numerous ballads. Their repertoire demonstrates that they individually selected songs based on their own interests and life stories.²⁸ The connection between the song and singer is simultaneously horizontal (synchronic) - a group of singers and songs together in an extended social and cultural context - and vertical (diachronic) - a song’s path through various time periods. Certainly, the ballad arises from certain types of social interaction between society, family, and individuals. Therefore, contextual and performance information are important for ballad interpretation.²⁹ The audience is also important, and in Slovenia the audience is usually active: in a live context, listeners of ballads usually join in the act of singing. Today the importance of the audience’s role is in transition, as the average

²⁶ See also Marjetka Golež Kaučič, ‘Slovenska ljudska pripovedna pesem (balada) in njeni odsevi v Prešernovi ter odmevi v sodobni poeziji’, in: Marko Juvan (ed.), *Romantična pesnitev: ob 200. obletnici rojstva Franceta Prešerna (= Obdobja, 19)*, Ljubljana, Center za slovenščino kot drugi/tuji jezik pri Oddelku za slovenske jezike in književnosti Filozofske fakultete, 2002, pp. 521–541. Marjetka Golež Kaučič, *Ljudsko in umetno: dva obraza ustvarjalnosti*, (Zbirka Folkloristika), Ljubljana, Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, 2003, pp. 99–128.

²⁷ Zmaga Kumer, ‘Ljudske pesmi Živčkove Katre’, in: *Traditiones* 15, 1986, p. 169.

²⁸ See also Marjetka Golež Kaučič, ‘Odsev pravnega položaja in življenjskih razmer žensk v slovenskih ljudskih družinskih baladah: poskus zasnove orisa ženske kot subjekta pesmi v povezavi z nosilko pesmi’, in: *Etnolog, N. vrsta (Ljubl.)*, 11 (= 62), 2001, pp. 170–172.

²⁹ A Scottish folk singer described ballad singing as difficult work, for which one has to be in the mood. ‘Singing old songs is like watching television. You think of the song and the picture of the song forms in your heart and you just sing it’. [Thomas A. McKean (ed.), *The Flowering Thorn. International Ballad Studies*. Logan, Utah, Utah State University Press, 2003, p. 5.] One Slovenian singer said that the folk ballad “Riba Faronika” (Faronika the Fish) is a prophetic song and that one must therefore ‘dramatize the lyrics’ while singing it. [Marjetka Golež Kaučič, ‘Folk Song Today: Between Function and Aesthetics’ in *Traditiones* 34(1), 2005, p. 185.]

audience is more demanding, but also increasingly passive. Some singers today shorten the ballad texts and omit some repetitions, as they believe that their audiences will become bored. For the same reason, they may rearrange some of the ballad melodies, in doing so asserting their own musical tastes.³⁰ The question then arises; do the listeners participate in the act of folk song creation as much as the performers they are listening to? Or do they form what Barre Toelken calls a 'proactive ballad audience', and what Gerald Porter refers to as the 'collaborative role of the listener', a form of 'cultural communication' quite variable from culture to culture?³¹ It is necessary to look at the ballad as an entire entity: its singers, melodies, and performance method; its context; and of course its text, which, given the ballad tradition, is the most important part of a ballad. It is possible to analyze the ballad from various aspects, but the simplest definition of the ballad is a song that tells (i.e., sings) a story, even when occasionally there is no dramatic conflict. This is especially so in legendary ballads. Zmaga Kumer, who remains an undisputed authority on Slovenian folklore in the European context, felt that it was always necessary to study the ballad through its internal structure, observing how it was put together and with which elements.³²

TYOLOGY AND THEMES IN SLOVENIAN BALLADS

The areas of Europe with the richest ballad traditions are Scandinavia, Britain, and Slavic areas.³³ But from these centers ballads spread to other parts of Europe. Nations come into contact with each other through ballads, through which they express their own ethnic identities and also their internationalism. Slovenians have over 300 types of ballads, and the classification of Slovenian narrative song content follows Štrekelj's classification (SNP collection, 1895–1923). Further refinements have been made to the classification of narrative songs (or ballads) in the collection *Slovenske ljudske pesmi I–V* (1970–2007). They are classified into eight groups by theme: heroic and historical, myths and fairy tales, legendary, social, love, family, animals and humor, and miscellaneous. The following statistics indicate the relative proportion of each type: mythological content (12%), historical (3%), social (6%), legendary (42%), humorous and miscellaneous (5%), and love and family combined (34%). Ballads are known throughout all of Slovenia, but some regions have more than others; particularly abundant are the area around Kamnik and Moravče, the southern foothills of Pohorje, the Ribnik Valley, Resia, and southern Prekmurje.

There are three thematic groups within the Slovenian ballad tradition: general European, Slavic, and originally Slovenian.

³⁰ Golež Kaučič, 'Folk Song Today', pp. 177–191.

³¹ Toelken, 1999, cited in: McKean, *The Flowering Thorn*, p. 6.

Gerald Porter, 'The Intertextuality of the Song Fragment: Dickens and Popular Song', in: Rieuwerts & Stein *Bridging the Cultural Divide*, p. 340.

³² Zmaga Kumer, 'Slovenska ljudska balada. XII', in: *Seminar slovenskega jezika, literature in kulture*. Ljubljana, Filozofska fakulteta, 1976, p. 49.

³³ The Norwegians have 195 types of ballad, the Swedes 230 types, the Danes 539, the English and Scots 305, the French 50, and the Romanians 352.

1. General European content: these include ballads about a girl soldier, “Godec pred peklom,” “Rošlin in Verjanko,” and ballads about the return of a husband to his wife’s wedding, about the brother that poisons his sister, and about dead bones.

Because ballads, or their motifs or themes, can travel and establish themselves in various national traditions, one can say that either the receiving national traditions thereafter transform them in their own way, or that particular traditions take over an entire reservoir of content, motifs and themes, myths, and so on independently of others: the latter represent “archetypal” stories. One example is the Slovenian “Jelengar,” which was first the Dutch “Halewyn,” and later German “Ullinger.” “Dona Filomena” is the Portuguese version of the Slovenian “Nezvesta gospa s tremi petelinčki” (The Unfaithful Lady with Three Cocks), and the Hispanic “Delgadina” has its Slovenian corollary in “Bratu, ki ubije sestro” (The Brother That Kills His Sister). Some German ballads were brought to Slovenia by the Kočevje Germans, who came to Slovenia in the 14th century, but they also took some Slovenian ballads with them back to Germany, such as “Lepa Vida.” The one among them that is still known is the Slovenian ballad “Desetnica” (The Tenth Daughter), which does not have any corollaries in ballad form elsewhere in Europe: the motif is known only in prose form. “The Twa (Two) Sisters,” a well-known Anglo-Scottish ballad, which David Atkinson believes is one of the few true folk ballads according to all the new criteria, is the story of a murder in which a musical instrument is made from the victim’s body; it is known in song or prose tradition through all of Europe.³⁴ Slovenia has only one recorded version, “Gosli iz človeškega telesa izdajo umor” (A Fiddle Made from a Human Body Reveals a Murder, SLP I/52). Some scholars believe that the ballad took shape in Scandinavia and then spread to other countries. Only two versions are known in Central Europe: one from Kočevje and the Slovenian one, but they are so different that they probably arose independently.

“Mrtvaška kost kaznuje objestneža” (The Dead Man’s Bone Punishes a Wanton Man, SLP I/39) is another Slovenian mythological or fairy tale ballad with international content.³⁵ The Slovenian ballad is different from most European versions in that the main figure in the ballad is dead bone and not a skull, and that the bone does not come as a guest, but simply causes the death of the person that has acted disrespectfully toward it.

2. Slavic: these include the ballad about the brigand’s wife; the ballad of the River Man’s wife; ballads about the spurned lover that puts a spell on the unfaithful one; and about the shepherd whose

³⁴ Atkinson, *The English Traditional Ballad*, p. 212. The ballad tells of two sisters that are in love with one boy; the boy has chosen the younger one. Out of jealousy, the older one murders the younger one by pushing her into the sea. The murder is later revealed when a fisherman catches a bone, makes a fiddle out of it, and starts to play. The song of the cruel murder then comes from it.

³⁵ The ballad of the dead bone that chastises the wanton man belongs to the category of narrative material about dead people that come to visit prideful living people. The content is known throughout almost all European nations, generally in prose; the Bretons, French, Spanish, Flemish, and Kočevje Germans also have verse forms. Slovenia has both forms. In the 17th and 18th centuries they were used as sermon examples, and they are also found in literature and the musical arts in Mozart’s opera *Don Giovanni*. Leonard Petzoldt (1968) has written an entire monograph on the topic in which he discusses most of the European versions of this type (both verse and prose) and their transfer into literature.

heart is torn from his chest by three women. An example of the first type, “Kata, Katalena: Z razbojnikom omožena” (Kata, Katalena: Married to a Brigand, SLP V/248), contains the theme of a woman married to a brigand and murderer; it is Slavic and probably comes from the Common Slavic culture or heritage because it is known to all Slavic peoples in their own particular variants.³⁶

3. Originally Slovenian: the ballads of the rescue of a girl from the hands of a Turkish abductor, of the tenth daughter, of the miller who quarreled with Death, of the galley slave, and of the dancer carried off by the devil. “Desetnica” (The Tenth Daughter, SLP I/51) is an originally Slovenian ballad. Even today the song preserves the memory of the pagan custom of giving the gods every tenth part of the harvest or livestock, or the requirement of sacrificing the tenth child of the same sex. This sacrifice was gradually replaced with exile or with giving the tenth child to the Church. Christianity later preserved only the tenth of the harvest. The folk tradition handles the tenth child as a special case that may harm the family, especially if it is a tenth daughter. Therefore, even in Christian times the tenth daughter became an exile. The motif is known throughout Europe, but usually only in prose (it is best preserved in the Baltic and Irish traditions); only the Slovenians have preserved it in verse form. The Kočevje Germans also have the song (“Die zehnte Tochter”), but they received it from the Slovenians.³⁷

CHARACTERISTICS OF SLOVENIAN BALLADS

The folk ballad is a song, so it belongs to folk poetry. It is sung and, as Johann Gottfried Herder said, ‘It is necessary to hear a folk song, not look at it’.³⁸ It is a synchronic whole of text plus texture. This is why the text, melody, and function, or the particular circumstances surrounding the song performance, are studied. This is where field information comes from. It is also necessary to take into account the singers who recreate the songs, or create a new version of the song each time. Part singing is characteristic of the Slovenian musical tradition although in the field, researchers have recorded many songs that only one individual knew how to sing. Most of these individuals were women, confirming the fact that the main carriers of folk ballad tradition are women.

In contrast to the literary ballad, in which the emphasis is mainly on the poem’s content, in the folk ballad the storytelling method is of primary importance. The recognized sign for whether to

³⁶ There are two thematic versions in Slovenia ethnic territory. One occurs primarily in central Slovenia and the other from Styria to the Rába Valley. The central Slovenian version has the motif of the brigand-murderer at its core, but the important theme in the content structure is that of marrying into a distant place. The Prekmurje and Rába Valley versions of the song (“Kata, Katalena”) influenced the Croatian, Međimurje, and Zagorje versions of this song type and also rely on the Croatian song of the various fates of three married daughters. [cf. Marko Terseglav, Robert Vrčon & Urša Šivic, ‘Z razbojnikom poročena’, in: Golež Kaučič et al, *Slovenske ljudske pesmi*, pp. 118–119.]

³⁷ The song is basically a translation of the Slovenian version into Kočevje German, which was recorded in 1937 in Koprivnik (Germ. Nesselstal), and published in France Marolt’s Kočevje collection in 1939. The song is now also included in the collection *Deutsche Volkslieder mit ihren Melodien* (DVM) of 1965 (new edition, 1996).

³⁸ Zmaga Kumer, ‘Razmerje med besedilom in melodijo v ljudski pesmi’, in: Tone Pretnar & Darinka Počaj-Rus (eds.), *XXVI. seminar slovenskega jezika, literature in culture*, Ljubljana, Center za slovenščino kot tuji ali drugi jezik pri Oddelku za slovanske jezike in književnosti Filozofske fakultete, 1990, p. 255.

consider a narrative song a ballad or not should, therefore, be drama. In contrast to an epic, a ballad is shorter, has a more compact narrative, and is dramatic to the degree that at the forefront it contains dialogue between characters. The Slovenian folk ballad has a few other particulars that distinguish it from artistic ballads, which it is perhaps necessary to highlight. It is compact both as a story and in its form; it has a melody and a particular role in the people's lives. A ballad can take the role of a dirge (such as the ballads of the death of the bride on her wedding day, of the widower at his wife's grave, and of the death of girl who has married far away). Singing was always a part of group labor, such as harvesting grapes, weeding, shucking corn, spinning, or shelling beans, and ballads were often among the songs sung. In Slovenia there was a custom, retained in some places today, in which the deceased were laid out at home on a bier, around which the members of the household, relatives, and friends would gather and sing; in this context the ballad takes on the role of a dirge. The preservation of some ballads until the present day is due to this custom. They can also be devotional songs (in the Karst region there is a Three Kings carol that has the legendary ballad of Mary and the ferryman as its central part), lullabies (such as the ballad of a servant girl whose child is murdered by the lord's wife), and children's songs (such as "Povodni mož" GNI M 20.713).³⁹ The ballad as a dance tune is also preserved at the southern edge of Slovenia in White Carniola, where at the winter solstice celebration on 27 December they dance a round dance while singing a fairy tale ballad of a shepherd whose heart is torn from his chest while he sleeps by three women – his mother, his sister, and his lover. The ballad is called "Tri žene iztrgajo mladeniču srce: Pobeledo polje" (Three Women Tear Out a Young Man's Heart: White Field). The dance rhythm is taken from the song rhythm to create the round dance, which came to Slovenia from the Balkans with the Uskoks.⁴⁰

Another characteristic of folk ballads is moralizing: folk justice seeks a punishment for every evil act. The fact that folk ballads are sung and rhythmically well-defined (the verse form or stanza must be preserved throughout the entire song because of the melody) distinguishes them from artistic ballads; very rarely they are also recited (at the western edge of Slovenian territory there is a recitative style of singing that allows varying lengths of verses in a song). Like all folk songs in Slovenia, the ballad is a group song; it is not sung by one individual to the group, but rather everyone in attendance sings if they know the song. This is how ballads have been preserved and spread. They are strophic and often have refrains; older ballads usually do not rhyme. The most frequent form is two-line

³⁹ Zmaga Kumer, *Pesem slovenske dežele*, Maribor, Obzorja, 1975, p. 454.

⁴⁰ Mirko Ramovš, 'Ples na Anževo v Predgradu' in: *Traditiones* 5–6, 1976/77, pp. 305–313.

Kumer believes that it can be concluded from Matija Majar's (Ziljski) note published in SNP on singing ballads under a linden tree that ballad dances existed in Upper Carniola and Carinthia; their form can be understood through Marolt's recordings. From these it is clear that they still danced while singing ballads in Carinthia and Upper Carniola until about the end of the 19th century, such that after each stanza of the ballad that the dancers sang, the musicians played while the dancers danced the appropriate figure. This form is still alive today in the Carinthian *visoki rej* 'High Dance', although here it is a sung *poskočnica* 'quick dance' composed of four-line stanzas. [Zmaga Kumer, 'Funkcija balade na Slovenskem' in *Rad kongresa folklorista V, Zaječar 1958*, Belgrade, Naučno delo, 1960, p. 139.]

stanzas with repetition of the second line, and only occasionally of the first. True three-line stanzas are rare; four-line stanzas arise where there is a distich in the text. Usually a four-line stanza is the fusion of two two-line stanzas where the melody has four parts.⁴¹

Some Slovenian narrative songs that are now part of the ballad tradition are of recent origin; they were created from the second half of the 19th century to the mid-20th century in eastern Styria and are also called “farewell songs.” They were based on real accidents or killings with narration of the individuals, places, and dates as a sort of wake song, broadsheet song, or obituary song. In England this type of song is known as a *broadside ballad*, in Germany as a *Bänkelsang*, and in Bohemia and Moravia as a *kramářská píseň*. Only later did they become narrative songs and thematicize the murder of lovers, killings during serenading, the sudden death of a daughter, or the killings of mothers or sons.⁴² In these, the folk singer expressed his or her own horror at the terrible event – which is colorfully described – commended the deceased, and mentioned the sorrow of his loved ones. Songs that were originally wake songs, sometimes turned into true narrative songs, or ballads.

THE MUSICAL FORM OF THE SLOVENIAN BALLAD

Slovenia is geographically and ethnographically heterogeneous, and this diversity is visible (or audible) in ballad melodies. Just as text characteristics show that some have their origins in very archaic historical periods and others are of more recent origin, the same is true of ballad melodies. These differences allow researchers to determine melodies’ relative age and sometimes their development or decay. Valens Vodušek believes that it is characteristic for ballads to be sung in a particular rhythm (*tempo giusto*), and not in a *parlando* recitative style, as is characteristic of Serbian (and other) epics.⁴³ The recitative style is only used exceptionally, usually for legendary songs; this style has only been found in the Soča Valley in the narrative song “Sveti Miklavž in hudoba” (Saint Nicolas and the Wicked Man, SLP II/125).⁴⁴ Leading Slovenian ethnomusicologists Vodušek and Kumer were aware that the metric verse structure was very important to the study of ballad melody characteristics, especially because the meter, just like the melody, is the product of historical development and decay. Therefore one can say that the most frequent ballad verse is heptameter, which appears in 70% of all ballads: for example, “Kaj pa delaš / Anzeljček // svoji lubci / šolnčke” (What are you making / little Anzelj // dainty shoes / for your beloved) from “Smrt čevljarjeve ljubice” (Death of the Cobbler’s Beloved, SLP IV/209) or heptameter with anacrusis, which came from the French Gallo-Romance verse form, the octosyllable, which is seen in the song “Smrt matere na porodu” (Death of a Mother in Childbirth, SLP V/250): “Lepa voda / Ljubljancica” (Lovely Water /

⁴¹ Kumer, ‘Slovenska ljudska balada. XII’, pp. 131–146.

⁴² SLP IV/218, 219; SLP V/253, 254, 276, 277

⁴³ Valens Vodušek, ‘Neka zapažanja o baladnim napevima na področju Slovenije’, in: Marko Terseglav & Robert Vrčon (eds.), *Etnomuzikološki članki in razprave*, Ljubljana, Založba ZRC. Zbirka Folkloristika, 2002, p. 41.

⁴⁴ Zmaga Kumer, *Etnomuzikologija*, Ljubljana, Filozofska Fakulteta, 1988, p. 120.

Little Ljubljana), which is trochaic heptameter with anacrusis. The verses repeat because of the two-part melody and are not strophic. A newer metric structure for the ballad is the distich octameter and heptameter; for example, in the family ballad “Nevesta detomorilka” (The Infanticide Bride): “En pastirček / ovce pase // na zelenem / travniku” (A little shepherd / guards the sheep // on the green / meadow, (188 versions of ballad type: SLP V/286).⁴⁵

Location: Logatec, Inner Carniola

Sung by: Matilda Molk (b. 1934) and Štefan Molk (b. 1934)

Rec. no. GNI (MR, DK), 6 July 1995

Source: GNI M 46.370

♩ = 76

1. Mlad pa - stir - ček__ krav-ce pa - se na ze - le - nem trav-ni - ku,

mlad pa - stir - ček krav-ce pa - se__ na ze - le - nem trav-ni - ku.

I.F.

Originating in Germany, this spread through Styria. As Mojca Kovačič states, ‘Nearly half of all versions show the characteristic binary metric scheme between the third and fourth melodic phrases’:

These melodies are most often found in Upper Carniola, Lower Carniola, and Styria, and more rarely in the Littoral, Carinthia, and White Carniola. In most cases the melody has four phrases, and so the text, which has two lines, repeats. This relationship between the melody and the text may indicate a more recent developmental stage in the melody.⁴⁶

In the Alpine region the “proto-Slavic meter”, which belongs to ancient or Common Slavic heritage is preserved.. This is a lyrical decasyllabic verse that consists of two pentameters (5 + 5). The medieval family ballad “Mačeha in sirota” (The Stepmother and Stepdaughter) C is a representative sample:

⁴⁵ Golež Kaučič et al., *Slovenske ljudske pesmi*, pp. 545–713.

⁴⁶ Mojca Kovačič, ‘Nevesta detomorilka’, in: Golež Kaučič et al. *Slovenske ljudske pesmi*, p. 713.

“Sveta Kristina / bolna ležala, / bolna ležala / milo jokala” (Saint Christina / lay ill / lay ill / gently weeping, SLP V/258). Additional indicators of the song’s age include the Proto-Slavic lyrical decasyllable, melodic characteristics – it is a single phrase composed of three notes, and is very simple – and the non-strophic arrangement of the verses. This occurs in Slovenia and in kajkavian regions of Croatia. Its preservation as a devotional song (such as a carol or wedding song) confirms its ancient origins. In Europe the only groups that have this, aside from Croatia, Macedonia, and Bulgaria, are the Baltic nations. This type of verse also occurs in the family ballad “Lepa Vida” (SLP V/244).

Another ancient Slavic arithmetic structure is the three-part octasyllable 3 + 2 + 3, which is known only in Styria, Prekmurje, and White Carniola, although it is also preserved in the Alpine region in a three-beat rhythmic form, such as in the family ballad “Sestra zastrupi sestri: Zarika in Sončica” (A Sister Poisons a Sister: Zarika and Sončica, SLP V/272).⁴⁷ The goliard verse is rarer and occurs in more recent ballads, such as the family ballad “Gospa s tremi petelinčki” B (SLP V/ 267), although as this loses the dramatic core of a ballad it is gradually turning into a lyrical song: “Tam dol na ravnem polju” (Down There on the Level Field). Only one of the melodies of many versions is three-part, leading to the conclusion that the melodic form of this song type has gradually been simplified and superseded the variety of melodies still found in the first half of the 20th century.⁴⁸ Ballad melodies do not differ markedly from other folk song genres. Vodušek believes that, from a musical point of view, it is the ballad that has preserved some archaic elements that are no longer present in lyrical songs. The most numerous have two rhythmic types - 3 + 2/4 and 5/8 - the first of which is limited to the Alpine region, and the second found in Styria, Upper Carniola, and Lower Carniola (in the Moravče Valley, Ljubljana, and Novo Mesto). Ballads are usually sung in homophonic three-part singing, only occasionally departing from this, when in the melodic verse there is a refrain; at this time the melody can have a *solo* (verse) and *tutti* (refrain), which is the norm in most lyrical songs. The oldest ballad singing method is only known from 19th-century written records. In ballads that were sung as Christmas carols one singer began to sing the ballad in couplets of two heptameters, and then in each verse or two-line strophe there was a *tutti* with a refrain text, such as “Veseli veseli, veseli dan, / veseli se, (Žefa, Reza...) z Jezusom!” (Joy, joy, joyful day, / Rejoice (Žefa, Reza, etc.) with Jesus!)” from the legendary narrative song “Marija in brodnik” (SLP II/105/8).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ This song is known in the European song tradition. Ivan Grafenauer determined the time and area that the song arose based on the two records of the song he had available. He believed that the content of the song came from the time when African and Spanish Saracens were pillaging the western coast of the Mediterranean, in the period up to the 12th century. [Ivan Grafenauer, *O Zariki in Sončici in še kaj o španskih junakih*, DiS 51, 1939, pp. 78–89.]

⁴⁸ Terseglav et al., ‘Z razbojnikom poročena’, p. 443.

⁴⁹ Valens Vodušek, ‘Neka zapažanja o baladnim napevima na področju Slovenije’, In Marko Terseglav & Robert Vrčon (eds.), *Etnomuzikološki članki in razprave*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2002. Zbirka Folkloristika: pp. 41–48.

CONCLUSION

What is the state of the ballad in Slovenia today? At present, ballads are alive in various forms and diverse contextual circumstances, but ballads in the proper meaning of the word are still timeless stories that amaze and always leave open a large semantic space. Even today some new and original versions can be found in the field, such as the love ballad “Samomor nune zaradi ljubezni” (A Nun’s Suicide due to Love, SLP IV/215), which was recorded by Ana and Romana Črnko from Gradišče na Kozjaku in 2004. Other examples include the ballad “Umor iz ljubosumja” (Murder out of Jealousy, SLP IV/218) with a new melody, which was recorded in 1999, sung by Lidija Žnebelj and Marija Carič from Gradišče pri Materiji (in Brkini); and a newly revived fairy tale ballad, “Riba Faronika,” recorded in 2005 and sung by singers from Podmelec (near Tolmin). In addition to the living folk tradition, there are also some stage interpretations of folk ballads that folk singers perform at festivals (meetings of folk singers and musicians, and folk dance group performances) for audiences; there are revivals and reinterpretations of ballads by folk performers such as Bogdana Herman, Tomaž Pengov, Volk Folk, Tolovaj Mataj, and Katice; ballads are “literaturized” or “folklorized” (the transfer of the folk into poetry, prose, or drama); and reworked into popular, jazz, or classical music by performers such as Katalena and Uroš Krek.⁵⁰

Even today the ballad remains enigmatic in terms of its genre and content classification. Notwithstanding its cataloging and content typing, which has already been carried out, it is difficult to define its character. Sometimes this is because of its fragmentation, but other times because of its various core contents, which are not unified. One thing that is certain is that even today it is this genre that interests the greatest number of Slovenian folklorists and literary scholars.

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⁵⁰ See also Marjetka Golež Kaučič, *Ljudsko in umetno: dva obraza ustvarjalnosti*, (Zbirka Folkloristika), Ljubljana, Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, 2003, 2004: 389–399

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Summary

This article discusses the ballad as one of the most enigmatic genre structures in both Slovenia and Europe as a whole. The Slovenian ballad is presented within the international context, along with analysis and synthesis of its fundamental textual, musical, and contextual characteristics.

The introduction and first section discuss the enigmatic character of the genre; history as the core of every ballad, whether folk or artistic; and determines that the Slovenian folk ballad is much more similar to Western ballads than to South Slavic ballads. In this it makes use of various definitions and discussions of ballads and their origins, first recordings, collections, and research in Europe. Then it quotes the international definition of *ballad*, which is “a ballad is a song that tells a dramatically pointed story.” The Slovenian definition is similar: a ballad is a compact narrative song, sometimes with more emphasis on drama or dialogue structure, with at least three types of rhythmic structure and diverse melodies with or without refrains, with a particular storytelling method (that is, singing), and a tragic or happy ending. Then it compares folk and artistic ballads and romances and discusses folk ballads in Slovenia, in which it determines a horizontal relationship between the song and singer, as well as a diachronic path that the song travels through various time periods. Then the article deals with the themes and typology of Slovenian ballads and determines that the Slovenian ballad tradition is one of the richest in Europe, because in Slovenia there are 300 different types. These belong to three thematic groups: general European (e.g., “The Dead Man’s Bone”), Slavic (e.g., “Married to a Brigand”), and originally Slovenian (e.g., “The Tenth Daughter”). Next, the article discusses the characteristics of the Slovenian folk ballad, which is a sung song, usually multi-part, has a special role in the people’s lives, has a particular storytelling method (that is, singing), and has a rhythmic structure that differs from the artistic ballad (such as heptameter, decasyllable, and three-part octasyllable), and a special group of ballads that were wake songs that became ballads and are called “farewell songs.” Then there is a special section on the musical form of the ballad, which discusses verse structure and determines that the ballad is usually sung rhythmically and not in recitative style. The article concludes with the state of the Slovenian ballad today, which shows that there are at least four forms of ballad in Slovenia: the living folk tradition, festivals, “literaturization” or “folklorization,” and composed reinterpretations in popular, jazz, or classical music. Similarly, the ballad as a genre holds interest for many literary historians and folklorists even today.