

classical epics and “puranas” (p. 70), “in folk epics the eldest brother is a villain and cruel, whereas the youngest brother is a hero. Similarly in folktales and oral epics, the younger sister-in-law, younger sister, younger daughter is neglected and at last she regains her valour” (p. 71). The “written discourse will represent the ‘ordered’ society only. Hence the creation of ‘disorder’ in folk tradition is only to counteract the forces which are dominant in society.” (p. 77)

Finally, a word must be said to clarify the title in chapter 10. The “festival of female infanticide” is a memory of such a festival until it was abolished in the mid 1850’s, and replaced by the sacrifice of a young ewe. The whole description of the seven day festival is very interesting, as it reflects the problems of a community and the creative way to solve those problems. I would be inclined to say this of the whole collection of studies in this book, as it combines the appraisal of an ethnologist with the deep inside knowledge of an insider of a very rich culture.

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“God Created Slovenia Last”. Past and Contemporary Slovenian Folktales (Vilenica 99 /Literary Folklore), selected, edited and introduction written by Marija Stanonik, translated by Sonja Kravanja and Rosemary Lincoln, introduction translated by Mia Dintinja, Ljubljana, Slovenian Writers Association, 1999, 228 pp.

Isabel Cardigos

We have a confession to make. Author Marija Stanonik sent us this collection of Slovenian folktales just after it was published, in 1999. We would have gladly made a review of it should we have passed the middle of it while turning its pages, as if the first half was in Slovenian, the second half was in the purest English. All these years had to pass before we were told by the author that turning a few more pages would bring good results. And she was right! From p. 107 to the end the book is not only in English but it gives us the first English translation of Slovenian folktales, a treasure because it is the first time ever that we have access to them in the English reading world, but also because they are a joy to read.

This little book written both in Slovenian and in English is really the showcase of a much vaster reality. The 53 folktales published in it are a selection from *Glasovi*, an outstanding series of twenty four volumes of folk narratives, an enterprise conceived and coordinated by Dr. Stanonik herself.

It started in 1988 and contains folktales whose sources don't go back further than the year 1945. This means that they are modern folk material. Another feature of this remarkable collection is that the original dialects are respected (seven in all) and they have not been transcribed in phonetic characters but "in standard written language to make them more accessible and thus facilitate reading enjoyment" (p. 116). This controversial option arises from the author's perception that "folk literature is the art of dialects", as "literary folklore and language are very closely connected", "language being the most important heritage our ancestors brought with them as they made their way to the southwest of Europe..." (p. 108).

In her introduction to her selection from *Glasovi*, M. Stanonik brings forth some of the conclusions allowed by such a huge gathering of material by regions: that although "modern times don't favor fairy tales", some provinces still excel in them. And, although the English translation cannot obviously honor the dialectal variety, we can see proof of the existence of stunning variants of European folktales, beautifully told. The narrowing down of the variety of mythological beings to just the devil and the fairies is of course regretted. On the other hand, she stresses the strong presence of accounts of encounters with witches that should be the object of a "sociological analysis".¹ More urban areas with mining towns show how folk literature excels in anecdotes and how new types of folktales evolved into horror and robber stories.

The 53 samples from the "polycentric development of Slovenian culture" (p. 120) that we can enjoy show in fact a lively variety of genres, very pleasant for reading aloud –as recommended by Dr. Stanonik (p. 126)–, this also certainly thanks to the expertise of the team formed by Sonja Kravanja, the translator, and Rosemary Lincoln, the English language consultant.

We recognize in these tales many types we are familiar with in the European lore, but each with a personal twist of their own, with the gift of bringing them life after passing the philters and being turned into writing and then being translated. What an achievement! The long ones are an absolute delight to read, but I will have to end with one of the shortest ones, a little vignette from the area of Višna Gora, which explains why we cannot see the witches: "When Christ hung on the cross, he was naked. A woman came with a piece of cloth and wrapped it around him. But she was a witch, and Christ said: 'You'll be hidden from the world, but not from God!' Because of this good deed, witches are hidden to this day from the world."

May I express the hope that the enormous wealth that certainly lies under this sample of 53 tales and legends may be catalogued and classified so that Slovenia too may appear in the rich jigsaw of the world's folktales.

¹ This has in fact been carried out in a recent study by Mirjam Mencej: "*Coprnice so me nosile*". *Raziskava vaškega čarovništva na podeželju vzhodne Slovenije ob prelomu tisočletja* ("Witches led me astray": Witchcraft in the rural environment of eastern Slovenia at the turn of the Millennium), 2006. See also her article in this issue of E. L. O.