

“ANIMALS BURY THE HUNTER” – ETHICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ELEMENTS OF THE SLOVENE BALLAD

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Abstract: The Slovene ballad *Animals Bury the Hunter* is an animal narrative song of jocular character. It tells of the burial of a hunter and of a funeral procession not composed of humans but wild animals (a bear, foxes, hares, a wolf, cranes and partridges, song birds, etc.) who seem to derive great joy from the event.

The analysis of the song's 31 variants reveals the changes made to the song over the course of time, as it survived through different historical periods and spread throughout Slovenia. I attempt to show that the ballad was used as a model for painted beehive panels featuring the same motif. In addition to the analysis, I am concerned with the sociological and ethical elements of the ballad.

The paper proposes at least three possible theses:

1. The song is part of the conception of a topsy-turvy world, where the roles and mutual relationships of people and animals are reversed in an ironic sociological view of the world.
2. The song is a critique of one class by another: peasants mocking hunters who belong to a different social stratum.
3. The song is a representation of “pre-Cartesian” times, when animals were not “mere machines” without feelings, to be treated by man as objects with no ethical significance. It points to the ethical aspects of the human treatment of animals.

Keywords: Slovenian ballad, animal jocular narrative folk song, textology, folklore, folk art, ecology.

When researching the ballad tradition in terms of its content and form, and reaching into its inner structure, we inevitably find at the centre the human being and his attitude to the world, his environment, his fellow man and, finally, to animals. In seeking to discover the ethical and sociological aspects of an individual ballad we encounter two of man's views towards the other creatures around him which we cannot ignore. The first is the anthropocentric view of the world reflected by the majority of ballads, while the other is a non-anthropocentric view.¹ The first of these views places the human being at the centre of the world – as the crown of creation – while the second shows him as occupying the same position as other living creatures. Most ballads express the former view but a few, those in which animals appear, give

¹ Of course uncovering the ethical elements in such a song should not only derive from human ethics, it must also contain ethical behaviour towards animals, otherwise we are only researching the anthropocentric aspect of the song.

the impression that they perhaps contain a reflection of the idea that man is merely a part of nature, or that in a 'topsy-turvy world' his rule could soon come to an end.² We may also observe that man is sometimes humbly prepared to put off his crown, or that a respectful attitude to other creatures contributes to this, or that the animals in the song take it from him whether he wishes it or not.

The Slovene ballad tradition contains a whole cycle of narrative songs – ballads – featuring animals. In most cases the animals in these songs have taken on human characteristics and act and live like human beings, although the representation of animals may be a hidden truth about man, his life and his foolishness, a hidden truth wrapped in the skin of an animal, as a way of mocking this foolishness. All of these images were human projections of what actually happened, or that which people secretly desired (and thus they also include criticism of social conditions, class strife or personal desires and resentments). Perhaps these songs also conceal man's personal attitude to animals.³ Examples include songs about animal courtships and weddings and songs in which roles are reversed, e.g. the blackbird mocking the hunter, the sick blackbird, the fox and the cockerel.⁴

Many of these motifs also survive in Slovene folk art, on the famous beehive panels: the fox shaving the hunter,⁵ the bear shooting the hunter, the tailors fleeing from the snail, animals riding in carriages, the bear chasing the hunter from the forest, the hunter dancing with the fox, hens driving a bear, hares playing in the snow, etc.

One of these ballads where 'the world is topsy-turvy or the right way round' is the Slovene ballad *The Animals Bury the Hunter* or *The Hunter's Funeral*, a jocular animal ballad, though some also classify it as part of the 'topsy-turvy world' song cycle. It was first written down by Frančišek Sedej in Cerklje, some time before 1873. Its subject matter probably dates from the Middle Ages or just after. It tells the story of the burial of the hunter, or of his funeral procession, which is not composed of human beings but of wild animals (a bear, a fox, hares, a wolf, cranes and partridges, songbirds etc.), who seem to derive great joy from the event.

The archive of the Institute of Ethnomusicology contains thirty-one versions of this song (the last version was recorded in 1999 at Brkini in south-west Slovenia). The song has undergone several changes of text and melody, and the context of its message has also changed. Asked about the meaning of the song, most singers replied that it was jocular, old, that they had learnt it from their parents, that they had heard it in live folk singing etc., that it was entertaining, and that that was why they

² See Luc FERRY, *Novi ekološki red: drevo, žival in človek* (1998) – the title of original: *Le nouvel ordre écologique*, Editions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1992.; see also the essay by the poet Jure DETELA, 'Ekologija, ekonomija preživetja in živalske pravice', *Nova revija* (Ljubljana, 1988), pp. 1473–1484.

³ Albina ŠTRUBELJ'S statement is: "Man's attitude to animals is only revealed to us in folk traditions, narratives, songs, customs, beliefs, proverbs and sayings. But even this chapter of folk culture remains unresearched." (ŠTRUBELJ 1996: 458).

⁴ Karel ŠTRELJ, *Slovenske narodne pesmi*, Slovenska matica (Ljubljana, 1895–1898), (reprint) Nos. 924–1006.

⁵ The motif of the fox shaving the hunter (*lisica brije lovca*) is an illustration of the saying 'briti norca iz koga' or 'to make fun of someone'.

67. J. Žirovnik, St. Vid n. L. R. 2
2832.

ETHNOGRAC-
SKI MUZEJ
V
LJUBLJANI

ja-ger gre na ja-ger u to gbr-er-er
dra-ger hoj-li hoj-er oj naj-ček do-ber bo hoj-
li hoj-er oj naj-ček do-ber er

Medved so ga dobili
So ga na tla pobili
Hojli, hojlo
Zdaj jagra več ne bo. (se ponavlja pri vsaki četrtici)

So zajci se mejali (pokopovali)
K' so jagra pokopovali
Lisice so plesale
K' so jagra pokopvale.

Medved so je tresel
K' je križ pred jagrom nesel
Volk je pa zastulil
Ker je pogreb zamudil;
Volk je pa zastulil
K' je jagra najbolj ljubil

Odbor za nabiranje
slovenskih narodnih pesmi.

Opomba. Pišite samo na prvo in tretjo stran!

Fig. 1. From the Archive of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU, GNI OSNP 2832, recorded by J. Žirovnik, the end of the 19th century, Gorenjsko, Slovenia

liked it. The song did not have a special role in ceremonies or customs. The first recorded version (Š 970) contains all the animals (hares, fox, bear, wolf, cranes, partridges, little birds) which rejoiced at the death of the hunter, as can be seen from the refrain. The song is from Primorska, Slovenia's littoral, and later spread throughout Slovenia. Other versions are from Štajerska, Gorenjska and Bela Krajina. The story is a simple one and the song is not particularly dramatic – unlike the

event it describes. In most versions the song has seven verses and each verse focuses on a wild animal rejoicing in its own way at the death of the hunter, whom they are carrying to his funeral in a special procession. Because the animals are participants in the funeral they also play appropriate roles: the hares jump around and bury the hunter, the fox says the rosary or laughs, the bear carries a cross, and in some versions it is the bear who kills the hunter (in others it is the wolf). Some versions feature deer, some stags, and also crows. In most versions the wolf howls (in the sense of crying) because he has missed the funeral or because he loved the hunter best – ironically of course. In some versions the song begins with the hunter hunting hares, or just hunting, and the bear (or wolf – role-reversal) kills him, and then comes the funeral procession. Interestingly dogs are only present in this funeral procession in one version, from 1960 (GNI M 23.527). In this version they weep at the death of the hunter, which from the human point of view is perfectly logical since the dog was the hunter's faithful companion and the only domesticated animal in the procession. (On beehive panels the dog is the only animal depicted on all fours. All the wild animals walk upright on two legs.) The funeral procession is described as follows: the hunter went hunting and while out hunting was killed by the bear or the wolf. Now the wild animals (from deer and foxes to partridges and cranes) are carrying him to his funeral. Most of them are happy and they also perform the funerary duties, pray, carry the cross and bury him. At the end of the song the little birds, an additional fabulous element, carry his soul off to purgatory – and not, interestingly, to hell. There are no significant changes, except that sometimes the animals swap roles and sometimes other animals are added. How and why the hunter died is unclear in most versions, though some include a verse which recounts how the hunter was killed by the bear, which is also the most logical version. In the verse which describes how the wolf howled because he missed the funeral – since he was supposed to have loved the hunter the best – a considerable degree of sarcasm, mockery and irony can be detected (KUMER 1957: 160). An indication of the condensed nature of the text of the ballad is the fact that the last recorded version (Brkini, Primorska, 1999) preserves the entire content of the first known version and only differs from it in details. On the other hand the melodies are very different.

JAGER GRE NA JAGO/THE HUNTER GOES A-HUNTING

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|----|--|---|
| 1. | Jager ⁶ gre na jago
tam v zeleno drago,
hajli, hajlo
zdaj jagra več ne bo, ha ha,
hajli, hajlo
zdaj jagra več ne bo. | The hunter goes a-hunting
Down in the leafy dell,
Hi-lee, hi-low,
The hunter now is gone, ha ha,
Hi-lee, hi-low,
The hunter now is gone. |
|----|--|---|

⁶ I would like in passing to draw your attention to the word *jager* which we can see at the beginning of the ballad. This is a corruption of the German *Jäger* which was often used in folk songs in Slovene, although the proper Slovene word for 'hunter' is *lovec*.

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|----|---|--|
| 2. | Vsi zajci so plesali,
k so jagra pokopali,
/: hajli, hajlo
zdaj jagra več ne bo. :/ | The rabbits all were dancing
When they laid him in his grave,
Hi-lee, hi-low
The hunter now is gone. |
| 3. | Lisica se smejala,
k je jagra pokopala,
/: hajli hajlo
zdaj jagra več ne bo. :/ | The fox he was a-laughing
When they laid him in his grave
Hi-lee, hi-low
The hunter now is gone. |
| 4. | Medved se je tresu,
k je križ pred jagrom nesu,
/: hajli, hajlo
zdaj jagra več ne bo. :/ | The bear was all a-quiver
As he carried forth the cross,
Hi-lee, hi-low,
The hunter now is gone. |
| 5. | Volk pa je zatulil,
ker pogreb je zamudil,
/: hajli, hajlo
zdaj jagra več ne bo. :/ | The wolf he was a-howling,
for he did miss the funeral,
Hi-lee, hi-low,
The hunter now is gone. |
| 6. | So prišle drobne ptice,
so nesle dušo v vice,
/: hajli, hajlo
zdaj jagra več ne bo. :/ | Then came tiny songbirds
And bore his soul away, (in purgatory)
Hi-lee, hi-low,
The hunter now is gone. |

From the Archive of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU – GNI DAT 103/5, recorded by Marjetka Golež Kaučič and Drago Kunej: 16.4.1999, tst. by MGK 2001, sung by Lidija Žnebelj, Gradišče, Primorsko, Slovenia.

On reading this ballad, which I admit entranced me because of the role-reversal of man and animals, I began to be interested in what hides below the surface, where the ballad comes from (in terms of time and also theme), and whether this ballad was also the basis for the beehive panels featuring this motif, or vice versa. I also asked myself whether the ballad and the beehive panels might perhaps appeared independently of each other. I began to try and discover the purpose and meaning of the ballad in the past and its importance for the present day.⁷

This motif is extremely widespread in the tradition of beehive panels. These examples of folk art first appeared in the 19th century and although similar subject matter can be found in lithographs and picture books from Central Europe, it seems that the painting of these beehive panels was directly influenced by this ballad. At the beginning of my research Professor Dr. Ildikó Kriza very kindly drew my atten-

⁷ This paper is a mixture of the objective or demonstrable and the subjective or philosophical. Both aspects come from my own 'personal theory'.

tion to an essay by the Hungarian ethnologist Sándor Solymossy on a folk painting with the same title as our ballad and beehive panel ('The Hunter's Funeral'). This essay, written in 1915, looks at the origin and dissemination of this motif on folk paintings in Hungary and western Europe. (May I take this opportunity to offer my sincere thanks to Ildikó Kriza). The essay describes the international journey of this motif and reveals what is apparently the true model for it: *La procession de Renard*, the seventeenth episode of the French folk epic or collection of stories *Le Roman de Renard*⁸ (this episode is only found in one fourteenth-century manuscript, although at least four manuscripts exist). The episode describes the funeral procession of an apparently dead fox. At some point during the development of the motif the fox was replaced by the hunter and thus we now have the hunter's funeral rather than the fox's funeral.⁹ Sándor Solymossy talks about simple images adorning the walls of roadside inns, hunting lodges, the passages of simple forest houses. We even find them on a shaving kit. The motif is widespread in Hungary, among the southern Germans, in Austria and even in the Netherlands. The image may have spread with the help of lithographs or handbills (SOLYMOSSY 1915: 232). Solymossy also considers the possibility that the motif arrived in Hungary from animal fairy tales, which were often created so that their instructive stories could be used for religious purposes, or later for ridiculing individual monastic orders. Solymossy finds it interesting that the motif spread in Hungary in the form of images and not as a story. The story does not exist either in German or Hungarian folklore. But the motif is present in the Slovene ballad tradition, and this is perhaps even original, if we subscribe to the polygenetic theory. (MATIČETOV 1956: 127–128). Thus in Solymossy's opinion the motif of the popular folk painting 'The Hunter's Funeral' goes back to the *Renard* episode (from the late 13th/early 14th century) and its original roots can be discovered within the cycle of stories about the cunning fox.¹⁰ How, when and why did the image find its way to Slovenia – and can we even say that the image came to Slovenia from elsewhere?

Let us look at an illustration of famous beehive panel about The Hunter's Funeral found in Slovenia: we see an unusual procession. In front, a fox and a bear walk on their hind legs; four hares carry a stretcher on which lies the dead hunter;

⁸ See *Le Roman de Renard* (adaptation), Pierre de Beaumont, Hachette, Paris 1990.

⁹ While researching the motif the author asks how a motif from a collection of stories about a cunning fox – in Slovenian language *Lisica Zvitorepka* (*Le Roman de Renard*) came to Germany and then to Hungary and why paintings show the funeral of a hunter and not a fox. He states that there was a painting of the fox's funeral in Münster Cathedral. Alongside the funeral ceremony was another picture of animals celebrating a Mass (1318). However this motif, which appeared sacrilegious to the Protestants, had to be removed in 1685. Since animals could not be in the position of priest they later made a 'pendant' image where a hunter rather than a fox lies in the coffin. The author also mentions a later image representing the resurrection of the apparently dead hunter, which was a pendant or complement to the first picture. This perhaps proves the connection with *Le Roman de Renard*.

¹⁰ The Slovene word *prelisičiti* (from the word *lisica* meaning 'fox'), means to trick or dupe someone and derives from the belief that the fox is a very clever and cunning animal, capable of 'outfoxing' anyone – as in the Slovene folk song *Lisica je prav zvita zver* ('The Fox is a Truly Cunning Beast'). Slovene distinguishes between *lisica*, a vixen, and *lišjak*, a dog fox.

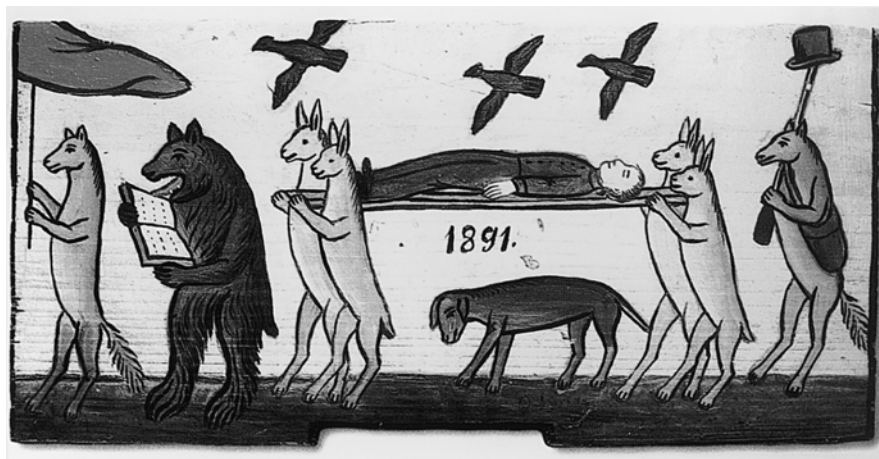


Fig. 2. Animals carrying a hunter to his funeral – photo of beehive panel. From the Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, inv. no. 17086/13 × 27.5 cm/date: 1891, painted by Marija Pavlič, Selce v Selški dolini, Slovenia

deer and sometimes a fox walk at the back walk; in the middle of the picture is a dog walking on all fours, and above the stretcher birds fly.

Gorazd Makarovič, a researcher of beehive panels, believes that the model for the first beehive panel featuring this motif, which is dated 1787, was a corresponding print and that the painter simplified the motif, reduced it and adapted it to the elongated form of the panel. He also claims that panels featuring this scene with significant iconographic changes do not appear until the last third of the 19th century. These changes are supposed to have been caused by the copying of colour lithographs of this motif, which would have hung on the walls of inns and suchlike. According to Makarovič: ‘Even images from the international motif family “the topsy-turvy world” lost their original sense, at least in certain rural environments. For example the scene in which the animals carry the hunter to his grave, playing the roles of human beings, is explained as the illustration of a story in which a hunter met with an accident and was carried off to his grave by the animals of the forest, or even as an illustration of special grace: the animals are supposed to have buried the hunter in answer to the prayer of his final hour. And thus for example a song from the rural oral tradition featuring this motif offers another interpretation: the animals killed the hunter and rejoice at his death.’ (MAKAROVIČ–ROGELJ ŠKAFAR 2000: 30, 36 and 124)¹¹. A completely different view is offered by the art historian Emilijan Cevc, whose starting point are the historical relations between the peasant and the professional hunter: ‘The motif of the hunter – the official, professional gamekeeper –

¹¹ See also G. MAKAROVIČ, ‘Poslikane panjske končnice’, *Likovni zvezki*, Vol. 2 (Ljubljana, 1962), p. 128, where the author claims that this motif came to Slovenia from picture books and lithographs from Central Europe.

whom the beasts bury as in the folk song is an extremely eloquent one. Here the peasant with his common sense is in fact venting his anger at the absurd hunting law, the violation of which was for him a heroic act, but not a wicked one. The peasant's ideal is the wild hunter, whom he never ridicules as much as the bourgeois 'Sunday hunter' being shaved by the hares and foxes.' (CEVC 1955: 1072–1073). The wild hunter was a peasant himself – another reason for this vision of the professional hunter, which also points to relations between individual social strata. Helmut Kropelj believes that this beehive panel belongs to the thematic cycle known as the 'topsy-turvy world'. In his opinion the concept of animals and human beings reversing their roles grew up in the thirteenth century, if we ignore parallels from Antiquity. In fabrications, farces and fables, proverbs and sayings, we encounter scenes where a hare pursues dogs or a hunter, where a sheep tears apart a wolf... 'From literary tradition comes Hans Sachs's famous farce "*die hasen fangen und praten den jeger*" ("The hares capture and roast the hunter").¹² To all the scenes which represent the two sides, the ruling and the ruled – i.e. a hierarchical relationship contrary to reality – two patterns apply: the reversal of the roles of human beings and animals, and a reversal of authority in society.' (KROPEJ 1990: 67). The original sense of the song could have been the reversal of the roles of feudal lords and serfs,¹³ ridiculing individual classes and professions, mocking certain religious orders etc. History of course tells us that in the Middle Ages there were great social differences between feudal lords and serfs. There were also social differences between the various social strata and professions or classes.¹⁴ The folk singer could only express the subjection of his position through the concealed structure of poetic form and the man shrouded in the image of an animal. Similarly, different professions ridiculed each other, especially in cases where one encroached on the other's sphere (BLAZNIK, GRAFENAUER, VILFAN 1970: 486–488). The reversal of the roles of animals and human beings is of course only possible if animals are subject to man in the real world. We know that this holds true if viewed from the position of man as the ruler of the world. What we need to do is find the material origin of our ballad, if possible, and find out roughly when it appeared and why it is known to Slovenes and not to other nations. I say this only provisionally, since unfortunately I cannot claim to know the entire European ballad tradition.

How can we discover what the basis was for the song and the beehive panel, or know what is original and what the importance of both the song and the ethnographic image can be?

If we accept the opinion of the Hungarian researcher Sándor Solymossy, who says that the origin of images of the hunter's funeral must undoubtedly be sought in the French national epic (or collection of stories about a cunning fox) *Le Roman de*

¹² Pieter Brueghel uses the expression "*Verkeerde Wereld*" on the sign of the ludicrous inn in his 1559 painting of proverbs, thus indicating that the topsy-turvy world is an allegory for the ludicrousness and foolishness of people. See Helmut KROPEJ, *Poslikane panjske končnice* (Klagenfurt, 1990), p. 67.

¹³ See also Sergej VILFAN, *Pravna zgodovina Slovencev*, Slovenska matica, Ljubljana, 1961.

¹⁴ cf. Josip GRUDEN, *Zgodovina slovenskega naroda*, Mohorjeva družba (1992 – reprint from 1910–1916).

*Renard*¹⁵ and that the basis for these images is therefore a fable, we can conclude that the basis for the Slovene beehive panel is the Slovene folk song which without a doubt appeared before lithographs or handbills arrived in Slovenia from western Europe. These lithographs may have later had an influence on the dissemination and popularisation of the beehive panel featuring this motif, but we have to doubt that they were the basis for its creation, and in particular that the song only appeared after these beehive panels had already established themselves.¹⁶ This statement is supported by the high incidence of motifs from folk songs on beehive panels – for example the well-known ballad *Pegam in Lambergar*, which was undoubtedly the material basis for a beehive panel (a view shared by researchers of Slovene folk art).

This ballad is seen through human eyes, and the rejoicing at the death of the executioner is present from the point of view of man's view of the world. Man is able to revenge himself, animals are not. Or this song (or image) is an allegory used by its creator in order to draw attention to the killing of animals, an unethical act. Furthermore in this 'allegory' the animals did not simply bury the man or cast his body away somewhere, as man usually does with animals; instead they arranged a funeral, a ceremony, for him. Although the animals in the song rejoice, their happiness is not an animal characteristic, it is a projection of man's view of the world. Animals are not malicious and do not kill for revenge, they do not know these emotions (or do they?). Only man could believe that animals could kill their executioner just as downtrodden man often rose up against his oppressor, and therefore this ballad is merely man's projection of his own desires and feelings. Perhaps the creation of this story was also a cathartic symbolic act, as an apology for an act committed. It would be interesting to establish the function of the story in people's lives. Or as John D. Niles writes in *Homo Narrans* (1999), only man is capable of creating stories and this is what separates him from other living beings. Perhaps? Whether this story was created by a person who wished to emphasise the equal role of animals and men, we can only guess.

If we assume that the substance of the story dates from before the sixteenth century, or even from the Middle Ages, we can perhaps establish that the attitude to animals is 'pre-Cartesian'. There are several cases in the 16th century of animals being afforded the same treatment as human beings, as shown by the 'animal trials'

¹⁵ The entry for *Fuchs* (Fox) in the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens V (Handwörterbuch zur historischen und vergleichenden Erzählforschung)*, Ed. Kurt RANKE, Göttingen (BAUSINGER, BREDNICH, BRÜCKNER, RÖHRICH, SCHENDA), Walter de Gruyter (Berlin–New York, 1985) states that *Le Roman de Renard* presents the social dimensions of these fables: 'Tierwelt und ihre Societät die Folie für Anspielungen auf historische und politische Entwicklungen, soziale und moralische Kritik und satirische Angriffe auf das klosterleben und die Heiligsprechung abgeben. Solche zeitgenössische Bezüge sind allerdings in den volksprachlichen Fassungen unterschiedlich ausgefallen, und dies gilt gleichermassen für die bislang unzulänglich untersuchte Rolle des Fuchses, der etwa im mhd. *Reinhart F. das Böse verkörpert*, im frz. *Roman de Renart* dagegen wesentlich sympathischere Züge trägt.' (p. 450). See also the bibliography relating to this topic on p. 474 and the German translation by Jacob GRIMM (*Reinhart Fuchs – Reineke Fuchs*, Georg Olms Verlag (Hildesheim–New York 1974)).

¹⁶ Beehive panels first began to appear at the end of the 18th century but reached their greatest vogue in the second half of the 19th century.

which took place from the thirteenth century to the eighteenth century, where animals (worms, leeches, rats) which ‘threatened’ the well-being of human beings were given their own lawyer, in other words treated as equals: for example in 1587 the inhabitants of the village of Saint Julien went to the diocesan judge at Saint-Jean-de-Maurenne to bring a suit against a plague of maggots which had attacked their vineyards and caused enormous damage. The case was won by the maggots, who were defended by a lawyer, and the verdict pronounced by the diocesan judge was that animals created by God have the right, just as human beings do, to feed on plants. He ordered the inhabitants of Saint Julien to do penance and called on them to repent of their sins and to call on God’s mercy (FERRY 1998: 9).

Is this true humanism because it is joined with zoophilia? Perhaps our ballad is the reflection of such an attitude to nature and the animal kingdom. Perhaps it is talking to us about this non-topso-turvy world, or is a warning in the shape of the view of the world held by Leonardo da Vinci and St Francis of Assisi.¹⁷ Perhaps this hidden structure of the ballad is for our time, telling us not only what the past was like but that we can learn something from this past, that the meaning communicated by the ballad can also be useful for the present day.¹⁸ The ethical dimension of the ballad is the special attitude of its creator towards animals, evident in the anthropomorphising of the animals which appear in the song, in their behaviour towards human beings which is the same as the behaviour of human beings themselves, but with one further perspective: the animals may rejoice at the hunter’s death but nevertheless they respectfully accompany him to his funeral.

CONCLUSION

Thus we find in the ballad at least three possible theses or theories concerning the thematic or historical background of the song:

1. The song is part of the conception of a topsy-turvy world, where the roles and mutual relationships of people and animals are reversed in an ironic sociological view of the world. This is a symbolic rendering of human relationships, in our case the relationship between the feudal lord and his serfs, and therefore a concealed criticism of social conditions.
2. The song is a critique of one class by another: peasants mocking hunters who belong to a different social stratum.
3. The song is a representation of “pre-Cartesian” times, when animals were not “mere machines” without feelings, to be treated by man as objects with no ethical

¹⁷ Leonardo da Vinci predicted that in a hundred years’ time killing an animal would be considered the same as killing a human being. For St Francis all of God’s creatures were brothers and sisters.

¹⁸ Perhaps we can observe in this song the hidden belief inherited from the immemorial past and preserved, that higher forces watch over man’s treatment of animals and that maltreatment of animals is severely punished. This idea is especially topical today as we witness the mass slaughter of animals and see the heaped carcasses of sentient beings killed by man because of his own mistakes, greed and gluttony.

significance. It points to the ethical aspects of man's treatment of animals. Rather than describing a topsy-turvy world, it speaks of human beings' attitudes towards animals prior to the 17th century, when people were still aware that the killing of animals was an unethical act. Perhaps this ballad speaks of man's bad conscience and of his compassion for animals. The ironic approach, employing the reversal of the human and animal worlds, may have been the only possible way of addressing alternative values.

The likelihood that, taking the historical migration theory, the origin of the ballad can be found in medieval collections of stories in France (ignoring stories from Antiquity) and stories about cunning foxes which were used to ridicule man's mistakes (in the Middle Ages monastic orders were the main objects of ridicule), which came to Slovenia from Europe via painted images, is small. There is no data suggesting that the *Roman de Renard* stories were even known in Slovenia in that period. It is more likely that the Slovene ballad appeared independently. Perhaps the ballad was written as a result of one of the three theories listed above. It is interesting that we find the same motif both in song and in painting. It may be the case that the beehive panel was originally based on the song and that its popularisation was partly the result of the images which later spread to Slovenia from Central Europe.

In order for this paper to be complete and in order to present all of the aspects indicated, we would have to expand it and research possible connections with similar motifs, ballads or fables from elsewhere in Europe and the world (if of course they exist), the symbolic, metaphorical and mythological backgrounds of the individual animals appearing in the ballad, archetypal motifs and connections between animal and man (ethological aspects) and the roles of animals in the real and mythological worlds. But these questions are already the subject of the next paper.

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