

# “OH, GIRL OF MINE, BRING ME SOME WATER” WATER IN SLOVENIAN FOLKSONG TRADITION

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*The article focuses on the content-related and formal roles of water in folk lyric songs and ballads, its meanings and metaphorical dimensions in various song microcosms and macrocosms. Our aim is to establish, on the basis of textual analysis, folkloristic methods and with use of some ethnological contextual aspects and with help of different theoretical discourses, the most frequent water dimensions, from mythological, transcendent to vital and mortal. Author finds out that water in songs, regarding to farthest richness and diversity of water sources in Slovenia, is not an object of desire and need and not an existential problem, but it is mostly connected with deep emotional and spiritual dimensions of songs subjects, as well as dependent from their experiences toward individual water forms.*

*Keywords: water, forms of water, metaphorical and symbolic connotations, roles of water, Slovenian lyrical songs and ballads*

*Razprava se osredinja na formalne vloge in podobe vode v slovenskih ljudskih pesmih kot tudi na pomene in metaforične ter simbolične konotacije vode v različnih vodnih mikro- in makrokozmosih. Na podlagi analiz besedil in folklorističnih metod, s pritegnitvijo nekaterih etnoloških kontekstualnih vidikov ter s pomočjo različnih teoretskih diskurzov avtorica razgrinja najpogostejše razsežnosti vode – od mitoloških, transcendentnih do življenjskih in smrtnih. Ugotavlja, da voda v pesmi, glede na izjemno vodnatost in pestrost vodnih virov na Slovenskem, ni objekt želje ali potrebe in ni eksistencialni problem, temveč je predvsem povezana z globokimi emotivnimi in duhovnimi razsežnostmi subjektov pesmi, hkrati pa je odvisna od njihovih izkustvenih odnosov do posamičnih vodnih oblik.*

*Ključne besede: voda, oblike vode, metaforične in simbolične konotacije, vloge vode, slovenske ljudske lirske pesmi in balade*

## INTRODUCTION

The article focuses on the content-related and formal roles of water in folk lyric songs and ballads, its meanings and metaphorical dimensions in various song microcosms and macrocosms. Our aim is to establish, on the basis of textual analysis, folkloristic methods and with use of some ethnological contextual aspects and with help of different theoretical discourses, the most frequent water dimensions, from mythological, transcendent to vital and mortal.

Slovenia is very rich in water; it has four times as much water per person as the average European country. It is full of springs, wells, creeks, brooks, ponds, streams, waterfalls, rivers, lakes, and even some sea. Most of this water flows into the Black Sea (80%), but some of it flows into the Adriatic (Uhan and Bat 2003; Vode v Sloveniji 2010). Water is not only a natural element it is also a cultural one because its various forms can be used to interpret both the material and the spiritual aspects. As Mohamed Larbi Bouguerra puts it, “Fountains, wells and springs are never purely functional. They are inhabited by both

material culture and deep-rooted spiritual values” (Bouguerra 2005: 10). The diverse forms of water are also represented one way or another in folksong tradition either concretely or symbolically, and they have many very different connotations.

Water is life or the source of life, which was first thematized by the Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus (7<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC), who considered water the origin of everything (*arché* ‘the most ancient’). Everything that exists, everything that lives – for in those far-off days the entire world, the entire cosmos was considered alive, not only living beings in the later sense of the word (see Uršič 2008). Water is a vital substance. Leonardo da Vinci called water “the driving force of all Nature.” Zdeňka Kalnická (2003: 29) feels that “water as a force of nature is more material than air or fire; we can see it (unlike air), and we can touch it (unlike fire).” The symbolism of water is ambivalent: on the one hand, it animates and creates; on the other hand, it functions as a symbol of destruction (Birkalan and Garry 2005: 489–493). In *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols* water is defined as a “symbol with a very complex spectrum of meanings. As an unformed, undifferentiated mass (regardless of whether it is a spring, lake, or sea), water symbolizes the abundance of possibilities or the primeval beginning of all that exists” (Becker 1994: 312).

Water is connected with life, death, birth, reproduction, and in Christianity even with resurrection and salvation through baptism. Water is very important in Slovenian tradition both in everyday life and on special occasions, and folk tradition especially emphasized holy water, which was believed to be connected with everything holy. Ethnologist Niko Kuret published numerous examples of holy water’s significance:

When the livestock are first moved from the barn to the pasture, they are sprinkled with holy water from the head down along the back [...];  
On Whitsun Saturday they bless the baptismal water in the churches;  
In Tržič the heads of household would go fetch it and bring it home in order to drink it. (Kuret 1989/I.: 97, 324)

To Thales, water was the element from which all life came and to which it all returned. The Slovenian “Bajka o stvarjenju sveta” (A Tale of the Creation of the World), written by Janez Trdina in 1855, also attests that we come from water. The Mengeš variant reads:

There was nothing but God, the sun, and the sea. The sun was scorching. God felt hot and died into the water for a swim. When he came back up, a grain of sand stayed under his nail. The sand fell out and stayed on the surface (because in the beginning, everything stayed where it had fallen). That sand is our Earth, and the seafloor is its homeland. (Šmitek 1998: 11)

Thales came from a coastal city on the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea and traveled much of the known world, going all the way to Egypt, of course by sea (as a wealthy merchant with a ship). He assumed that the Earth floated on a vast body of water, and that when the surface of that ancient ocean had too many waves, an earthquake took place (see Uršič 2008; Eliade 1996: 13; Kropej 2008: 25).

## WATER, BALLAD AND MYTHOLOGY

The belief that a mythological creature carried the earth is revealed in the Slovenian mythical ballad “Riba Faronika nosi svet” (Faronika the Fish Bears the World; SLP I/20/2<sup>1</sup>), which points to the cosmology of the predecessors of today’s Slovenians. It is connected with an ancient tradition that the world rests on a giant mythological creature in the form of a fish that swims in the ocean, and the belief was that, if the fish moved, there was an earthquake; if the fish moved her tail, there was a flood; and if she turned onto her back it would be the end of the world. The apocalyptic elements of the song are in the form of Jesus’ plea to the fish to abandon her intentions and have mercy on them for the sake of the children and women with child. Thus cosmology and religion are brought together because only Jesus can persuade the mythological creature to remain calm. Water in this song thus represents a place that is foreign, far away, unknown, and frightening, even involving transcendental and mythological properties. All suggest that the folklore motif of dangerous, destructive water may have its basis in observed fact (floods and earthquakes).

Cast as the ‘source of life’ and as a metaphor for ‘life time’, water imagery is used in thinking about cycles of life and death, and microcosmic and macrocosmic circulation of various kinds. It provides a way of conceptualising the ‘substance’ of the self, emotional states of being, and social relationships. All /.../ contain a systematic order that can potentially be ‘disordered’. Thus it is unsurprising that water issues such as droughts, floods and pollution create enormous anxiety: resonating with all of these linked associations, these are literally and meaningfully ‘life threatening.’ (Strang 2004: 79)

The sea with a mythological fish<sup>2</sup> (a whale or seal) represents a threat of a universal destruction of all living creatures (see Dundes 1988: 167, 173; Šmitek 1998; Golež Kaučič 2005, 2013; Tucovič 2010).

<sup>1</sup> SLP I/20/2: *Slovenske ljudske pesmi* (Slovenian Folk Songs), Vol. I, song type 20, variant number 2.

<sup>2</sup> The Hopi Indians have believed that the water creature (snake) came out from a river pond, has risen to the sky and lifted the water with her. With this act caused the Flood (Mittelungen). See Propp 2013: 225.



Figure 1: Picture of the Faronika the fish (detail) depicted on the front of the pilgrimage church of the St. Kanzian in Vrzenec. Photo: Rebeka Kunej, 2013.

*Riba po morju plava,  
riba Faronika.  
Jezus za njo priplava  
po morja globočin.  
»O le čakaj, čakaj, riba  
riba Faronika.  
Te bomo kaj prašali,  
kak se po svet godi.«  
»Če bom jest z mojim repom zvila,  
ves svet potopljen bo.  
Če se bom jest na moj hrbt zvrnila,  
ves svet pogubljen bo.«  
»O nikari, nikari, riba,  
riba Faronika.  
Zavolj nedolžnih otročičev,  
zavolj porodnih žen.«*

A fish swims in the sea,  
Faronika the fish.  
Jesus swims after her  
In the ocean deeps.  
“Oh wait, wait, fish,  
Faronika the fish.  
We’d like to ask you  
What’s happening around the world.”  
“If I flick my tail,  
The whole world will be flooded.  
If I turn onto my back,  
The whole world will be lost.”  
“Oh, don’t, don’t do that, fish,  
Faronika the fish.  
For the sake of the innocent children,  
For the sake of the women with child.”

The concept of a creature that is half fish and half woman is ancient. This type of image is found in various cultures, such as the Semitic goddess of the moon, Atargatis. The connection comes from the ancient mythological association between water and women (Kalnická 2003: 35). The Nereid sea nymphs are another similar figure. These water creatures had special seductive power, so they were associated with sirens, who enticed people to their deaths (Ashliman 2005: 210–215; Marjanić 2013: 89, 93).

## WATER IN SONG: FLUIDITY FOR CLEANSING AND HEALING

Water was not only the origin of the cosmos, but it was also the most basic fluid that not only enabled life and cleaned away dirt; moreover, it was also a symbolic fluid with which even sins could be washed away. According to Niko Kuret,

In Prekmurje they washed in running water while the bells were pealing on Easter Saturday, in order to wash away their sins [...]; In Middle Ages people was convinced that all the springs, rivers, ponds and wells in all the Christian world are supposed to be blessed on Midsummer Eve and that washing in that night has not only healing power but brings luck; On Midsummer Eve youths poured water over girls and then these girls were supposed to be married shortly thereafter. (Kuret 1989/I.: 189, 406)

If water had such magical powers that it could bring a bridegroom, washing with it could also be a ritual act. In the lyrical love song “Deklè, prinesi (glaž) vodé” (My Girl, Bring Me [A Glass of] Water; Š 2206<sup>3</sup>) the youth asks the girl to bring him water because he believes that he will be able to wash away<sup>4</sup> his love for her this way. In one of the variants the girl is to bring the water in a glass, but in others the receptacle is not important. In Slovenian material culture there is a special kind of pitcher in which water was carried, usually by women. According to Martin Heidegger, an empty pitcher is no pitcher:

What makes a pitcher from a pitcher lives in what is poured out as a gift of a feast. The source is concealed in the gift of poured water. Here the rock is hidden, from which the spring wells up, in it is hidden the earth’s slumber, which receives rain and dew from the heavens. Springs hide the place where heaven and earth come together. (Heidegger 2000: 15, 16)

<sup>3</sup> Š = Karel Štrekelj, *Slovenske narodne pesmi 2*, 1900–1903, song no. 2206.

<sup>4</sup> Water can be the tool for the oblivion (Lincoln 1982: 20–21; Šmitek 1998: 44–45).

The gift of water is thus also an act of sacrifice by the girl, who – through water – enables the “pouring in” or “pouring out” of love.

This water is not natural water, but rather water with special power that the youth believes the girl must bring him of her own free will, so that with her help he will stop embracing her, visiting her, thinking of her, hearing her, looking at her, kissing her, and loving her. The gradual buildup of his demands to rid himself of his attraction to the girl and the growth in his desire to break off contact with her in this song is exceptional, and it is a true poetic masterpiece.

GNI M 21.266

Figure 2: First verse of the song ‘My Girl, Bring me Water’, recorded 1957<sup>5</sup> in Stari trg pri Ložu, sung by the group of man (Archive no. GNI M 21.266).

“Dekle, prines glaž vode” (My Girl, Bring Me a Glass of Water; Š 2206), Kamnik

*Dekle, prnes en glaž vode,  
da umijem si svoje roke!  
Roke svoje umil si bom,  
da tebe objemal več ne bom.*

My girl, bring me a glass of water,  
So I can wash my hands!  
I'll wash my hands  
So that I won't embrace you anymore.

*Dekle, prnes en glaž vode,  
da umijem si svoje roke!  
Roke svoje umil si bom,  
da tebe objemal več ne bom.*

My girl, bring me a glass of water,  
So I can wash my feet!  
I'll wash my feet  
So that I won't come visit you anymore.

*Dekle, prnes mi en glaž vode,  
da umil si bom usta svoje!  
Usta svoje umil si bom,  
da tebe kušnil več ne bom.*

My girl, bring me a glass of water,  
So I can wash my mouth!  
I'll wash my mouth  
So that I won't kiss you anymore.

<sup>5</sup> This song was used with a slightly changed text and music in the song “Dekle moje” by the musician Tomaž Pengov (1995/1996) as well as “Na oknu je deva slonela” by the singing group Hrušiški fanti (2015).

*Dekle, prnes mi en glaž vode,  
da umijem ušesa svoje!  
Ušesa svoje umil si bom,  
da tebe poslušal več ne bom.*

*Dekle, prnes mi en glaž vode,  
da umil si bom oči svoje!  
Oči svoje umil si bom,  
da tebe gledal več ne bom.*

*Dekle, prnes mi en glaž vode,  
da umil si bom svoje srce.  
Srce svoje umil si bom,  
da tebe ljubil več ne bom.*

My girl, bring me a glass of water,  
So I can wash my ears!  
I'll wash my ears  
So that I won't hear you anymore.

My girl, bring me a glass of water,  
So I can wash my eyes!  
I'll wash my eyes  
So that I won't look at you anymore.

My girl, bring me a glass of water,  
So I can wash my heart.  
I'll wash my heart  
So that I won't love you anymore.

In the song “Pastorek umori očima” (A Stepson Kills His Stepfather; SLP 274), which is a Slovenian reworking of the Orestes motif, the mother, who is pretending to be ill, sends her son for water from the “black mountain,”<sup>6</sup> because there is a healing spring<sup>7</sup> there that is supposed to help her get well. This song thematizes the healing, magical power of water whose source is someplace in the mountains, but at the same time the water is used as a pretext for blinding the youth, so that his mother's lover (who had killed his father) would then be able to kill him on the mountain. In this case, instead of water the youth pours hot blood into his pail, because the plot fails and the boy shoots Rošlin the Terrible:

*Pride v črno goro za bukviso,  
k sebi pritisne pušico;  
vbil je Rošlina hudega,  
natočil je vroče krvi.  
»Nate, mati, pijte vodo iz črne gore!  
Ste želeli piti mojo kri,  
zdaj pite kri Rošlinovo.«*

He came to the black mountain behind the little beech,  
Pressing his gun to his chest;  
He killed Rošlin the Terrible,  
Poured out hot blood.  
“Here, Mother, drink the black mountain's water!  
You wanted to drink my blood,  
Now you're drinking Rošlin's blood.”

The smallest water feature, the microcosm of water, is the spring. This is the water that comes, flows freely from the earth and is the most elemental and pure. But Slovenian vernacular expression “studeneč” is also expression for artificially made well<sup>8</sup> or fountain-head, coming from the ground and then build around. (Koren 1962: 88). In the love song

<sup>6</sup> Compare water's “complex spectrum of meanings,” and “unformed, undifferentiated mass” symbolizing “the abundance of possibilities” with rock: “A symbol of solidity and immutability” (Becker 1994: 249). Rock or mountain is associated with immortality and stasis, water with mortality and flux.

<sup>7</sup> The healing spring in “the black mountain” can be a symbol of death or it is the warning of death. (Šmitek 1988: 44–45).

<sup>8</sup> See also pictures about water supply in Istria, Goriška Brda, Brkini <<http://www.etno-muzej.si/en/spletne-zbirke/klasifikacije/oskrba-z-vodo>>.



Figure 3: Laundresses, Boljunec. Photo: Mario Magajna, 1948. (Baš 2004: 411)

“Preizkuševanje drage / Plenice je prala pri mrzlem studenc” (The Betrothed is Tested / She Was Washing Diapers in a Cold Spring; Š 1275), a girl is washing her son’s diapers and weeping. An unknown youth passes by, who asks why she is crying. She answers that it is because she lost her innocence due to love, and then her beloved left her, so now she is alone and has no reason for rejoicing – she is like a “flower without water”. The cold spring in the song is symbolic water, where the girl is not only washing laundry, but she is also washing away her sin both with the water and her own tears. In some variants, at the end the youth is revealed to be her betrothed and he takes her to the altar. The spring thus also symbolically signifies water of recognition.

<sup>9</sup> See also the love ballad “Pridobitev ljubega z navidezno smrtjo”/B (Zaljubljeni mladenič) / Winning one’s Lover by feigning death/B (Lad in love), SLP IV/ 203, where the young man in love asked father to dig or build a well or fountain (Sln. *studenec*), wishing that the loved one would come to fetch the water. See Detelić 2013 about water oppositions and fluidity.



## WATER, BLOOD AND DEATH

The water in the ballad “Zadnjokrat se poljubita in v valove skočita” (One Last Kiss and into the Waves They Leap: GNI M 24.612) takes the form of a brook. A girl with a sorrowful face walks along its banks, collecting flowers for her beloved, who must join the army, and so they will never see each other again. The girl is pregnant, which is revealed in the final stanza, and so she and her beloved leap into the water together so that he will not have to join the army and she will not have to cradle the son. All of a sudden the brook widens into a bigger watercourse that has waves, and upon these waves they find death: *Ob potočku sva hodila, / tam kjer voda bolj šumela, / zadnjokrat se poljubila / in v valove skočila* ‘We walked along the brook / Where there were more rapids / We kissed for the last time / And leapt into the waves’. Water gives life but can also take it. It causes events, but is also closely connected with death because, as French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin stated, water “signified the source of death and new life” (Morin 1981: 144). Water can thus bring the two lovers together only in death, because a life together is not to be theirs in this world, where social conditions drive them apart.

In the love ballad “Brata ima raje od ljubega” (She Loves Her Brother More Than Her Beloved; SLP IV/220) the microcosm of water is a river, but the sea is invoked even more frequently. This is probably actually just a body of water – a brook or spring – and not actually the sea, because laundry normally would have been washed in fresh water and not the sea:

<i>Dekle pere srajci dve, na sivem morju, na prode;</i>	The girl is washing two shirts in the gray sea, on the gravel. (Ex. 3)
<i>Dekle prala srajčki dve / na sredi morja te vode.</i>	The girl was washing two shirts / in the water in the middle of the sea. (Ex. 7)
<i>To dekle pere srajčki dve / na bistri vodi Lublančici</i>	That girl is washing two shirts / In the clear waters of the Ljubljanica. (Ex. 8)

The linguist André Martinet believed that the original Indo-European homeland did not allow a distinction between the various forms of water:

The most common form, represented by the root \**mor-*, originally referred to an unspecified type of water source that disappeared into the distance. This indicates that maritime life was not known in a true sense, which would have been characterized by contact with the wide sea, and which would have made a clear distinction between a lake on the one hand and the sea on the other. (Martinet 1987: 62–63, cited in Mencej 1997: 8)

In this song blood is more powerful and binding than love because love for one’s brother is unique, whereas love for one’s beloved is not. Slovenian tradition also has the

proverb "Kri ni voda" 'Blood is thicker than water,' indicating that blood is a stronger tie between people than water, which is also connected with the legal element of the avunculate, which laid down that a widow with sons came under the jurisdiction of her husband's brother, who had authority over her sons (Vilfan 1961; Golež Kaučič 2002). The blood was extensively symbolized and ritualized, and it was one of the most powerfully meaningful and multivocal bodily substances (Myer 2005). This is why washing is a ritual act, and the water also washes away the girl's head, which her beloved cuts off because he is jealous of his brother. Even though blood is not water, water can even wash away blood, so perhaps it is stronger than blood after all.

### WATER AS HOSTILE POWER

In the legendary ballad "Marija in brodnik" (Mary and the Ferryman; SLP II/105), water is hostile to humans. It contains the core of the story, which makes a song out of the conversation between Mary and the ferryman and her request that he takes her across the sea, river, or lake to the other side for free. The ferryman declines and wants to be paid, but after some time he and his boat or ship are caught in a terrible storm. When he calls out to Mary for help, she chides him and says that kreutzers (i.e., money) ought to save him. Water is a symbolic ethical agent. In some variations the ferryman and his ship go down, and in others Mary has mercy on him. Perhaps the water is the sea (hence the storm), but it is also likely that it is a river. In Slovenia ferries were usually used to cross rivers such as the Mura.

The legendary ballad, "Marija in potopljene vasi" (Mary and the Flooded Villages; SLP II/110), thematizes the destructive force of water, in this case the Danube, which roars and awakens the infant Jesus. In her dialog with the water (in this case, the Danube) Mary asks the water about the cause of all the noise, and it answers her as an anthropomorphized living creature that it will flood nine (in some examples twelve) villages where wicked and cruel people live. Mary herself experiences this personally because in two of the villages wealthy people turn her away when she asks for a place to sleep, whereas in the third village a poor widow – who herself lacks food or even a proper bed – takes her in. After all the villages are flooded except for the one where the widow lives, Mary gratefully promises her that she will protect her on her final night. This is a sort of water lesson or, as Vinko Ošlak puts it: "When the friendly water of baptism and blessing is disdained, a great water lesson follows, whose roaring voice can no longer be ignored" (Ošlak 2002: 59).

The core of the fairy-tale ballad "Pred zmajem rešeno dekle" (A Girl Rescued from a Dragon<sup>10</sup>; SLP I/22) is a deep, dark lake in which a strange beast<sup>11</sup> swims (a dragon, serpent, or demon). The beast eats animals and people:

<sup>10</sup> About dragon as mythical animal see Birkalan and Garry 2005: 73–79.

<sup>11</sup> On the complexity of the dragon as water creature see Propp 2013 (1946): 191–192, 226–227.

*Tu mi stoji, stoji beli grad,  
pod gradam globoko jezero,  
po jezeru plava čudna zver,  
pa je z imenam hudi zmij.*

Here stands a white castle,  
Under the castle a deep lake,  
In the lake swims a strange beast  
That is called a wicked dragon.

In the nearby castle the lord and lady therefore choose a victim, Margaret, God's servant, who can be spared more easily than other children. The girl goes to the lake and in some cases saves herself by crossing herself, and in others she is rescued by St. George. The depth and darkness of the lake stirred the human imagination and increased the fear that deep waters hid creatures that were hostile to people. Water in the form of a lake is calm but mysterious, which does not promise anything good. Probably this thematizes human sacrifice (Propp 2013/1946: 230–231; Klobčar 2011), which was then later overlaid with Christian attributes. Since the ritual can be “a symbolic code communicating certain aspects of ideology and social structure” (Myer 2004: 3), we might state when the ritual is gone the ballad can reinterpret the ritual. The woman in ballad is the sacrificial lamb, and the connection of women with water is downright archetypal. The dragon is one of Carl Jung's archetypes, as well. Jung compared archetypes to powerful, eternal, torrential watercourses:

An archetype is like an ancient watercourse, through which living water has flowed over the centuries, carving a deep channel for itself. The longer the water has flowed through this channel, the more likely it is that it will return to this old riverbed sooner or later. (Jung 1986: 38–39)

The water in the fairy-tale ballad “Povodni mož<sup>12</sup>” (The Water Man; SLP I/24/2) can be a river or lake; the song does not define what type of body of water it is. The folksong uses the general term “water” for the home of the mythical creature the river man, who sometimes brings a dancer into the water and sometimes steals a child that wanders too close to the water:

*Še je šla mati po vodo,  
vzela je dete s sabo.  
Prišal je povodni mož,  
povodni mož Trdoglav.*

Then the mother went for some more water,  
Taking her child with her.  
The water man came,  
Hard-Head the water man.

Water is once again a frightening element full of monstrous creatures, and therefore people should avoid it. The best-known version is the story of the water man that was recorded by polyhistor Janez Vajkard Valvasor in the 17<sup>th</sup> century: that the water man lives

<sup>12</sup> Waterman should, after the mythology, live in the glass palace in the middle of the lake and the spring in his castle is supposed to be the spring of all the rivers on the world (Šmitek 1998: 49; see also Dapit and Kropelj 1999; Radenković 2013).

in the Ljubljanica, the river that flows through Ljubljana. At a dance under a linden tree in central Ljubljana he carried off the beautiful Urška Šefer to his waters. A folk ballad arose based on this fairy-tale story, followed later by a literary poetic version by France Prešeren. (Golež Kaučič 2001; SLP I; Radenkovič 2013). In the past, the watery world was something foreign to humans, elemental; people drowned in rivers, lakes, and seas; most of them did not know how to swim so water also carried drowning victims. All this confirmed that the watery depths were full of dangers and that it was certainly possible that mythical creatures hostile to humans lived there too.

The Ljubljanica River, is thematized in the family ballad “Smrt matere na porodu/B” (A Mother’s Death in Childbirth; SLP V/250). The first two lines are: *Lepa voda Ljubljaničica, / na nji prala Margetica* ‘The beautiful waters of the Ljubljanica / Margaret was washing her laundry there’. The river is a place for washing and a symbolic place for purification because Margaret is pregnant and, despite the efforts of the hero King Matthias, the girl dies in childbirth.

#### WATER AND LONGING FOR BETTER LIFE, LOVE AND DEATH

In the family ballad “Zvijačna ugrabitev mlade matere / Lepa Vida” (The Cunning Abduction of a Young Mother / Lovely Vida; SLP V/244), the sea is a wide expanse of the unknown, but also promises a better life. This type of sea landscape is represented by the following song excerpts:

*Prelepa Vida plenice prala, pri kraju  
morja na sinji skali  
na širokem morji, na belem peski  
pri morju na belem produ  
Mlada Vida štrence prala pri kraju morja,  
na belem produ/pesku.  
je plenice prala in v luži stala*

Lovely Vida was washing diapers, by the sea on the blue cliffs. (1)<sup>13</sup>  
On the wide sea, on the white sand (4)  
By the sea on white gravel (5)  
Young Vida was washing yarn by the sea, on the white gravel/sand. (2, 3)  
Washing diapers and standing in a puddle (11)

In this story a woman, who is standing on the beach and washing diapers for her sick child, longing for a life without her old husband and sick child, is abducted. A Moor called Saracen comes to her and persuades her that he has a mandrake root for her to heal her sick child, and so she should come onto his boat. When she boards, the boat sails away: *po tem črnjelem morju / po tem zelenem morju* ‘upon the black sea / upon the green sea’. Then Vida realizes that she has been abducted and that she is to become a wet nurse to the Spanish prince. In one of the variants she leaps into the sea; in others she either gives in to her fate or curses it. Now the sea is black, now it is green; it changes color as a reflection of the emotive

<sup>13</sup> Numbers denote variants of song type 244.



Figure 4: Mesečev zaliv (The Moon Bay), Strunjan. Foto: Daša Ličen, 2015.

feelings of the subject, or also whether the water is shallow, deep, calm, or stormy. The sea is the mother of all water (in French, *mère* ‘mother’ and *mer* ‘sea’ sound the same). The sea is infinite, so it is no wonder that Lovely Vida longed for new horizons; places where the child was not crying, where there was no poverty, where there was medicine for her child, where she could be beautiful again, where she could be a woman and no longer the victim of poor living conditions. It is also a place of fear because it is uncontainable, but at the same time a place of longing for a better life that is somewhere off there in a faraway land.

In the love ballad “Čez morje v vas” (Across the Sea to Find a Bride; SLP IV/ 208), which bears the basic content of the ancient story of Hero and Leander, the sea is a limitless expanse that a man must conquer in order to reach his beloved. Young man swims across the sea or makes a boat with which he crosses the symbolic distance to the girl’s heart. The subject of the song can see from one bank to the other as with a river, and so very often the “sea” is merely a term for water, especially when the singer wishes to stress the difficulty of crossing it. In his article “Tema morja v slovenskem pesništvu XIX. stoletja” (The Theme of the Sea in XIXth Century Slovenian Prose), Štefan Barbarič claims that:

In the great majority of folklore traditions, mostly of continental Slovenia, the sea theme is not based on concrete experience or real life. In the simple folk imagination, the sea served as an example of a faraway, unknown, and fantastically unattainable place. (Barbarič 1977: 210)

The sea is a type of emptiness that stimulates the human imagination to create images of monsters, ships, and unusual creatures from the waves.

The most salient character of the sea, which may be either calm or stormy, is depth, and this is a metaphor for the distance between two hearts. This is sung about in the song "Smrt ženina pred poroko" (Death of a Bridegroom before the Wedding; SLP V/243), in which the son Marko marries far away from his birthplace: *Sinko Marko se je ženja / prek morja globokega, / prek morja globokega* 'The son Marko found a wife / Across the deep sea, / Across the deep sea'. He sets out on a trip in order to bring her home: *Peljal se je po mlado sneho, / še je morje mirno bilo* 'He traveled to his young bride / The sea was still calm'. When he went to fetch her, it was calm, but once he had her on deck it became stormy: *De so bli že z mladoj snehoj, / morje čez brege stopilo* 'When he was already with his young bride / the sea overflowed its banks'. The bride's ring falls into the water because of the rough sea, and so then she asks her maid of honor go after it, but she does not do so. Then she asks the senior wedding-organizer, who also refuses, and the bridegroom finally jumps in after it himself, but is drowned in the gray sea. In the end the bride also jumps in after him because she believes that her only home is there where her bridegroom is. The sea can thus separate or even unite people.

In the family ballad "Galjot" (The Galley Slave; SLP V/284) the sea plays a different role. It is the final refuge of someone resigned to his fate. It is deep, wide, and limitless; it separates a man from his family, ultimately forever. This originally Slovenian song probably arose between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, because galleys with oars were used in the Mediterranean during that period. In the late Middle Ages and the sixteenth century Slovenians could serve on ships that had various owners in ports such as Koper, Trieste, and Piran. They could serve as oarsmen. *Galjot pa vozi galejico, / na sredi morja globocega. / Pri kraj morja en pubič sdi, / galjot mu pravi ino govori.* 'The galley slave rows the ship / In the middle of the deep sea. / By the shore sits a boy, / The galley slave speaks to him' (SLP V/284/ 1 and 2). The galley slave was serving on the galley either as a prisoner or as an indentured servant; after many years he was to be allowed to return home, but they told him that his wife had remarried and his son had become a priest. Thus the slave returns to the galley in order not to destroy the peace of his family's new life, and: *Potegnil je veter hladan, / veter hladan, hudo močan. Odnesele je galejico / spet sred morja širocega* 'A cold wind blew up / A cold wind, very strong. It swept the galley / Back to the middle of the deep sea'.

Water in various forms, from springs and brooks to rivers and the sea, is thematized in the family ballad "Nevesta detomorilka" (The Infanticide Bride; SLP V/286; more in Golež Kaučič 2007: 712–713, 946–947). Here a girl that gives birth to several illegitimate children and wants to hide this fact abandons the children, either throwing them into the water or getting rid of them in some other manner. The child that is thrown into the water drowns, but the child that she puts under the "beech log" survives. This child reveals her secret on her wedding day. Water that should take an illegitimate child far away into the unknown, to the sea, in which the child would also symbolically disappear, occurs in

various versions of the song but always in the same role, that of carrying the child far from people's view. The basic message of the song is that the child must be carried off by water and be eaten by fish in order for the girl to be seen as a virgin once again. Song excerpts present the water features. In the variant from Miklavž pri Ormožu, the girl gives birth to a second illegitimate child next to "clear water": *Drugega je porodila, / pri eni bistri vodici, / tistega je tam vtopila, / v tisti bistri vodici (vrgla, položila)* 'She gave birth to the second / By a clear stream / This one she drowned (or threw, or laid) / In this clear stream'. In some this is *globoka voda* 'deep water' (SLP 286/32); in others she throws the child: *v morje globoko* 'into the deep sea' (SLP 286/3); *v sivo, globoko morje* 'into the deep, gray sea'(6); *per potok ste me rodili* 'you had me near a brook'(40); *enega ste v reko vrgli* 'one you threw in the river' (41); *prvega ste v voda vrgli, / de valovi vzel so ga* 'You threw the first into the water / So the waves would take him'(48); *to drugo je vrgla notri v morje med ledovje* 'she threw the second into the sea among the ice'(53). Water is that which can also symbolically signify that the girl can set the baby into the water, which then takes into its depths the only evidence of her adultery.

The Ljubljanica River, the Sava, the Drava, the Danube, and the sea are all waterways that show the route taken by the illegitimate child that is thrown into the water in the song "Obsojena detomorilka" (The Convicted Infanticide; SLP V/287). The song arose from a real event that occurred in 1766 in Ljubljana, in which the court delivered a death sentence and took the life of the infanticide Urška Mandlovka (Golež Kaučič 2007: 771, 947). The water in which she threw the child carried him from the place where she threw him in all the way to the deep sea. The folk song also condemns the infanticide by using progressively larger bodies of water. Various excerpts of song variants point to her act and various forms of water: *Svojga sinka je vmorila, / v beli Lublanici* 'She murdered her sons / In the white Ljubljana' (var. 24); *Deteta je umorila, / vrgla ga u Lublančico. // Lublančica globoka voda, / nesla ga je u Savico. // Savica široka voda, / nesla ga je u Donavo. // Donava velika voda, / nesla ga je sred morja* 'She murdered the baby / Threw him into the Ljubljana. // The deep waters of the Ljubljana / Carried him to the Savica. // The deep waters of the Savica / Carried him to the Danube. // The great river Danube / Carried him to the sea' (var. 38, 39, 47).

In both observed ballads, the representation of a single water microcosm is not sufficient. The dead of newly born child is so horrible to cause the water rising. With the gradation of water from small brook to outflow to the sea, the ballad dramatically emphasizes the gravity of the crime. There are two possible representations of the sweeping away of the corpse into the sea: only something so far away and infinite, as well as so deep (it can be Black sea or North sea with use of ice), can disguise such an act, and the being, which was not supposed to be alive, is returning back to the true "home" – the sea, as symbolic space of life and death.

FORMS OF WATER AND THEIR CONNOTATIONS	SLOVENIAN FOLK SONGS
SEA as creative and cosmological element; destructive power; mythological creature	»Riba Faronika nosi svet« (Faronika the Fish Bears the World; SLP I/20/2)
WATER in glass or pitcher (purifying power)	»Dekle, prines glaž vode« (My Girl, Bring Me a Glass of Water; Š 2206), Kamnik
HEALING SPRING (magical and healing power; symbol of death or warning of death)	»Pastorek umori očima« (A Stepson Kills His Stepfather; SLP 274)
SPRING (cleansing power and water of recognition)	»Preizkuševanje drage / Plenice je prala pri mrzlem studenc« (The Betrothed is Tested / She Was Washing Diapers in a Cold Spring; Š 1275)
BROOK (death and place of uniting)	»Zadnjokrat se poljubita in v valove skočita« (One Last Kiss and into the Waves They Leap; GNI M 24.612)
RIVER (water of hidden crime and purification; hostile power; symbolic ethical power; anthropomorphized living creature; symbolic space for purification, life and death)	»Brata ima raje od ljubega« (She Loves Her Brother More Than Her Beloved; SLP IV/220); »Marija in brodnik« (Mary and the Ferryman; SLP II/105); »Marija in potopljene vasi« (Mary and the Flooded Villages; SLP II/110); »Smrt matere na porodu/B« (A Mother's Death in Childbirth; SLP V/250); »Obsojena detomorilka« (The Convicted Infanticide; SLP V/287).
LAKE (the place of human sacrifice; frightening element full of monstrous creatures)	»Pred zmajem rešeno dekle« (A Girl Rescued from a Dragon; SLP I/22); »Povodni mož« (The Water Man; SLP I/24/2)
SEA (the place of abduction; the place of symbolized longing for for new horizon; place of separation and of uniting again; final refuge)	»Zvijajčna ugrabitev mlade matere / Lepa Vida« (The Cunning Abduction of a Young Mother / Lovely Vida; SLP V/244) »Čez morje v vas« (Across the Sea to Find a Bride; SLP IV/ 208); »Smrt ženina pred poroko (Death of a Bridegroom before the Wedding; SLP V/243); »Galjot« (The Galley Slave; SLP V/284);
WATER IN DIFFERENT FORMS (depth and infiniteness)	»Nevesta detomorilka« (The Infanticide Bride; SLP V/286).

Figure 5: Table: Forms of water and their connotations.



## CONCLUSION

Traveling through the waters in Slovenian folksongs points to the diverse forms, occurrences, use, and symbolism of water demonstrating that water is not only a basic natural element, but it has also been present throughout folk singers' entire lives; it accompanied them from birth to death. Water made life possible but also took life. The conceptualization of water in songs is connected with the nearness and remoteness of water and water also has various metaphorical and symbolic connotations in folksong. In songs, water is also connected with diverse emotive states, can also be a place for voluntary death, and can be silent, torrential, deep, and shallow, and can roar and wash things away. It is a female archetype, space for the imagination, a powerful presence in people's lives in all forms, and a frequent motif in all genres of Slovenian folksong.

The concept of water used in the songs, in regard to farthestmost richness and diversity of water sources in Slovenia, is not an object of desire and need and not an existential problem, but mostly connected with deep emotional and spiritual dimensions of songs subjects, as well as their experiences toward individual water forms.

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### »DEKLE MOJE, PRINESI MI VODE« VODA V SLOVENSKI LJUDSKI PESEMSKI TRADICIJI

*Razprava se osredinja na formalne vloge in podobe vode v slovenskih ljudskih pesmih kot tudi na njihove pomene in metaforične ter simbolične konotacije v različnih vodnih mikro- in makrokozmosih od vode v kozarcu do morja. Na podlagi tekstovnih analiz in folklorističnih metod, s pritegnitvijo nekaterih etnoloških kontekstualnih vidikov in s pomočjo različnih teoretskih diskurzov razgrinja najpogostejše dimenzije vode, od mitoloških, transcendentnih do življenjskih in smrtnih. V uvodu niza različne pomene vode, kakor se kažejo v posamičnih diskurzijah in konceptih tako kulturnih, filozofskih kot tudi simboličnih razsežnosti vode; voda ni samo naravni element, je tudi kulturna prvina, saj prek njenih različnih podob lahko interpretiramo tako materialni kot duhovni svet. V razpravo vključi slovensko ljudsko izročilo o vodi, o šegah, povezanih z vodo, kozmologijo in mitologijo.*

*Analizo ljudskih pesmi začena s kozmogonskim mitom o pradavnem izročilu, da svet počiva na velikem bajeslovnem bitju v obliki ribe, ki plava v morju, in veri, da če se bo zganila, bo potres, če bo z repom zamahnila, bo povodenj, in če se bo obrnila na hrbet, bo konec sveta. Tematiziran je v bajeslovni pesmi »Riba Faronika nosi svet« in voda v tej pesmi je prostor tujega, oddaljenega, strašljivega celo transcendentnih in bajeslovnih razsežnosti. Voda pa ni samo prapočelo sveta, je tudi najosnovnejša tekočina, ki ne samo, da poživilja, z njo se lahko očistimo umazanije, je tudi simbolna tekočina, s katero lahko celo izmijemo greh, kar je v slovenskem izročilu predvsem blagoslovljena voda. V pesmi »Dekle, prinesi mi vode« je tekočina, ki je središčna tekočina obrednega dejanja izmivanja ljubezenske navezanosti fanta na dekle. Dar vode je torej tudi dejanje žrtvovanja dekleta, ki prav z vodo omogoča »izlivanje ali odlivanje« ljubezni. Voda naj bi imela tudi zdravilno moč, kar ubeseduje pesem »Pastorek umori očima«, v kateri je studenčnica povezana z goro, kar lahko povežemo z elementom stabilnosti, ki omogoča vodi fluidnost. Iskanje studenca, zdravilnega in magičnega pa je pretveza za uboj in vodi kot čisti in prozorni prvini se pridruži kri kot njeno nasprotje.*

*Autorica nato analizira posamične mikro- in makrokozmose vode, od izvira ali studenca, kjer*

*potekata realno pranje in metaforično očiščevanje, kar vidimo v pesmi »Preizkuševanje drage«, kjer je v simbolnem pomenu tudi voda razkritja in spoznanja. Nato se posveti potoku (»Zadnji-krat se poljubita in v valove skočita«), ki je hkrati izvir smrti in novega življenja, reki, kjer se zgodi zločin (»Brata ima raje kot ljubega«), voda pa je močnejša od krvi, saj lahko kri izmije. V baladah »Marija in brodnik« in »Marija ter potopljene vasi« gre za morje, reko ali jezero, v prvi je voda etični agens, v drugi pa celo antropomorfizirano bitje z rušilno močjo. Reka je tematizirana v baladi »Smrt matere na porodu«; v njej je ponovno simbolni element očiščenja. Jezero kot globoka, temna in strašljiva voda, polna mitoloških bitij, ki zahtevajo žrtve, je upesnjeno v baladah »Pred zmajem rešeno dekle« in »Povodni mož«. Morje kot brezmejno vodno prostranstvo, prostor življenja in smrti, prostranstvo neznanega, a hkrati obet boljšega življenja, je upesnjeno v »Lepi Vidi«, kot metafora razdalje med dvema srcema pa v baladi »Čez morje v vas«. Kot zadnje prebivališče in prostor ponovnega snidenja je ubesedeno v pesmi »Smrt ženina pred poroko« in metaforično kot zadnje pribežališče v »Galjotu«. Voda, v različnih oblikah od studenca, prek potoka in reke ter morja, je predstavljena v baladi »Nevesta detomorilka«: je voda, v kateri naj bi izginilo dete, ki se ga je nezakonska mati želela znebiti. Še bolj pa je moč vode, ki odnese nezakonskega novorojenčka, razvidna v baladi »Obsojena detomorilka«, v kateri je ljudski ustvarjalec detomorilstvo obsodil tako, da je uporabil stopnjevanje velikosti vodnega vira, od reke Ljubljanice pa vse do Črnega morja. V obeh navedenih baladah ni dovolj le en vodni mikrokozmos, temveč je smrt komaj rojenega otroka tako grozljiva, da narašča tudi voda. Prav s stopnjevanjem voda od manjšega potoka in na koncu izliva v morje balada dramatično poudari težo zločina. Odnášanje trupla v morje lahko razumemo na dva načina, da le nekaj tako oddaljenega in neizmerne ter globokega, kot je morje (to je lahko Črno morje ali celo severno, kjer je ob morju še ledovje), lahko prikrije dejanje, ali pa da se bitje, ki mu ni bilo dano živeti, na neki način vrača v svoj prvotni dom, saj je morje simbolično prostor življenja, a tudi smrti. Potovanje po vodah v slovenskih ljudskih pesmih pokaže raznovrstne oblike, pojave, uporabo in simboliko vode, kar pomeni, da voda ni samo elementarna naravna prvina, temveč je bila ljudskemu ustvarjalcu navzoča v vseh obdobjih njegovega življenja, spremljala ga je od rojstva do smrti. Voda je omogočala življenje, a ga je tudi jemala. Dojemanje vode je v pesmih povezano z bližino in oddaljenostjo vode, voda pa ima v pesmih tudi različne metaforične in simbolične konotacije. V pesmih je povezana tudi z različnimi emotivnimi stanji, je tudi prostor proustvoljne smrti, je tiha, je deroča, je globoka in plitva, buči in odplavlja. Je arhetip ženske, prostor imaginacije, je močno navzoča v življenju ljudi v vseh oblikah ter pogost motiv v vseh žanrih slovenske ljudske pesmi. Voda v ljudski pesemski tradiciji, glede na izjemno vodnatost in pestrost vodnih virov na Slovenskem, ni objekt želje ali potrebe in ni eksistencialni problem, temveč je predvsem povezana z globokimi emotivnimi in duhovnimi razsežnostmi subjektov pesmi, hkrati pa je odvisna od njihovih izkustvenih odnosov do različnih vodnih oblik.*