

Soldiers' Poems as An Ideal Indicator of a Soldier's Psychological Microworld

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Abstract

Luka Lukić, a Croatian ethnographer, melograph and folklorist, created reliable records of cultural heritage on the territory of Slavonia, between the late 19th and mid 20th century. During his 56-year-long career, he collected descriptions of life and customs of the inhabitants of Klakar and a wider Brod-Posavina area. His manuscripts contain over 10,000 pages. Although presented as a monograph, the manuscripts have not been sufficiently analysed in the context of psychology, sociology, politics, history, philology and other sciences. They contain folk chants, notes on social relationships, customs, beliefs, folk medicine, architecture, economy, the art of traditional clothing, folk songs, prayers, stories, short stories, incantations, fables, jokes and complex soldiers' poems which form the basis of the analysed corpus. As Lukić meticulously documented his materials and conveyed the atmosphere of his time, the soldiers' poems are an ideal indicator of a soldier's psychological microworld before and after WWI. It seems like the inhabitants of the Brod-Posavina region themselves speak through the poems honestly, as witnesses, about the events, feelings, and situations in the armed forces, and discipline and drills they had experienced before battles and during the war. They speak about relationships between the soldiers and their superiors, and soldiers' feelings and dissatisfaction caused by disrespect for human dignity. They mention fears, restlessness and uncertainty due to battles they were about to enter, and dissatisfaction with the relationships between them and their superiors. Soldiers' poems, therefore, speak for the first time about the main protagonists of WWI, from first-hand experience.

Keywords: Brod-Posavina; Luka Lukić; soldier; soldiership; World War I

1. Introduction

Although in many historical sources and various monographs¹ there are records of diplomatic and political crises before the World War I, the circumstances² that lead to the inevitable clash, the assassination³ of Franz Ferdinand and Sophie as the cause of the Great War, many books, encyclopaedias, sources do not supply the different, darker side of the history which was lived and written by the participants of the Great War, who were fighting in several large battlefields like the Western Front, the Eastern Front or the Balkan Front. It is, therefore, crucial to analyse soldiers' poems, so called personal soldiers' accounts and records from the front, dictated directly into the pen of note-taker and collector Luka Lukić.

This paper brings first the short biography of Lukić and a description of his creation and legacy, the paper corpus, and the methodology. The core of the text analysis are verses in which the storyteller-soldiers document events in the battlefield, descriptions of various historically authentic battles of the Great War, but also the traumas that happened to them, personal experiences and events during and after the warring. The soldiers introduce us to the military drill, recruits' and soldiers' life, reveal the relationships inside the hierarchical military structure and speak of personal dissatisfaction caused by the disregard for human dignity, of fears, restlessness and uncertainties of the battlefields. The paper does not analyse the historical events of the Great War because the emphasis is on the psychological microworld of military life before and during the War, for which these poems are the ideal material.

2. Luka Lukić – a short biography

Luka Lukić was born on December 4th, 1875, in Brodski Varoš as a descendant of an old Slavonski Brod family from the former Gornja Varoš (West of Slavonski Brod). He began his teacher career in Kaniža, a village near the Sava, a few kilometres from Slavonski Brod. In 1900, as a 25-year-old teacher he came to Klakar, East of Slavonski Brod, where he remained for the next 37 years. Almost his entire life, he recorded the original speech and customs of his fellow-townsmen, the stories, melodies of songs, more significant events and so on, that is, he recorded the complete picture of everyday life and customs of Klakar residents. He retired in 1937, after 42 years of teaching service. He returned to Varoš and continued his work as a note-taker and author, by finishing many records he had started. He was 81 years old when he passed away in Varoš on April 28th, 1956, leaving behind him a considerable volume of unexplored documents and sources.

¹ More in Adams (2001), Dukovski (2012), Ergang (1954), Scott (2013), Zeiger (2010).

² More in Clodfelter (1992), Dukovski and Dukovski (2014), Foerster (1921), Mallinson (2013).

³ More in Marix Evans (2005), Weissensteiner (1983).

2.1. Lukić's creation and legacy

The complete manuscript material of Lukić comprises over 10,000 pages, and most of it is stored in The Museum of Brodsko Posavlje in Slavonski Brod, the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, the Department of Ethnology of Croatian Academy of Sciences and Art (HAZU) in Zagreb, Matica hrvatska and in private collections. It is a large stock which abounds not only in folk chants, but also comprises a thorough description of the life of inhabitants in Brodsko Posavlje community, and its complete culture. Lukić notes the architecture, describes the enterprise of Klakar homesteads, diet, clothes, social relations, lists the annual and everyday life customs, various games for children and young people, folk medicine, and beliefs. In Lukić's enormous manuscript legacy, a large portion is comprised of songs and notes – short folk songs and church songs. A portion of the material from the description of the village Klakar encompasses prayers and storytelling genres, i.e., tales, short stories, stories, gatkas, fables and jokes, and a corpus of folk songs, i.e., longer soldiers' poems.

Even though Lukić's considerable legacy encompasses various textual types, the backbone of the analysed corpus will be the latter, i.e., poems from soldiers' life. Lukić made certain to write everything down exactly as he heard it, "and not as it should be, (...) accurately and precisely, just as the people sing and speak (Lukić, 2016: 18)." In his notetaking and collector's labours he strived to document the written materials as precisely as possible, and so he, in addition to the text and melody, documented the teller, date and place of the text. The material is therefore extremely valuable not only to ethno-musicology or ethnology, but also to history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, linguistics, and other disciplines. "To both stories and storytelling, Lukić approached as the crucial research areas. He recognized a hundred years ago that the context of the performance is extremely important, because in the moment of the performance, the communication inside a community is especially important, where experiences and knowledges, both collective and individual, are shaped through stories and storytelling. Therefore, whenever he could, he tried to be a participant in the community if something were being told or sung, in social gatherings or through dance."⁴

3. The paper corpus – Poems from the lives of soldiers⁵

Up until now unexplored poems bring us the records from the second half of the 19th century until WWI (more precisely, until 1918). In them are recorded longer soldiers' poems whose content is associated with the events of the battles of that time, and in which young men from Lukić's area served and fought. These young men-narrators experienced the trench warfare of WWI first-hand, they lived through the terror of first airplane attacks and felt the effects and consequences of war gases. The owners of these songbooks were different young

⁴ Prologue by Tanja Perić-Polonijo and Dunja Vanić of the book Lukić (2016: 34).

⁵ All analyzed soldiers' poems were collected and published in Lukić (2016).

soldiers, and among the analysed a few of the storytellers stand out: Josip Pitlović and Franjo Pitlović, Pero Dupor, Mitar Stanić and Ivan Ćosić, all of them members of the 78th infantry regiment, and Stjepan Petričević, a corporal of the Home-Guard regiment.

4. Methodology

Textual analysis and interpretation of corpus verses will show that the mentioned narrator-soldiers described in their songs vividly and in detail certain events, successes and failures in military campaigns, military situations and anecdotes, feelings, dissatisfaction, fears, trepidations, the uncertainty of the battlefield, but primarily the courage of all those soldiers and heroes mostly from the 78th6 infantry regiment, whose members they were. Often the soldiers would mention their fellow fighters from other regiments; 28th7 Home-Guard regiment in Osijek, 16th8 Bjelovar regiment, 42nd9 Home-Guard infantry division, the so-called Devil Division, thus completing the military environment present in the East and Balkan Front. In the poems they mention toponyms and names which outline real events, places, and people, and this gives Lukić's records and his narrators an added value. Lukić tried to accurately record or copy all that his narrators say/sing of, and because of this, many foreign names were distorted, sung in the way Klakar inhabitants spoke in that time, and will be additionally explained. Some poems thoroughly describe certain events which are not recorded in historical sources or are just mentioned in passing, and therefore the possibility of verification in these cases is minimal or non-existent.

Seeing how the narrator-soldiers were all active participants in the events they sing about, it is expected that we find, during textual analysis, a plethora of details and elements, which in various ways paint a broad portrayal of historical events. Through this, we will see a psychological microworld of a soldier's life before and during WWI on the East and Balkan Fronts.

5. The analysis of soldiers' poems

The mentioned verses record the documentation of events, certain battles and military formations which participated in the war, and all the horrifying scenes of terror and the violence of the fights brought on by war, and which every soldier-narrator lived through and remembered deep inside himself. First is the title of the poem, and then its textual analysis.

⁶ 78th regiment with headquarters in Osijek, a regiment of Croatian Home-Guard within the Austro-Hungarian army during WWI.

⁷ 28th regiment with headquarters in Osijek, a regiment of Croatian Home-Guard within the Austro-Hungarian army during WWI.

⁸ 16th Hungarian/Croatian/ infantry regiment with headquarters in Bjelovar.

⁹ 42nd Croatian Home-Guard infantry division within the Austro-Hungarian army during WWI.

The entry of our troops into Černovica¹⁰, and the Hungarian flag flutters (1915)

Soldier-narrator Josip Pitlović describes the events in one of the battles during WWI locating them in the North (*And now I will sing to you again/What the Croats are doing in the North/Bukovina is known to you/Where the Russians were masters*). It is about the conquest of the town Černovica. He records that the march on Bukovina was ordered from the top (*But they weren't there for long/Because the Croats got the order;/To hit the Russians there/And to banish them from there*). The poem states that the conquering of Černovica was not a problem for the Croats, because Croatian courage is mentioned often and with admiration (*But, brothers, listen to this here/Russians heard it from somewhere/They did not want to wait for us/Because they already knew of the Croats/Because they heard it from their Serbian brothers/How the Croat can give a whooping/So they gathered their army/And retreated greatly/In this way our muscles of steel/Made way to Černovica*). The soldiers make fun of the Russian adversaries calling them derogatory names (*We took Bukovina without a fight/Because the Russian drunks are afraid/of all of us and our shadows too*). After conquering the town of Černovica in 1915, Pitlović emphasizes how thrilled the Ukrainians were with Croatian soldiers (*When we marched into town/they all started jumping for joy/If you only could have heard the delight and song*). However, in the town they find an unpleasant surprise when they see a Hungarian flag as a visible sign of the conqueror. This is why they feel cheated, mocked and deceived, and they decide to remove the flag. (*And we, in unison with the "Devil Division"/attacked with our guns from the sides/until the flag was gone from the church*). They express their anger with the words of revenge, ready to execute the wretch because of a practical joke (*If we had known the gentleman/how joked with us like that/he would not walk on the earth/but reside underground*). After every battle the Croats expect Hungary, for which they fight, to respect and acknowledge them. Because of similar cases of disrespect, Croatian soldiers home-guardsmen express more and more the dissatisfaction with the Hungarian authorities, with the captivity in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and demand freedom because they recognize the unfortunate fate of fighting a war and serving a foreign master (*everyone hates the Hungarians/and as time goes on, they hate them even more/they have to be removed from them*). They emphasize their courage, heroism and readiness for battle anytime and anywhere (*Croats are true heroes/wherever they need to go, day or night/who goes first to face the enemy/if not our seventy eight/and by its side the twenty eight*), stress their honesty and loyalty (*...what the Croats want:/To be honest, to bring pride to their people/To live free in their home*), but quietly aspiring to freedom.

The battle at Černovica in Bukovina

Soldier-narrator Josip Pitlović, member of the 78th infantry regiment, notes the force of Home-Guard military charge on the town of Černovica (*The ground rumbles from the cannon*

¹⁰ A town in Ukraine in the district of Bukovina, a region on the border between Ukraine and Romania, the place of numerous battles during WWI.

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roar/The air is pierced by guns' scream/A mighty army approaches the town/Bombs are flying, and shrapnels whirring/The Croats are bombing the town). He notes that they besieged the town several times because of an order that it must be conquered (*Dawn is here, roosters can be heard/Bombs are resounding in the air already/Our side attacks the town heavily/Because the order came from above*). In the intensity of the conquest terror, everything is saturated with fighting pathos (*Land is trembling, soldiers fighting/The cloud above is burning/Guns are firing, cannons roaring*). The Croats are cheering each other on during the fight (*But the Croats are all yelling heroically:/Go on, brothers, go on, falcons/Fight like mad lions*) encouraging each other in different ways. They do not hesitate to show their courage, solidarity, they are not afraid to die, they fight to the end and do not even think of giving up (*Let it be known, my dear brothers/That this is the Croatian might/That none of us fear dying/What we planned, we must take/And together we strike/And banish the Russians from the town*). Narrator Pitlović – and this is not recorded in history books – reports of the battle consequences from his point of view as a soldier, he notes how many Russians were killed but also captured (*Russian forces died here/Six thousand we captured*), abandoned food and drink (*All their food they left/Lots of flour, cans and wine/Rum, bacon and bread there was*) and describes the feast that the Croats prepared with the supplies they found (*Brothers, we were very hungry/So we drank some rum/Ate some white bread and bacon*) as a well-deserved reward at the end of the battle.

The battle at Halič¹¹ and the harming of 16th and 78th infantry regiments

One of the historically recorded battles was the one at Halič where two great armies clashed, the army of the Croatian king Franz Joseph I, and the mighty Russian army of Nicholas II (*Four days have passed now/of this fierce combat/We strike like lions/And we must take the stronghold/Two times they fought us back/We could not defend ourselves/But the third time when we hit/We banished the Russian forces/The town of Halič we conquered*). Soldier-narrator Josip Pitlović speaks of the fierce battle and the terror of wartime killing during the siege of Halič (*You thrust, you kill, you stab/It was hell over there/The clouds were filled with fog of smoke/Injured and killed heroes everywhere*). After the successful taking of the town, Croatian soldiers got the permission to rest there, because the town was considered to be conquered when the battle was finished (*Here, my brothers, we went on leave/To the town we went/Then to sleep we broke off/And we decommissioned here/And the glorious sixteenth regiment/Also was on leave*). On the second night the Hungarians started retreating before the Russians and then they surrendered, because the Russian army unexpectedly entered the city and attacked the soldiers of the 16th and the 78th infantry regiments (*Terrible Russian forces struck/They caught us sleeping/We grabbed our guns right away/And hit the Russians with the gun butts/We were barefoot, and the Russians were not/The cries of the glorious sixteenth*

¹¹ Halič, Galyč – a town in today Ukrainian region Ivano-Frankivsk, a mediaeval centre after which Galicia was named.

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regiment/Could be heard in the streets/And over here, my brothers, is not well either). Many brave soldiers died, mostly because the army did not have unity because of different nationalities of the soldiers, or because of Hungarian cowardice (*Here the Russians struck/And the Hungarians joined them/It was terrible to watch/Look at the Russians and the Croats slaughtering each other/For if it were not for the treason/It would not have been for this travesty*). As the witness author Pitlović states, if it were not for the latter, there would be no defeat of Croatian infantry regiments.

***Loyalty of the Croatian army to our king*¹²**

Soldier-narrator Josip Pitlović records the successful battles of Croatian soldiers against the defeated Russian occupants lead by the Russian czar Nicholas II in the Carpathian Mountains area in 1915, more precisely the battles of Kolomyia¹³, Stanislav¹⁴ and Kalush¹⁵ in Ukraine. The Russian czar decided to surprise the Croats in the East of Hungary, at the river Koroš (*When the Croats beat the Serbs/He retreated from Serbia/When the Russian czar heard*¹⁶/*That the Croats will side with the Hungarians/He occupied the Koroš*¹⁷ *frontier/And surprised the Croats there*). The Croats were not frightened in the least by this, because their heroism is well known (*All of Hungary cheered/And with it all of Austria/That the Croat will fight Russia*) and they quickly went to fight the Russians and even further to the West (*Tripartite army struck/From the Carpathians banished the Russians/Tripartite army of the great Croatia/Defeated all of the Russian Kozaks/The Russians besieged Kolomyia/They waited for the tripartite army/But our army struck/Conquered Kolomyia in an hour*). Pitlović negatively describes the Russian czar, calling him derogatory names and contrasting him to the brave soldiers of the Triune Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia, who stood out in the battles (*If you could see the Russian Nicholas/running away like an old hag/triune our kingdom/raised heroes, my brothers/Ten Russians struck on one/The Croat only a bayonet has/The Russian Nicholas has escaped/left Stanislav to us/Waited for us at Kalush/and our side resisted easily*).

The song of the Italian offensive (June 12th, 1918)

Soldier-narrator Franjo Pitlović records the circumstances from the perspective of a defeated Croatian soldier who was a member of the Austro-Hungarian troops in the Italian Front in June of 1918, at Piava (*Here the Italians sent us packages/gas grenades and many*

¹² A description of fighting of the Croatian army with the Russians (czar Nicholas II) – battles at Kolomyia, Stanislav and Hali in Ukraine.

¹³ Kolomyia, a town in Western Ukraine, at the beginning of the WWI it was taken by the Russian imperial army, and in 1915 it was won by Austro-Hungarian forces.

¹⁴ Stanislav, today, Ivano-Frankivsk, a town in Western Ukraine.

¹⁵ Kalush, a town in Ukraine, West of Stanislav.

¹⁶ Nicholas II (1868 – 1918) the last Russian czar.

¹⁷ Koroš – a river in the East of Hungary.

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shrapnels/Along the whole road when we marched/shot at us with gas grenades.../When we came into position, my brothers/The Italians can see us from the plane/Flie low above our fight line/shoots at us from the machine gun). He notes how the Croats were powerless, exposed to a much stronger enemy, and describes the vehemence of the battle terror and the impossibility of avoiding the horrors of war (When a grenade explodes/All you hear are the wounded ones/And what is not injured by grenades/is suffocated by gas, my old brothers). He witnessed personally to the substantial consequences of war gas (because, my brothers, this is no joke/when you have to die of gas/They all lie like that, as if asleep/foaming a bloody foam from the mouth). Beside the direct injuries of war, soldiers are exposed to constant hunger, scarce and low-quality food, dehydration (a soldier suffers from hunger/I live through two days with no food/When a meal arrives finally/it is cold/Black water which they call coffee/but it disagrees with the stomach). Those who end up in a hospital with wounds are not recovering in any better conditions (In hospitals there is little to eat/easily eaten in one sitting) and soldiers were not shy about calling out their masters for poor management and not caring about their people, ironically noting: Long days, and the plates are small/the Germans do not feed us well anymore.

The destruction of the Serbian division in Syrmia (Srijem) (September 1914)

Pero Dupor, a soldier of the 78th infantry regiment, spoke of the historical events in the Balkan Front. One of the events that stands out does not have to do with classical warfare over a certain territory, but records instead the destruction of a Serbian division during the coronation of George Karageorgevich (Đorđe Karađorđević)¹⁸ in Syrmia. This event is not recorded in historical sources or anywhere else, but Dupor describes it so vividly that it needs no scrutiny. The record notes only the most important paragraphs of the narrator's poem; the intention of George Karageorgevich to be coronated as the king of Syrmia, his unsuccessful attempt to destroy the Croatian army, which was to witness the occasion, and finally the ironic depiction of the destruction of the Serbian division and the escape of soldiers and the young George Karageorgevich by jumping into the river Sava:

¹⁸ George Karageorgevich (1887 – 1972) older son of Peter, crown prince, had to abdicate from the throne because of a scandal, he was put in a mental institution and then his younger brother Alexander became king.

*Oh God almighty, thank you for
 everything,
 The Serbs wanted to rule in Syrmia;
 From Zemun to old Pazova
 The Serbs wanted to be the masters
 here...
 My brothers, in Zemun already
 George wanted to crown himself;
 He wanted a coronation there
 The king of Syrmia he wanted to be...
 An order to our army came,
 To get going now,
 And to go where George has his
 coronation...
 To meet it, he sent his armada.
 But bad luck spoke to him,
 Our army was waiting for him; ...*

*Right away, brothers, that first day
 They surrounded the Serbs from all
 flanks
 A fight is fought, the sky contracts,
 The poor Serbs pounced, to escape.
 And in front of them, George the
 coward,
 He left his barren throne...
 But our side does not even care
 They just charge the Serbs.
 The chased them into the cold Sava,
 Destroyed the miserly Serbian army.
 There many were executed by our side,
 And thrice as many were drowned...
 But, brothers, much good did his
 crown do,
 And the Sava full of the throne.*

The occupation of Crni vrh¹⁹

Witness Pero Dupor records the initially unresolved battle on the mountain Gučevo in Podrinje, by describing the great rivalry of the two armies (*One of the armies is of the Austrian emperor/ and the other of the Serbian king*). The conquest of Crni vrh was not smooth (*We strike as damned lions/On the barren hills of Crni vrh/Two times they repelled our attacks/We could not resist the force*), and the Serbs were described as fierce opponents. However, the situation changed (*And the third time, Croat next to Croat/If anyone was to watch/When they took their bayoneted guns/And charged on the Serbs*) and soon the Croatian army gained supremacy over the opponents, which resulted in horrific scenes (*You thrust, you kill, you stab/It was hell over there/The clouds were filled with fog and smoke/Injured and killed heroes everywhere*) which the witness ties to apocalyptic events (*This is like hell on Earth/Wherever you look, blood is there/It was horrifying to see*). Dupor records that conquering of the Crni vrh resulted in capturing many Serbs and claiming their spoils of war which were abandoned when they fled (*Five hundred were captured here/They surrendered to us without spilling blood/Here we took spoils of war a plenty/And four cannons we*

¹⁹ Crni vrh, a clearing on the mountain Gučevo in Podrinje where large-scale trench battles were fought in September of 1914.

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gained/We captured battle cannons/And four machine guns/And plenty of other battle material/Which the Serbian army threw away).

Battle at Beograd (Belgrade)

Battle at Belgrade was recorded by Josip Pitlović who witnessed it personally. In his notes we find the cunning of Croatian soldiers when entering the city, which they had to conquer as ordered by the 13th military command of the Joint armies²⁰ (*Dear God, the Dunav is murky/On the river Sava goes a yellow boat/And in the boat three hundred and four of our officers/On the boat they extinguished the candles*). It did not take much for the determination of the Croatian army to be shown, and the city was conquered by December 2nd, 1914, which was recorded in historical sources (*And the Croats hit fiercely/on the evening of December the second/The battle was ferocious, my brothers/Motors struck on the Dunav*). The city was burned, many objects broken and demolished, and the royal palace itself was damaged (*Belgrade burned from all sides/They crushed houses and hotels/King Peter's²¹ house they set on fire/All the Serbian factories they set on fire/Serbian powder-mill they set on fire*). The Serbs surrendered very quickly (*The Serbs are running away, hands in the air/So that the Croats do not kill them with a bayonet*), and then colonel Uzelac entered the city and brought the Croatian flag as a symbol of conquering the city (*Uzelac was a hero colonel/Entered Belgrade first/And hung the Croatian flag*). The Croats gained another historical battle in their series within a conquering campaign across the Balkan Front.

My dear started crying

Stjepan Petričević, the corporal of the 28th Home-Guard regiment from Osijek witnessed the retreat of Home-Guard soldiers from Serbia and the terror they experienced while returning to their homes (*Many a brother cried bitterly/When he returned home/Across the Drina, the cold water/From Serbia, the hungry kingdom*). Petričević describes how, when they left Serbia, they dug canals next to the Drina and stood guard. They fought hunger and thirst, and preparing food and quenching the thirst while awaiting further instructions from their superiors on the retreat (*During the day slaughter the pigs again/Then bury them deep in the ground/There is no kitchen here/What we roast, we eat right away/There is water, but you cannot drink it/Drinking fountain nowhere to be found/Water from the well you must not drink/You have to fear that poison is inside*). When they managed to get food, it was very expensive (*I had to pay three krunas for proja (corn bread)/Six seksers (Sechsers) for a flask of spirits/Twelve grams for a krana of bacon/Not expensive, for you must eat*),

²⁰ Central military command in Zagreb.

²¹ Peter I Karageorgevich (1844 – 1921) king of Serbia.

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but they did not worry about the price too much, because they had to survive. Just when they calmed down in the improvised trenches, the soldiers got orders not to retreat yet, but to put on full battle equipment (*And now, my poor brothers/Every last one has lost hope/We are not going to motherland Croatia/But to Jana²², where they slaughter lamb/Order came: "must travel"/Quickly, quickly, put your shoes on/Get in formation/Stroke your gun, caress your bayonet*). Petričević further describes the horrors of fighting when they were leaving Jana and everything the soldiers experienced while they were crossing the river into the embrace of their homeland (*Round the ears bigger bulbs are buzzing/And the river crossing you can hear/The wounded are already crossing back/The healthy ones go through the corn fields/Through the corn, and under some willows/Where the branches can hurt you*). The soldiers that managed to escape were injured badly. The poems that follow were not specifically named but were consolidated in a concise description of what they are describing. First, they note the conditions in military hospitals, and personal experiences and emotions during the recovery in one of the in-patient clinics in Germany, Austria, and Hungary. Next, they describe and analyse the life of soldiers during recruiting, training, and leaving for battle. The analysis ends with a versed letter spoken by the narrator, but not a crude, brusque and trained soldier, but a family man, who is aware of his responsibility to his country, and states his vulnerability in an emotional way by declaring his love for his wife, thanks to whom he can survive in the brutal and inhumane conditions.

The wounded soldiers in military in-patient clinics

The records of inhumane conditions in military hospitals throughout Austria, Germany, and Hungary, as well as the attitude of medical personnel toward Croatian soldiers is interesting. Here one can clearly see the vivid picture of non-Hippocratic behaviour towards the injured, infirm, or dying. In these in-patient clinics there was a great difference between certain wounded soldiers of which Josip Pitlović spoke in the poem *How bad it is for the Croats in hospitals in Austria and Hungary*. The hostility can be felt right at arrival of the wounded to the hospital (*When a Croat comes to the hospital/The way the Germans treat us/they look at Croats with hostility*). After the admission, the antagonism towards the wounded continues (*The doctors start yelling instantly/When they come to examine us/Then they tell us that we are avoiders/And that we poison our own wounds*). By insulting and humiliating them, the doctors stigmatise them as cheaters and fakers, and go so far as to accuse them of self-inflicting their wounds. The soldiers feel the discrimination between themselves and the domicile wounded soldiers (*How can we not resent/The Germans get to go on leave/And the Croats get sent to the front*).

²² Jana, village and river in Southern Podrinje, municipality of Bijeljina.

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They are aware that German soldiers have a better chance of recovery compared to them, who are deprived in every way (*The nurses that serve us/Bring the better things to the Germans/Every German has better food to eat/Enough soup, meat and roast/And for the Croats only scraps*). The same situation Pitlović describes in Hungarian temporary in-patient clinics (*It is the same thing in Hungary/In hospital where there are Croats*), and he asks himself, as do many of the wounded, why are they less worthy if everyone is same under the shared flag of the then Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (*Croatia has, under the Hungarian crown/Been declared as South Hungary/My brothers, why do we fight/Spill our blood in vain*). Croatian soldiers often emphasize their own courage, fighting spirit and success in the battlefield, their solidarity and loyalty to their sovereign (*The Croats, my brother, are no joke/Because it would cost you dearly/Who would dare hit a Croat?/Or pull a knife on him?/The Croats have always been united/Gladly we die for any companion*) and therefore consider this treatment an injustice.

Soldiers' life as recruits

Soldiers-narrators Ivo Ćosić and Mitar Stanić introduce us to their lives in the barracks²³, starting with applications and the arrival of recruits, up to senior soldiers and their treatment of the newcomers. The poems note the legal procedures of recruiting (*The Germans wrote to all the notaries/to pick up every dandy in the village/even if they are the village rakes/They just have to be twenty years old*). Upon their arrival to the administration headquarters, recruits are subjected to bad behaviour and belittlement of their dignity (*At me, they curse: "Where have you been, you beef/strip down this instant!"/I strip, and roll up my rubina²⁴/they take me naked to the doctor*), where they do a rough medical examination (*The doctor grabs my muscles/"You, boy, will make a good soldier."*) and they are sworn to be loyal to the emperor (*"Stand still as if you were holy/you have to swear to the emperor"*). Soldiers have a short amount of time to say goodbye to their loved ones (*Misery is making me sick/the Germans made me a soldier/I am restless, as if rabid/If only I were not married*). With mixed, undefined emotions they leave for the three-year period and into the uncertainty caused by many diplomatic and political crises in the eve of the Great War (*When I came in front of my barracks/there I heard a noise too great*). When he came to the barracks, a recruit had to subject himself to new rules and laws of military life, respecting the hierarchy (*A recruit curses his old mother/anyone can slap him at will/a sad recruit cries bitterly/he cannot say anything/place and old soldier next to him/let the old one show him the ropes*), obeying all orders without a word (*Has to go wherever he is sent/has to listen to his*

²³ Poems *A life of a soldier (In Foča in Bosnia)*, *Soldier's poem (when he is feeling low)*, *How a soldier lives* as told by Ivo Ćosić, *The life of a recruit* as told by Mitar Stanić.

²⁴ Top part of a Šokac male folk costume.

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seniors/who are cursing his recruit deity). The soldiers have to endure the inhumane treatment, taunting and mockery (*Here are all the recruits of the regiment/they all share an old, torn soldier's uniform/and a completely shabby raincoat/and completely torn shoes/all the patches already seedy/They gave me a defective gun/and a rusty bayonet/"Take this bear up there"*), and their human dignity is often violated. But a soldier must be ready for anything. Often the newcomers are being trained for abrupt departure with false alarms, and their stamina is tested. They are being accustomed to the military drill simultaneously replicating several situations (*When at four o'clock in the morning/the trumpet player blows, and I jump up/but the inspection is on the door/and he yells a couple of times:/"Get up, put your shoes on, newcomers."/"/"Get up, you wretch/put your gun on your chest/Then the cook from the kitchen arrives:/"Hurry, newcomers, get your soup!"/"I eat the soup like I'm throwing it away/the captain says: "Put your armour on!"*), making them march and stand in the cold in the middle of the night. This can have different effects on the psycho-physical state of the soldier (*Inside I am crying, cursing the injustice/the soup we can't eat in peace/I am pulling my hair out from the hardship/I don't know what to put on myself*) and they often feel helpless, miserable, used and humiliated. Often this pressure during an unannounced inspection (*And then the captain arrives/goes to visit the recruits/When he grabs me by the chest/I dread, tears flow down my face*) can lead to a psycho-physical breakdown of a recruit manifested in crying and sobbing, which is then followed by the officer's yelling and derision (*"Is this a way to prepare a newcomer?/Whoever prepared this idiot/must have dropped from a cloud"*). Few soldiers are satisfied with the employ in the barracks and with the preparations for the front (*The drums are pattering, and the music is playing/a sad soldier marching to it*). Often during the military service the soldiers complain of hunger (*If I only had some bread/My belly is all but gone*), destitution (*Nothing on the shelves/only one old crust*) and poverty (*not a krajcar in my pocket*), deficient menu (*here my soldier's meal awaits/Cold potatoes, and I sad and hungry*), hasty pace (*I have no time to tidy my things/Because I have to go stand guard*), going to the solitary (*better not steal from a friends/because to the solitary he will go*). The soldiers find it extremely difficult to endure how their superiors treat them (*In the morning when the reveille plays,/the sergeant inspects the rooms/And he starts to dust my pants so hard/that I can't look straight from the dust*) in situations where there is often mistreatment of the newcomers or their things (*he tied my hands and my legs/caused me great trouble/when I move, turn to the light/I can't even sleep, brother/I can only roll on the boards*). Therefore, the repulsion towards the imposed imperial burden was not surprising (*I just wait for the time/when I can shed this imperial burden/I would rather dig for two, three days/than serve the captain*), and the soldiers, even though they do not have free time, only dream of returning to their homes, to some more normal and humane conditions.

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The soldier is only a man

The poem of Pero Dupor, recorded in *Pismo dragoj s bojišta*²⁵ (1915), is especially interesting. It portrays a complete array of emotions hidden under the strict military drill and assigned uniforms in the battlefield. Although the soldier has a sense of duty towards the homeland which often comes before his private feelings (*My dear, do not be sad/that I had to leave you/Homeland called/and I must go with my companions to the battle/to fight for the homeland and for the emperor/our dearest ruler*), he also feels the need to justify himself before his loved one. He is very aware of the ever-present danger, but despite the fierce battles, danger of getting wounded and dying (*I am on the battlefield, my dear/bullets glistening with red blood are buzzing/grenades are falling*) he owes his courage and perseverance to the one he loves (*and again, my dear, I think of you/Even when I am in the fire with my companions/your image is before my eyes*), who awaits for him, back in their warm home.

6. Conclusion

Poems from the lives of soldiers are an invaluable part of Lukić's legacy. They are so much more than merely a recording of verses because the verses not only document historical events, completing in this way numerous monographs and sources, but they also depict fears, restlessness, uncertainties, dissatisfaction and many other feelings and thoughts of soldiers who personally experienced the trench fighting of the WWI, lived through the horrors of first plane attacks and felt the effects and consequences of war gas. There is no better way than direct witnesses' testimony, who cannot but speak honestly about all the things that made their microworld of uncertainty and terror during the fights. By analysing their words through the verses of soldiers' poems we can truly enter the psychological microworld of a soldier's life before and during WWI on the East and Balkan Front.

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²⁵ A letter to my dear from the front.

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