

Wiley Blackwell Handbooks to Classical Reception

A HANDBOOK TO
CLASSICAL RECEPTION
IN EASTERN AND
CENTRAL EUROPE

EDITED BY ZARA MARTIROSOVA TORLONE,
DANA LACOURSE MUNTEANU, AND DOROTA DUTSCH



WILEY Blackwell

A Handbook to Classical Reception in Eastern and Central Europe

Edited by

Zara Martirosova Torlone

Dana LaCourse Munteanu

Dorota Dutsch

WILEY Blackwell

Contents

List of Illustrations	x
Notes on Contributors	xii
Acknowledgments	xix
Introduction	1
<i>Zara Martirosova Torlone, Dana LaCourse Munteanu, and Dorota Dutsch</i>	
Part I Croatia	13
<i>Neven Jovanović</i>	
1 Classical Reception in Croatia: An Introduction	15
<i>Neven Jovanović</i>	
2 Pula and Split: The Early Modern Tale(s) of Two Ancient Cities	21
<i>Jasenska Gudelj</i>	
3 Croatian Neo-Latin Literature and Its Uses	35
<i>Neven Jovanović</i>	
4 The First Dalmatian Humanists and the Classics: A Manuscript Perspective	46
<i>Luka Špoljarić</i>	
5 The Swan Song of the Latin Homer	57
<i>Petra Šoštarić</i>	
Part II Slovenia	67
<i>Marko Marinčič</i>	
6 Classical Reception in Slovenia: An Introduction	69
<i>Marko Marinčič</i>	

7	Collecting Roman Inscriptions Beyond the Alps: Augustinus Tyfernus <i>Marjeta Šašel Kos</i>	74
8	Sta. Maria sopra Siwa: Inventing a Slavic Venus <i>Marko Marinčič</i>	88
9	Images from Slovenian Dramatic and Theatrical Interpretations of Ancient Drama <i>Andreja N. Inkret</i>	99
Part III Czech Republic		113
<i>Jan Bažant</i>		
10	Classical Reception in the Czech Republic: An Introduction <i>Jan Bažant</i>	115
11	Classical Antiquity in Czech Literature between the National Revival and the Avant-Garde <i>Daniela Čadková</i>	121
12	The Classical Tradition and Nationalism: The Art and Architecture of Prague, 1860–1900 <i>Jan Bažant</i>	133
13	The Case of the <i>Oresteia</i> : Classical Drama on the Czech Stage, 1889–2012 <i>Alena Sarkissian</i>	146
Part IV Poland		159
<i>Dorota Dutsch</i>		
14	Classical Reception in Poland: An Introduction <i>Dorota Dutsch</i>	161
15	From Fictitious Letters to Celestial Revolutions: Copernicus and the Classics <i>Dorota Dutsch and François Zdanowicz</i>	166
16	<i>Respublica</i> and the Language of Freedom: The Polish Experiment <i>Anna Grzeškowiak-Krwawicz</i>	179
17	Two Essays on Classical Reception in Poland <i>Jerzy Axer</i>	190
18	Parallels between Greece and Poland in Juliusz Słowacki's Oeuvre <i>Maria Kalinowska</i>	207

Part V	Hungary	223
	<i>Farkas Gábor Kiss</i>	
19	Classical Reception in Hungary: An Introduction <i>Farkas Gábor Kiss</i>	225
20	Classical Reception in Sixteenth-Century Hungarian Drama <i>Ágnes Juhász-Ormsby</i>	233
21	<i>Truditur dies die</i> : Reading Horace as a Political Attitude in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Hungary <i>Ábel Tamás</i>	245
22	The Shepherdess and the Myrmillo: The Sculptor István Ferenczy and the Reception of Classical Antiquity in Hungary <i>Nóra Veszprémi</i>	260
Part VI	Romania	277
	<i>Dana LaCourse Munteanu</i>	
23	Classical Reception in Romania: An Introduction <i>Radu Ardevan, Florin Berindeanu, and Ioan Piso</i>	279
24	Loving Vergil, Hating Rome: Coşbuc as Translator and Poet <i>Carmen Fenechiu and Dana LaCourse Munteanu</i>	287
25	Noica's Becoming within Being and Meno's Paradox <i>Octavian Gabor</i>	300
26	Reception of the Tropaeum Traiani: Former Paths and Future Directions <i>Allison L.C. Emmerson</i>	312
Part VII	Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro	327
	<i>Nada Zečević</i>	
27	Classical Reception in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro: An Introduction <i>Nada Zečević and Nenad Ristović</i>	329
28	Classical Antiquity in the Franciscan Historiography of Bosnia (Eighteenth Century) <i>Nada Zečević</i>	336
29	Innovative Impact of the Classical Tradition on Early Modern Serbian Literature <i>Nenad Ristović</i>	347

30	Classical Heritage in Serbian Lyric Poetry of the Twentieth Century: Jovan Dučić, Miloš Crnjanski, and Ivan V. Lalić <i>Ana Petković</i>	360
31	The Ancient Sources of Njegoš's Poetics <i>Darko Todorović</i>	373
Part VIII Bulgaria		387
	<i>Yoana Sirakova</i>	
32	Classical Reception in Bulgaria: An Introduction <i>Yoana Sirakova</i>	389
33	Bulgarian Lands in Antiquity: A Melting Pot of Thracian, Greek, and Roman Culture <i>Mirena Slavova</i>	396
34	In the Labyrinth of Allusions: Ancient Figures in Bulgarian Prose Fiction <i>Violeta Gerjikova</i>	411
35	"Bulgarian" Orpheus between the National and the Foreign, between Antiquity and Postmodernism <i>Yoana Sirakova</i>	423
36	Staging of Ancient Tragedies in Bulgaria and Their Influence on the Process of Translation and Creative Reception <i>Dorothea Tabakova</i>	437
Part IX Russia		449
	<i>Judith E. Kalb</i>	
37	Classical Reception in Russia: An Introduction <i>Judith E. Kalb</i>	451
38	"Men in Cases": The Perception of Classical Schools in Prerevolutionary Russia <i>Grigory Starikovskiy</i>	457
39	Homer in Russia <i>Judith E. Kalb</i>	469
40	Vergil in Russia: Milestones of Identity <i>Zara Martirosova Torlone</i>	480
41	Russian Encounters with Classical Antiquities: Archaeology, Museums, and National Identity in the Tsarist Empire <i>Caspar Meyer</i>	493

Part X	Armenia and Georgia	507
	<i>Zara Martirosova Torlone</i>	
42	Armenian Culture and Classical Antiquity <i>Armen Kazaryan and Gohar Muradyan</i>	509
43	Medieval Greek–Armenian Literary Relations <i>Gohar Muradyan</i>	516
44	The “Classical” Trend of the Armenian Architectural School of Ani: The Greco-Roman Model and the Conversion of Medieval Art <i>Armen Kazaryan</i>	528
45	Classical Reception in Georgia: An Introduction <i>Ketevan Gurchiani</i>	541
46	Greek Tragedy on the Georgian Stage in the Twentieth Century <i>Ketevan Gurchiani</i>	548
	Index	560

The Ancient Sources of Njegoš's Poetics

Darko Todorović

Abstract

Petar II Petrović Njegoš was a poet, ruler, and bishop of Montenegro in the first half of the nineteenth century. During his reign, Montenegro was a small theocratic principality, involved in constant struggle with the neighboring Ottoman Empire. Raised in the libertarian spirit of Serbian folk song, Njegoš at the same time showed a lifelong interest in classical antiquity. Most of his poetic work contains diverse elements of classical heritage, both in terms of ideas and motif patterns, as well as poetic images, literary topoi, metaphors, and symbols largely related to the tradition of Neoplatonic philosophy in its Christian guise. However, the highlight of Njegoš's creativity is marked by the more predominant influence of classical tragedy, shaped into a kind of an overall "Aeschylean" view of the world order.

Keywords: classics; folk epic; Hellenism; Kosovo myth; Njegoš; tragedization of epic

Introduction

The isolated and rather idiosyncratic poetic opus of Montenegrin Prince-Bishop Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1813–1851) emerged from two clearly separated traditions of thinking and poetizing.

One is indigenous, Serbian, and, more specifically, Montenegrin. It is the tradition of the oral epic, with its well-established linguistic and metrical patterns, inherited mytho-historical apparatus and deep-seated ethics of heroic sacrifice, that was built into the centuries-long struggle for the preservation of national identity under foreign occupation. Such was the poetry of anonymous *gusle*-players, with which Njegoš, like any other Montenegrin of his time, would have been growing up since his early childhood. Originally adapted and artistically

sublimated forms of this tradition would provide an effective means of expression in the major achievements of the poet's mature phase: *The Ray of the Microcosm* (*Luča mikrokozma*, 1845), a Christian-Neoplatonic epic on the origin of pre-existent sin; *The Mountain Wreath* (*Gorski vijenac*, 1847), a dramatic epopee inspired by a tragic episode in the national history—the poet's magnum opus; and, finally, *The False Tsar Stephen the Little* (*Lažni car Šćepan Mali*, 1851), a historical drama about an episode from the recent past of the Montenegrin people.

Another thread of tradition, as easily noticeable in Njegoš's work, is cosmopolitan, European—namely Hellenic (in a supranational sense of the term). It is largely manifest in numerous mythical and historical allusions—an indispensable accompaniment of the grand style. It can also be traced in many elements of the late antique philosophemes and mythologoumena close to Neoplatonism and platonizing Christianity, eclectically combined in a rather peculiar local variant of the Neoplatonic light philosophy (mostly represented by *The Ray of the Microcosm* and the related reflective lyric). Elements of true *classical* provenance are certainly less frequent, but all the more important and organically integrated into the body of Njegoš's poetry. We find them, as a rule, almost exclusively in places where the dramatic tension is about to reach the peak of a genuine tragic expression: here, they serve as the functional catalyst and the main promoter of the tragic potential inherent in the poem (for example, the choruses in *The Mountain Wreath*, apparently Aeschylean in inspiration, are completely "Slavicized" and functionally merged with their native equivalent, the so-called *kola*, Serbian ring dances, assuming the traditional role of the commenting "voice of the people").

Historical Background

It was the famous Battle of Kosovo, along with its far-reaching historical consequences, that made up the foundational narrative of the Serbian folk epic. The fateful *Vidovdan*, St. Vitus's Day (June 15/28, 1389)—when, according to the folk song, "the Serbian Empire collapsed," and both rulers of the warring armies, Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović and Ottoman Sultan Murad I, found death on the battlefield (the latter at the hands of the legendary nobleman, Miloš Obilić)—provided a stable motif complex for many centuries of anonymous singing. Although the actual loss of political independence and the final submission to the Ottoman reign occurred only many decades later (1459), it was the Battle of Kosovo that was destined to become the ideological nucleus of the Serbian national identity, the embodiment of the ethos of "preferring the kingdom of heaven to the earthly one" (Karadžić 1977 [1845]: 186–192 [= nos. 45 and 46]). The advancement of the Turkish invader and the gradual merging of the old Serbian lands into the political body of the newly established Muslim state resulted in the subsequent Islamization of parts of the Serb Orthodox population. The sturdiest resistance to assimilation was offered by the inhabitants of the

hardly accessible mountain area of Upper Zeta, the core of the later Montenegro, which the subsequent folk tradition used to represent as the last refuge of what allegedly remained of the medieval nobility after the defeat in Kosovo, a kind of last stronghold of the Serbian statehood and Orthodoxy (Andrić 1997 [1935]: 9). After extinguishing the last independent dynasty of the local Principality of Zeta, the Crnojevićs, in 1496 (HM 1970: 345–347; 1975: 12 ff., 503 ff.), this unsafe, semi-dependent area was continuously governed by theocratic rulers, the Orthodox bishops, spiritual and political leaders of the nation. From the end of the seventeenth century they started to be hereditarily elected from the members of a prominent Petrović-Njegoš family, originating from the tiny mountain village of Njeguši, near Cetinje. This last period was characterized by increasingly severe confrontations with the neighboring Turks and the presence of ever more numerous local renegades in the bordering villages. In the end, after a series of victorious struggles in the last decades of the eighteenth century, the central and most populated area, the so-called Katunska *nahiye* (“district”), gained a sort of de facto independence. The district’s political and spiritual headquarters were located in Cetinje monastery, the traditional seat of Montenegrin prince-bishops (HM 1975: 232 ff.).

Apart from Islamization, the other major threat to the integrity of this small, patriarchal, and extremely belligerent community, imbued with a spontaneous and unrestrained libertarianism, was its archaic tribal fragmentation. Intolerant of foreign invaders, the proud-spirited Montenegrin highlanders were no less antagonistic toward any kind of centralized administration imposed from above. Political centralization on a more secular basis, as a fundamental prerequisite for the modernization of this highly backward society, was therefore the most urgent political task that the visionary Bishop Petar I Petrović (1748–1830) was to hand over to his heir, his young nephew Radivoje-Rade Tomov Petrović, who was later to succeed him as Petar II Petrović Njegoš. Although failing to repeat the glorious military successes of his great predecessor, Njegoš made the most decisive contribution to the difficult process of political integration. His work culminated in a final crackdown on the divisive tendencies among his highly anarchic and recalcitrant tribesmen, and substantial secularization of the society, in which the young bishop played the role more of a worldly prince than of a traditional spiritual shepherd.

Education and Early Oeuvre

The son of illiterate peasants from Njeguši, young Rade, like any of his peers, grew up on the native folk song, the cult of Vidovdan, and the ethics of the holy “Kosovo vow” of liberation. His first, unrecorded poetic compositions, which he used to sing self-accompanied on *gusle* while tending his father’s flocks on the slopes of Mt. Lovćen, were certainly quite folkloric and “anonymous” by character.

A hasty and discontinuous schooling, which the aged bishop sought to ensure to his 12-year-old successor, barely exceeded the scope of elementary literacy and some spiritual training. The curriculum was based on Church Slavonic and Russian, including the required knowledge of the breviary, psalter, church singing, and calculus, with some Italian added (Dragičević 1948: 186–188). The essential shift in the intellectual maturing of the young man took place only with the appearance of Sima Milutinović Sarajlija (1791–1847), a famous Serbian Romantic poet of the time. Milutinović suddenly found himself in Cetinje (1827), following his ever-restless wanderings throughout the Balkans, up to Russia and central Europe. The unexpected comer was immediately appointed secretary to the old bishop and entrusted with the role of tutor to the young heir. A curious and adventurous nature, active participant in the First Serbian Uprising, hajduk and jailbird of Turkish dungeons, a collector of folk songs and fervent poet of somewhat bizarre and twisted rhymes in a strong nationalist vein (such as a lengthy patriotic epic, *The Serbian Maid* [*Serbijanka*, 1826] and a romantic tragedy *Obilić* [publ. 1837]), Milutinović was certainly a rather unconventional mentor to be assigned to a future bishop. His educational methods, actually devoid of any specified methodical procedure, consisted in free and fairly unsystematic discussions on the widest circle of topics, ranging from Greek mythology and classical poetry to contemporary philosophical teachings, as well as purely practical issues (such as growing potatoes, for example). “Peripatetic” debating in the open air freely alternated with interludes filled with *gusle*-singing or “Spartan” exercises in combat skills and endurance, including wrestling, stone-throwing, shooting a rifle, or running barefoot over stony ground (Nenadović 1929: 124–126). This controversial two-year or more apprenticeship certainly could not have equipped the student with any well-rounded knowledge of any particular subject whatsoever. Still, as a well-trained Latinist and a good connoisseur of both Greek and Latin literature, Milutinović was able to awaken in his pupil a profound and lasting interest in classical antiquity, especially in Greek poetry and philosophy. These subjects would provide the main topics of Njegoš’s extensive and incessant autodidact studies for years to come. Moreover, Milutinović’s own poetic work, especially the implicit poetics of his “Homeric” epic, based on the national subject (*Serbiad* was the characteristic working title of his *Serbian Maid*, treating the topic of the First Serbian Uprising), had an equally important impact on shaping his disciple’s intellectual and artistic preferences.

But above all, Milutinović’s curriculum separated the student from the narrow exclusivity of the homegrown tradition and directed him toward the wider spectrum of European literature, largely identified with its ancient Greek foundations. Nonetheless, Njegoš’s poetry, even at an early stage, showed a great deal of autonomy in relation to its different intertexts. Though leaving the basic nature of folk song, it would never lose some of the essential features of folk diction: a certain hard-edged monolithicity, pointedness, and a distinct lack of “aesthetic” interest. In line with a pithy concentration on conceptual message is a relatively

restrained range of recurring imagery, such as the constant repetition of light–darkness metaphors, favored symbolism of divine spark/ray, and so on. A larger part of these early poems (published in the first collection, entitled *The Hermit of Cetinje* [*Pustinjak cetinjski*], 1834) was represented by the occasional odes composed in various meters (octosyllabics and decasyllabics) and dedicated to contemporary statesmen and crowned heads. The poems naturally abound in frequent allusions to ancient myth, history, and geography. Even so, these references fail to absorb the latent reflectiveness inherent even in such minor compositions. One of the most successful, *A Montenegrin to Almighty God* (*Crnogorac k svemogućemu Bogu*), already gives us a foretaste of the full scope of Njegoš's talent:

Yet I am proud to share with thee,
 However small, some common quality
 Which, if with the radiance of thy will
 Compared, is as a tiny spark
 Of fire that flies up through the dark
 Out from the fiery ocean till
 At last it flies back whence it came.

(vv. 54–62, trans. E.D. Goy)

The new work was largely influenced by the major shift in the author's life circumstances. After the death of the old bishop (1830), the 17-year-old Rade Tomov became the actual sovereign of Montenegro under the name of Petar II Petrović Njegoš. His first diplomatic journey took him to St. Petersburg (1833), where he was supposed to pay homage to the Tsar, traditional patron of the Orthodox Slavs in the territory of the Ottoman Empire. Here the young ruler was formally ordained Metropolitan of Montenegro in the presence of the highest officials of the Russian church and state, as well as Emperor Nicholas I (Džilas 1966: 113–114). Along with its incomparable political significance, the trip to Russia was of utmost cultural importance, as the accompanying donation of the Russian church (or rather secular) authorities included a large contingent of books, some five hundred most carefully selected titles, which encompassed inter alia a comprehensive body of ancient, especially Greek literature in translation into Russian.

The year 1835 saw the completion of the *Svobodiad* (*Svobodijada*, *The Epic of Freedom*, not publ. until 1854), the great historical epic in 10 cantos, dedicated to the victorious struggles against the Turks, the Venetians, and the French over a period of more than a century. The real acme of the first, preparatory period, the *Svobodiad* was clearly modeled on Milutinović's poetics of deliberate "homerizing" the national epic. This can be seen already in the somewhat stilted wording of the title, with its heroic ending (added to the Serbian word *svoboda*, "freedom"), but above all, in some redundancy of mythological "learnedness" which, as with the older poet, still did not completely coalesce with the native element (Flašar 1997: 79).

However, the immanent poetics of the *Svobodiad* points to yet another, more immediate source of inspiration. It is Homer's epic itself, which, as a privileged part of the "Russian books," was granted the foremost position in the personal library of Bishop Rade. The call numbers 1 and 2 were reserved for the volumes of the Russian translation of the *Iliad* by N.I. Gnedich (1829). It is from this famous hexameter version that Njegoš translated the first half of the first book, applying the traditional decasyllabics of the folk song—an experiment that preceded, or rather coincided with, the composition of the *Svobodiad* (c.1834/5). The main body of Njegoš's classical library consisted of a multi-volume edition of Russian prose translations of the most important Greek authors by I.I. Martynov (*Greek Classics Translated by I. M.*, 1823–1829, including the whole of the *Odyssey*, Pindar, Sophocles, Herodotus' *History et al.*), as well as a comprehensive anthology of the *Imitations and Translations from Greek and Latin Poets* (1826) by A.F. Merzlyakov (a diverse selection from Tyrtaeus, Sappho, Aeschylus, Euripides, Vergil, Horace, Ovid *et al.*). It was combined with a large number of individual translations, free adaptations, and some original Greek-inspired poetry by Lomonosov, Derzhavin, Zhukovsky, Lamartine, Hugo, and others. All the copies from this favored group are regularly supplied by Njegoš's *ex libris* and call number label, and characteristically marked with frequent marginal notes (vertical strokes running along the text), certainly made by the poet's own hand. Here we should add several encyclopedic manuals to which the poet owed much of his knowledge of ancient history, literature, and philosophy (J.-J. Barthélemy's *Anacharsis the Younger* [1788, Russ. trans. 1803], Abbé Millot's *Histoire générale* [1772–1783, Russ. trans. 1820], and A. Wahlen's *Nouveau dictionnaire* [1842–1845], cf. Flašar 1997: 22–24, 35–54, 56–67, 253–274).

Later Work

After almost 10 years of poetic stillness, filled with exhaustive, mostly classics-focused self-instruction (as well as much involvement in political and military affairs), Njegoš suddenly produced a series of poems evincing a new maturity and an altered, deeper approach to both classical and native heritage. The turnaround had already been foreshadowed in some of the last poems of the first phase, written in highly stylized decasyllables, which thereby proved to be the constant formal link with the folk song tradition (Vuković 1967; Haymes 1980: 396, 399–400; Butler 1984–1985: 121). For example, the *Faithful Son of Night Singing Praise to Thoughts* (*Vjerni sin noći pjeva pohvalu mislima*) and the *Ode to the Sun Composed in a Moonless Night* (*Oda suncu spjevata noću bez mjeseca*, both from 1837) are characterized by a more expanded, "cosmic" perspective and a kind of a new reflectivity, paving the way for an innovative and more complex treatment of the classics.

The role of the classical component is essentially redefined by its being gradually moved from the level of a simple stylistic device to that of the main organizing

principle of the poem's internal structure. The poetic composition becomes ever more "classical" in its overall spirit and inner content, omitting too overt references to the explicit motifs and topoi of the classical antiquity. Thus, in the sole surviving love poem *A Night More Precious than a Century* (*Noć skuplja vijeka*, unpublished during the poet's lifetime, composed prob. 1844), the basic erotic content is consistently intertextualized—by means of a greatly developed technique of subtle, unspoken allusiveness—with the old mythico-ritual motif of hierogamy and so, in the final analysis, related to the broadest cultural context of the age-old fertility mysteries of the ancient Mediterranean and Middle East (and, indeed, to biblical *Canticum* as well, cf. Lompar 2010: 172–174):

Inheritance ideal, thou art the one
that nurtures forth our immortality,
whereby the soul with heav'n, in tight embrace,
through mystic intercourse in one unites!

[...]

O Moon, thy chariot halt, expand my hours,
if Sun over Inopus could be reined.
Soon as I saw the lovely one, I hugged her,
and, god myself, to th' tabernacle led,
to bring fulfillment to the sacred wish.

(vv. 17–18, 33–36, trans. D.T.)

The poem *Thought* (*Misao*, 1844), in turn, leads us quite directly to the vast thematic field of *The Ray of the Microcosm*, the first of the three masterpieces of the poet's artistic maturity. The introspective *Thought* announces all the basic motifs of Njegoš's biblical epic: man's "thought," "fiery idea," is conceived as a spark of divine light entrapped in a body, once discarded by the Creator as a result of some grievous transgression committed in pre-existence (Javarek 1952: 524). And yet, the poem's narrator remains somewhat indecisive, almost skeptical about the "intimations of immortality," a trait that makes the *Thought* hardly compatible with the nature of the later deeply religious epic (Lompar 2010: 74).

Now, with *The Ray of the Microcosm*, the "classical heritage" is no longer a single expression, idea, or a motif complex, but is rather represented as the whole conceptual "packages," deriving this time from the widest range of traditional philosophoumena and theologoumena of both Greek and Judeo-Christian origin. As extremely diverse and heterogeneous as they are, the constituents are blended together with considerable creative dexterity. The result (completed during the first four weeks of the Quadragesimal fast in 1845 and published in the same year) is a quite exceptional work of poetry, original and distinguished in its genre. Composed of six (stanzaic subdivided) cantos, preceded by an inspired "Dedication to S. Milutinović," the epic is generically entrenched in a steady tradition of the hexaemeral poetry, widespread since ancient times in both Eastern and Western Christianity. It begins with a first-person narrative on the mystical ascent of the

soul, the “ray of the microcosm,” up to the throne of the Most High, which is followed by a visionary third-person re-enactment of the prehistory of its fall, described as the consequence of the pre-existent alliance with the rebel angels of Satan.

As from a wakened flower a drop of dew,
 Or as a small translucent corn of hail
 At the first glance of the warm sun sends forth
 Weak rays to heaven, I mounted too, inflamed
 And blazing with the majesty of light:
 Some quality unknown had lifted me,
 Some weird magnetic power attracts me there.

(I, vv. 103–110, trans. A.S. Rebac)

The extensive literature on *The Ray of the Microcosm*, which has been steadily growing since the end of the nineteenth century (beginning with Lavrov, Rovinskiy, and others), testified, firstly, to the expected impact of Milton’s epic—however limited in scope it proved to be. Njegoš, it is implied, had had the opportunity to read *Paradise Lost* in Russian via a French prose translation by A. Serebrennikov publ. 1780 (Javarek 1952: 516; Flašar 1997: 318; Clark 2004: 103). Thanks to comprehensive research, numerous other indirect and direct sources have come to light. Some go back to the Orphic, (neo-)Platonic, Philonic, Origenist, and Gnostic teachings (Schmaus 1927: 107–114; Rebac 1957: 124–125; Flašar 1966: 81–87), others to medieval, Balkan Bogomil neo-Manichaeism, whose vague remnants might have been preserved in local apocrypha, hexaemera, and visions of the native church tradition, as well as in scarce traces of local Montenegrin legends, folk tales, and songs (Banašević 1930: 48; Rebac 1957: 126–127, 130, 142–143). Even Kabbalah and eighteenth-century Masonic deism came into consideration (Rebac 1957: 109–110; Flašar 1967: 333–336; Aubin 1972: 220; Radulović 2007: 527). The elements of the latter are clearly recognizable in the Neoplatonic-inspired visionary epics of the Russian neoclassicists and famous Freemasons of the time M.M. Kheraskov (*Rossiada*, 1779 and *Vladimir Reborn*, 1785) and S.S. Bobrov (*The Old Night of the Universe, or the Fartravelling Blind*, 1807–1809), which Njegoš possessed (or, as in the case of the latter, *most likely* possessed) in his personal library (Flašar 1997: 157 ff., 229 ff.; Radulović 2007: 539–541). An original trait of Njegoš’s fairly unorthodox approach to the familiar topic is mirrored primarily in a syncretistic and ultimately incongruent amalgamation of the neo-Manichaean light–darkness/soul–body dualism with the basic monism of the Neoplatonic emanatist metaphysics in its Christianizing, Origenist interpretation. Another peculiar trait can be seen in a rather non-traditional image of a prelapsarian Adam, who is understood, in line with Origenist doctrine, as one of the rebellious, although timely repented, angels of Satan’s host. As such, this Adam and his renegade legion were moderately punished with partial oblivion of the

pristine community with God and temporary detention “in the oozy chains of earthly bodies” (VI, v. 43, trans. A.S. Rebac).

The Mountain Wreath

The fact, however, that *Striking the Spark* (*Izvijanje iskre*) was one of the alternate working titles of *The Mountain Wreath* (together with *Izviiskra* or *Izvita iskra*, both variants of *The Rising Spark*) is yet another confirmation of the deep affinity between the two main achievements of Njegoš's creative maturity. With *The Mountain Wreath* (1847) the poet returns to national issues, yet in a way that was completely unknown to the *Svobodiad*. In fact, the far more complex poetic fabric of *The Mountain Wreath* is quite inconceivable without taking into account the 10-year period of gradual and ever more complete adoption and naturalization of the classics by their incorporation with the indigenous linguo-poetic element of folk tradition. With *The Ray of the Microcosm*, in which the process has gone the furthest, the “classical” component, as we have seen, becomes not only the main and indispensable constituent of the poetic composition, but also its overall metaphysical armature, so to speak. Thus, whereas *The Ray* draws the outline of a “Platonic prototype,” or an ideal scenario, of a cosmic drama unfolding in an abstract extra-temporality and extra-spatiality of pre-existence, *The Mountain Wreath* brings us back to concrete, “earthly”—that is, *national*—drama. This drama is placed in an historical time and space, yet in such a way that a dramatic conflict, albeit of local significance, assumes the character of a “cosmic” one. This “cosmic pattern,” deeply “Aeschylean” in its tragic essence, is completely alien to *Svobodiad*.

As for the nature of its genre, *The Mountain Wreath* marks a decisive step forward in the direction of a fundamental *tragedization of the epic*. Consequently, it represents a kind of a transitional form, which scholars have long been at pains to categorize in terms of a literary genre. “Dramatic epic” and “epic drama” were among the most common designations of this semi-dramatic, dialogue-and-monologue poem, loosely divided into scenes of unequal length. They feature vivid “anthropological” tableaux of everyday Montenegrin life and habits, filled with various episodes of church festivities, weddings, games and battles, public mournings of fallen warriors, solemn deliberations of tribal chiefs gathered around the bonfires, shared meals followed by auguring from the shoulder-bones of rams and collective listening to the *gusle*-players. These episodes are separated by occasional appearances of the heroic *kola* (ring dance songs), collectively evoking iconic episodes and figures of the national myth. All these elements are organically connected to one another—rather than with the classical unities of time and place—with a unique, ever-increasing upward sweep, that leads unerringly to a cathartic climax—a kind of “grieving optimism,” deeply tragic at its core.

However, the controversial structure is only a formal counterpart of the tragic tension inherent to this epic drama. *The Mountain Wreath* deals with the

historical or, according to some authors (Rugarac 1899: 157–183), only legendary event from the end of the seventeenth century, related to the final clash between Orthodox Montenegrins and the local converts to Islam, the renegade kinsmen that were seen as the biggest internal threat to the preservation of national identity and political independence (Džilas 1966: 316). The tragic counterpoint largely develops in three separate “voices.” Although ultimately consonant with one another, they actually epitomize three distinct and mutually irreducible ethical concepts.

The first voice is represented by Bishop Danilo, the historical founder of the Petrović-Njegoš dynasty (r.1697–1735), an idealistic, highly spiritual protagonist of the drama, whose exalted position, associated with an almost “Hamlet-esque” intellectuality, enables him to perceive the tragic dimension of the fratricidal battle to come (the so-called extermination of the renegades, *istraga poturica*):

O my dark day! O my black destiny!
 O my wretched Serbian nation snuffed out!
 I have outlived many of your troubles,
 yet I must fight against the worst of all!
 [...]
 When I think of today's council meeting,
 flames of horror flare up deep inside me.
 A brother will slaughter his own brother,
 and the arch-foe, so strong and so evil,
 will destroy e'en the seed within mothers.
 O wretched day, may God's curse be on you!
 when you brought me to the light of this world.
 (vv. 43–46, 79–83, trans. V.D. Mihailovich)

The second voice is best embodied in Vuk Mićunović, one of the most prominent chieftains in the Bishop's entourage, his true dialectical counterpart, a staunch champion of the active principle of heroic struggle, for whom any hesitation means only a harmful delaying of the predestined task:

Don't, my Bishop, if you have faith in God!
 What misfortune has come over you now
 that you do wail like some sad cuckoo-bird
 and drown yourself in our Serbian troubles?
 Is today not a festive occasion
 on which you have gathered Montenegrins
 to cleanse our land of loathsome infidels?
 [...]
 Our struggle won't come to an end until
 we or the Turks are exterminated.

What right to hope has anyone of us
except in God and in our own two hands.
The hope we had was buried forever
in one large tomb at the Kosovo Field.

(vv. 89–95, 131–136,
trans. V.D. Mihailovich)

Finally, the third voice is personified in Abbot Stefan, an aged monk, deprived of eyesight but endowed with eschatological visions. The abbot's long ruminations on an inscrutable economy of divine providence, distinctively styled in the exalted manner clearly reminiscent of *The Ray*, establish the "macrocosmic" layer of the poem, its true "Aeschylean" core:

Suffering is the virtue of the Cross.
Tempered in trials and suffering, the soul
feeds the body with electric fire,
through hope the soul is bonded with Heaven,
as the sun's ray binds droplet with the sun.
What is man? (And it's his fate to be man!)
A small creature deceived oft by the earth,
yet he sees that the earth is not for him.

[...]

Your destiny it is to bear the Cross
of the fierce fight against brothers and foes!
The wreath's heavy, but the fruit is so sweet!
Without death there is no resurrection.
Under a shroud of glory I see you
and our nation's honour resurrected.

[...]

Die in glory, if die indeed you must!

(vv. 2324–2331, 2348–2353, 2356,
trans. V.D. Mihailovich)

The discordant harmony of the three voices creates an internal tension which, as in classical tragedy proper, does not find an ultimate resolution in the formal denouement of the drama. In a characteristic scene from the finale, on hearing the news of the final victory and the heaviest casualties on both sides, the Bishop bursts into tears, while the Abbot, paradoxically, starts laughing. "Stefan's laughter and Danilo's tears at the final completion of the slaughter synthesises the ethical contradictions, but only in Stefan's universal sense" (Goy 1995: 39). It is the sense of the same universal law of providence that likewise manages the overall celestial economy of Greek tragedy itself, with its unfathomable, divinely ordained justice, tragically tolerant of revenge and shedding kinsmen's blood.

Last Writings

The Mountain Wreath ends a long process of the immanent Hellenization of Njegoš's poetic work. After the somewhat epigonic beginnings in the manner of contemporary neo-classicism, the poet gradually rises to the large-scale synthesis of national and classical elements that culminates in the establishment of an entirely new, tragic sensibility in the very middle of the, essentially untragic, epic tradition of the indigenous folk song.

Compared with it, *The False Tsar Stephen the Little* (1851) brings nothing new in this respect. There is really not much controversy about this dramatic composition, not only at the level of the literary genre ("bourgeois drama" or "heroic comedy") and form (common five-act verse play, divided into scenes), but also in terms of the metaphysical assumptions of its dramatic organization. Although actually not free of dramatic tension, *The False Tsar* is not based on a confrontation of providential and temporal, "macro-" and "microcosmic" aspects of a historical situation. Instead it is construed on a modern, "post-tragic," "Euripidean" internal problematization of a single and isolated historical instance seen as such. This instance is relocated outside a transcendental background of a predetermined pattern and retrieved to this-worldly, political, moral, and psychological immanence of a particular historical event. The case under consideration is that of a fake political leader, viewed in the light of his controversial relationships with devoted subjects and opposing political forces; all this raises rather modern issues of the "shared identity" in politics, the right to manipulate in the name of a "higher cause," and so forth (cf. Lompar 2008).

In his short antemortem poems Njegoš will return to both neo-classicism (e.g., *Rome [Rim]*, *Visiting Pompeii [Polazak Pompeja]*, 1851) and "pre-artistic" epic song of a traditional *guslar*-type (*Tower of the Đurišićs [Kula Đurišića]*, *Watchtower of the Aleksićs [Čardak Aleksića]*, 1850). He will thus ultimately abandon the genuine tragic trait of *The Mountain Wreath*—with one exception: a deeply affectionate *Escorting the Ashes of S. Milutinović (Sprovod prahu S. Milutinovića)*, 1848), a philosophical tribute to the memory of his deceased teacher that once more leads us back to both the "divine spark" imagery of *The Ray* and *The Mountain Wreath's* genuinely tragic prospect of the historical destiny of an outstanding individual and the nation.

References

- Andrić, I. 1997 [1935]. "Njegoš kao tragični junak kosovske misli" [Njegoš as a tragic hero of Kosovo's thought]. In *Umetnik i njegovo delo* [The artist and his work], edited by I. Andrić, 9–31. Belgrade: Prosveta.
- Aubin, M. 1972. *Visions historiques et politiques dans l'œuvre poétique de P.P. Njegoš* [Historical and political visions in the poetic work of P.P. Njegoš]. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne.

- Banašević, N. 1930. "Oko Njegoševe Luče mikrokozma" [Concerning *The Ray of the Microcosm* by Njegoš]. *Godišnjak Skopskog filozofskog fakulteta* 1: 39–48.
- Butler, T.J. 1984–1985. "Njegoš's Language." *Zbornik Matice srpske za filologiju i lingvistiku* 27–28: 121–125.
- Clark, R. 2004. "The Dark Side in Milton and Njegoš." *Sydney Studies in Religion* 6.1: 102–119.
- Djilas, M. 1966. *Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop*. Translated by M.B. Petrovich. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Dragičević, R.J. 1948. "Njegoševo školovanje" [Njegoš's education]. *Istorijski Zapisi* 2.3–4: 186–208.
- Flašar, M. 1966. "Izvori Njegoševog poznavanja platoničarskih mitova i poznoantičkih filozofskih teologumena: Iz Njegoševe lektire I" [The sources of Njegoš's knowledge of Platonic myths and discourses about the gods: From Njegoš's Reading I]. *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* 9.2: 65–108.
- Flašar, M. 1967. "Tradicionalne teme Luče i novije vizionarsko i metafizičko pesništvo: Iz Njegoševe lektire II" [Traditional themes of *The Ray of the Microcosm* and modern visionary and metaphysical poetry: From Njegoš's Reading II]. *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* 9.1: 315–362.
- Flašar, M. 1997. *Njegoš i antika* [Njegoš and antiquity]. Podgorica: Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts.
- Goy, E.D. 1995. *The Sabre and the Song: Njegoš, The Mountain Wreath*. Belgrade: Serbian P.E.N. Centre.
- Haymes, E.R. 1980. "Formulaic Density and Bishop Njegoš." *Comparative Literature* 32: 390–401.
- HM 1970. *Istorija Crne Gore* [History of Montenegro], vol. II/2 (group of writers). Titograd: Editorial Board for the History of Montenegro.
- HM. 1975. *Istorija Crne Gore* [History of Montenegro], vol. III (group of writers). Titograd: Editorial Board for the History of Montenegro.
- Javarek, V. 1952. "Petar Petrović Njegoš (1830–1851)." *Slavonic and East European Review* 30.75: 514–530.
- Karadžić, V.S. 1977 [1845]. *Srpske narodne pjesme* [Serbian folk songs], vol. II, edited by S. Galožaža et al. Belgrade: Nolit.
- Lompar, M. 2008. *Njegoš i moderna* [Njegoš and modernism], 2nd rev. ed. Belgrade: Nolit.
- Lompar, M. 2010. *O tragičkom pesniku: Njegoševe pesme* [On tragic poet: Njegoš's poems]. Belgrade: Albatros plus.
- Nenadović, Lj.P. 1929. *O Crnogorcima: Pisma sa Cetinja 1878. godine* [On Montenegrins: Letters from Cetinje in 1878]. Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruka.
- Njegoš, P.P. 1986. *The Mountain Wreath*. Translated by V.D. Mihailovich. Irvine, CA: Charles Schlacks Jr.
- Radulović, N. 2007. "Ezoterični okviri Luče mikrokozma" [Esoteric framework of Luča Mikrokozma]. *Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik* 55.3: 511–543.
- Rebac, A.S. 1957. P.P. Njegoš: *The Ray of the Microcosm*. In H. Lunt (ed.), *Harvard Slavic Studies* 3: 105–149 (intro.), pp. 151–200 (trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ruvarac, I. 1899. *Montenegrina: Prilošci istoriji Crne Gore* [Montenegrina: Contributions to the history of Montenegro]. 2nd ed. Zemun: Printing House J. Puljo.

Schmaus, A. 1927. *Njegoševa Luča Mikrokozma: Prilog proučavanju Njegoševog religioznog pesništva* [The Ray of the Microcosm by Njegoš: A contribution to the study of Njegoš's religious poetry]. Belgrade: Printing House "Jedinstvo."

Vuković, J. 1967. "The Structure of Njegoš's Decasyllabic Verse Compared with the Decasyllabic Verse in Epic Folk Poetry." *Indiana Slavic Studies* 4: 192–208.