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Софија Милорадовић
Андријана Аничкић

Превод на енглески:
Јелена Чворовић
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Summary

Садржај

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Lada Stevanović</i> , Human or Superhuman: the Concept of Hero in Ancient Greek Religion and/in Politics..... | 7 |
| <i>Лада Стевановић</i> , Човек или натчовек: концепт хероја у античкој грчкој религији и/или политици..... | 21 |
| <i>Aleksandra Pavićević</i> , Time With or Without Death. Researching Death in Serbian Ethnology during the Second Half of the 20 th Century..... | 23 |
| <i>Александра Павићевић</i> , Време без смрти. Проучавање смрти у српској етнологији током друге половине 20. века..... | 34 |
| <i>Ljiljana Gavrilović</i> , Museums and Geographies of (National) Power..... | 37 |
| <i>Љиљана Гавриловић</i> , Музеји и географије (националне) моћи..... | 51 |
| <i>Srđan Radović</i> , From Center to Periphery and Vice Versa: The Politics of Toponyms in the Transitional Capital..... | 53 |
| <i>Срђан Радовић</i> , Од центра до периферије, и обратно: политика топонима у транзицијској престоници..... | 73 |
| <i>Milina Ivanović-Barišić</i> , Holiday Text Message Well-wishing..... | 75 |
| <i>Милина Ивановић-Барушић</i> , Празничне SMS честитке..... | 97 |
| <i>Ivan Đorđević</i> , Historical Tradition in Serbian Genre Literature..... | 99 |
| <i>Иван Ђорђевић</i> , Историјска традиција у домаћој жанровској књижевности..... | 114 |
| <i>Marijana Mitrović</i> , Serbia – from Miki and Kupinovo to Europe: Public Performance and the Social Role of Celebrity..... | 117 |
| <i>Маријана Митровић</i> , Србија од Микија и Купиново(м) до Европе: јавни наступи и друштвена улога медијске звезде..... | 131 |
| <i>Sanja Zlatanović</i> , Power of Categorization: Natives and Incomers in South-eastern Kosovo..... | 133 |
| <i>Сања Златановић</i> , Моћ категоризације: староседеоци и досељеници југоисточног Косова..... | 146 |
| <i>Gordana Blagojević</i> , Recent Turkish Migrants in Serbia and the Role of the Serbian-Turkish Friendship Association..... | 149 |
| <i>Гордана Благојевић</i> , Новији турски мигранти у Србији и улога Друштва српско-турског пријатељства..... | 156 |
| <i>Jelena Čvorović</i> , Impact of Paternal Investment Among Women in Sandzak... | 159 |
| <i>Јелена Чворовић</i> , Утицај очинског улагања у кћерке: случај жена у Санцаку..... | 170 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Milica Bakić-Hayden</i> , Two Methods of Contemplation: Yoga and Hesychast Prayer. An Exercise in Comparative Religion..... | 171 |
| <i>Милица Бакић-Хајден</i> , Два метода контемплације: јога и исихастичка молитва. Оглед из упоредне религије..... | 182 |

Прикази

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Иван Ђорђевић</i> , Мирослава Малешевић, <i>Женско</i> | 185 |
| <i>Сања Златановић</i> , Saša Nedeljković, <i>Čast, krv i suze: ogledi iz antropologije etniciteta i nacionalizma</i> | 187 |

Хроника

| | |
|---|-----|
| Предавања одржана у оквиру Трибине Етнографског института САНУ 2008. године..... | 191 |
| <i>Драгана Радојичић</i> , Архивска истраживања и њихов значај за етнологију..... | 191 |
| <i>Љупчо С. Ристески</i> , Теренски рад међу непостојећим људима. Етнографија друштвено маргинализованих група..... | 192 |
| <i>Љиљана Гавриловић</i> , О успоменама, херојима и путовањима. Клод Леви-Строс на терену..... | 192 |
| <i>Мирко Благојевић</i> , Колико има православних верника данас? О социолошким критеријумима религиозности..... | 193 |
| <i>Милина Ивановић-Баришић</i> , Реч на отварању изложбе <i>Зооморфни орнамент у традиционалној култури умадије</i> | 194 |
| <i>Милина Ивановић-Баришић</i> , Реч на отварању изложбе <i>Производи абацијског заната</i> | 195 |

Ivan Đorđević

Ethnographic Institute of the SASA, Belgrade

scedo@eunet.rs

Historical Tradition in Serbian Genre Literature*

This paper discusses two Serbian science-fiction stories with a special emphasis on the motives in their narrative structure; the motive analysis is focused on those motives that represent a transposition of "historical tradition" elements. The key words connecting images appearing in this context are: fear of losing (national) identity and a strategy of resistance towards those, who presumably, want to "take over" the identity. In this sense, a return to "the historical tradition", in the analyzed texts, aims to reassess certain past models indicating at the same time those that have successfully served and endured as historical models in this discourse.

Key words:

genre literature, science-fiction, tradition, national identity, fear

Discussing any kind of literature as a work of art surely overcomes my formal education and also the framework of anthropology, in the context of literary works. However, if we suspend the assumption of autonomy in the sphere of aesthetics, and instead emphasize historical, political and social contexts of production and reception of literary presentations,¹ we arrive in the field potentially interesting to anthropologists. Anthropologists, hence, focus their analysis on writings as a social practice, emphasizing mutual interlink of text and practice, that is, an anthropological inquiry of literature should be focused on mutual connection of written products and broader cultural and social processes.² Namely, the basic idea of this approach is the attempt to establish the ways, means and effects that serve one culture pre-

* This paper is a part of the project 147021: *Anthropological Studies of communication in contemporary Serbia*, financed by the Serbian Ministry of Science and Technological development.

¹ Zoran Milutinović, *Susret na trećem mestu*, Београд 2006, 25.

² Eduardo P. Archetti (ed.), *Exploring the Written. Anthropology and the Multicliplity of Writing*, Introduction, Scandinavian University Press, Oslo 1994, 13.

senting itself to and within itself.³ Along the same lines, I agree with Bahtin, in that the author is a prisoner of the time and society he/she writes in, or more bluntly, in Foucault's terminology, a prisoner of a certain historical discourse, where literary texts must be seen exclusively through this presumption.⁴

In this context, a genre literature is an ideal model for analysis, considering that in this type of creative work, the key is in the way cultural consumers experience a part of cultural communication with creators of cultural products.⁵ Notions like convention, structure or precisely built horizons of expectations, which help to define a genre, imply that a genre work carries a potential for communication, which, in turn, brings into research a real socio-cultural context. A genre, that is, in this context, a literary subculture, is based on certain mutual preferences shared by the author and the consumers, and refers to the narrower framework of subjects which limit the literary work in question. As pointed out by Žikić, when such a personal preference becomes a part of public, i.e., socio-cultural behavior, regardless of its artistic-esthetic aspects – then it also becomes a relevant subject of many disciplines that treat man as a socio-cultural creature.⁶

In other words, if a genre, in a certain way, conditions the reader's interpretation of a text, it is important to focus on how readers identify that genre, and not on possible theoretic classification of the same. Even if a definition of genre through formal categories manages to overcome its own limitations, "the ordinary" consumer will continue to classify a text, mostly within certain "unspoken" conventions⁷ - the consumer will simply "know" whether he/she is reading a horror or science-fiction. In fact, it could be argued that genres exist only in cases when some social group announces and follows the rules constituting these genres.⁸

In this sense, a genre is not to be understood as a fixed category, culturally given once and forever. In addition, a genre is, as well as other segments of popular culture, a form constantly changing and altering, which overcomes purely essentialist attempts to establish it. Even though certain conventions, rules and structure do

³ Z. Milutinović, *Susret na trećem mestu*, 149.

⁴ Марина Симић, *Да ли су антрополози (још увек) књижевници? (кратак преглед антрополошких приступа проблему књижевности и антропологије)*, Зборник Матице српске за књижевност и језик, књ. LIII, свеска 1-3/2005, 549-560.

⁵ On relevance of genre literature in anthropological studies see: Bojan Žikić, *Strah i ludilo: prolegomena za antropološko proučavanje savremene žanr-književnosti*, Etnoantropološki problemi, Nova serija, god. 1, sv. 2, Beograd 2006; Иван Ђорђевић, *Употреба традицијских мотива у фантастичној књижевности*, Гласник Етнографског института САНУ, Београд 2006; Бојан Жикић, *Страх, зло и лудило*, in: Иван Ковачевић, Бојан Жикић, Иван Ђорђевић, *Страх и култура*, Београд 2008, 67-127.

⁶ Б. Жикић, *Страх, зло и лудило...*

⁷ See Daniel Chandler, *An Introduction to Genre Theory*, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/intgenre/intgenre1.html>.

⁸ Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, *Social Semiotics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1988, 7.

exist within a genre, they also incline to constant alterations, with a cumulative effect. This effect allows a genre to be recognizable, but at the same time, to acquire new meanings. These meanings are constructed within this chain of cultural communication by the author's creating the assumption of his/hers "ideal reader". This refers to the author's choice of the subject, but also context related to the readers' ethnic, class, religious or gender affiliation.⁹

Therefore, genre literature is based on a certain "cultural capital", mutual within the communication chain. This primarily refers to the kind of rigidity, immanent to genre, reflected in "unspoken" knowledge of a recipient, who reads/understands the things he/she expects to find. These shared meanings, in fact, represent a basic constituent allowing a genre to be identified as subculture within a given culture, and in this case, within one we usually call popular culture. However, another fact makes things even more interesting for anthropological inquiry: the "rigidity" of the genre form, paradoxically, facilitates constant installation of new meanings, which the recipients incorporate in their conceptual maps, which, on the other hand, is made possible by the reader possessing the basic, pre-given (unspoken) cultural understanding of the given genre. In this way, the transfer of cultural meanings takes place between the author-sender ("a prisoner" of the time and society they live and write in) and the reader-recipient (also "a prisoner" and product of a society, but also constituted within a genre that is, a subculture they belong to). I will try to illustrate this with an example. For instance, Ursula Le Guin, is widely considered as one of the greatest and best writers of science-fiction, i.e. she is consensually considered to be "a genre writer", whose books have been successfully sold around the world. The fact that her numerous books are colored with segments of feminist theory hardly implies that her readers/readers of science fiction are also feminists. Boldly, I'm inclined to assume that the majority of her readers have never even met any classic "feminist" work,¹⁰ and would probably not do so even if they had a chance. Still, this does not diminish the wide readership of Le Guin, or her popularity within the genre. The thing is, the author, in a certain way, firstly legitimized herself as a member of the genre subculture. The readers, finding themselves in a cozy and familiar world of science-fiction, brimful of space crafts and new worlds, tacitly accepted the feminist undertones sent by the author.¹¹ Ursula Le Guin is no "elite" writer, whose works are read by exclusively dedicated and relatively narrow circle of "consumers of higher art" but the author of a pop-culture genre, whose aims are foremost, good sells and broad audience; hence, it becomes clear that sending such potentially subversive, cultural messages aimed at targeted group has a far more importance than, for example, a seminar on gender equality in the factory hall of Industrija Motora Rakovica (a fabric producing car engines in Serbia) outside normal working hours. I dare to claim this type of cultural transfer

⁹ See D. Chandler, *An Introduction...*

¹⁰ At the time when I was reading Le Guin for the first time, I did not have a clue that such a thing as feminism exists at all, which did not prevent me for considering her my favorite author.

¹¹ Interestingly, the works of le Guin provoked a special subgenre of science-fiction, named by theoreticians as "feminist science-fiction".

pushes recipients into certain type of discourse, through communication using known, “rigid”, cliché like forms of a given subculture.

The goal of this paper is a motif-analysis of the two Serbian science-fiction stories, with a special emphasis on those motives that in the narrative structure of the stories present a transposition of elements of “historical tradition”.¹² I refer to the last 20 years or so of the socio-cultural milieu in Serbia, especially so with the process of tradition revival, and the usage of the tradition, where it is understood as a process in which traditional elements are being cut out of their primary context and used afterwards for aims not immanent within.¹³ The usage of the motives will be interpreted in the context of their transformation and re-contextualization with regards to the social reality of the culture where this literature originates.

Future Serbia

The two stories analyzed in this paper belong to the so-called anti-utopia type of science-fiction¹⁴. This is a broad field of literature and the general characteristic is “a vision of dangerous and alienated future societies”.¹⁵ Most of anti-utopias are based on the assumption that there are different kinds of social restrictions, forced upon inhabitants of these “future worlds”. Closely related, and often impossible to separate from anti-utopia is a subtype of science-fiction called post-apocalyptic literature. Post-apocalyptic literature discusses a society after some catastrophe, caused by various factors, earthquakes, epidemics, volcano eruptions or man-made disasters such as nuclear or environmental pollutions. In this case also, the main intention of an author of post-apocalyptic literature is to criticize society, conveying possible disastrous consequences of current social trends. This kind of science-fiction reached the peak of popularity after WW II, at the time of worldwide fear of nuclear war.¹⁶

The story *Равнодушност црвеног сунца* (Indifference of the Red Sun) by Miodrag Milovanović belongs to the classic type of anti-utopian prose. The story is situated in contemporary Belgrade under German rule and dominant cultural influence. The main protagonist is a woman living in this prosperous and technologically well developed but alienated city; in a time machine, she manages to go back to the

¹² On motives in historical tradition in the genre literature see Иван Ђорђевић, *Антрополошка анализа 'традицијских' мотива у домаћој научно-фантастичној књижевности*, unpublished MA thesis, library of Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Belgrade University of Philosophy.

¹³ On the process of tradition revival see Slobodan Naumović, *Upotreba tradicije*, Mirjana Prošić-Dvorniћ (ed.), Kulture u tranziciji, Beograd 1994.

¹⁴ Anti-utopian literature should not be reduced to science-fiction but a large number of science-fiction works certainly belong to this genre.

¹⁵ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, under: dystopia

¹⁶ See Paul Briens, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895-1984*, Kent State University Press, 1987. This large study contains more than 800 references of movies and literature dealing with a possible threat of nuclear catastrophe.

past, in order to change history and prevent the German rule over entire central Europe. The moment she finds appropriate to intervene is neither WW I nor WW II, as one might assume, but the beginning of the 19th century and the first days of the Serbian Rebellion. The woman does not try to influence Karadjordje or some other leader of the rebellion but Sava Tekelija, a well known Serbian intellectual. Her aim is to prevent this Hungarian Serb from attempting to mediate and appeal for the Austrian Emperor's help and military aid, in the liberation wars against the Turks. She succeeds in this task, influencing Tekelija to meet with Karadjordje instead with the Emperor Frantz and afterwards, the history goes back to the forms we know today.

The novel *Jeka* by Zoran Jakšić could not be classified as the classic anti-utopia but more so in the genre of post-apocalyptic prose. This novel constructs a dark world of the future, in ruins after a military misuse of a great power based on sound. Apocalypse has brought about the geographic restructures of the world as we know it today, so instead of Siberia, the Siberian Sea came about, while the Adriatic Sea has dried up completely. Still, humankind has survived, with social order regressed into a type similar to feudalism.¹⁷ The main protagonist in the novel is a Serbian *knez* (a prince) Velibor, a ruler of the fortress-like town of Vuchitrn, who solely has the ability to communicate with a deadly sound powers, in the story named “TheVoices”. The narrative is focused on the war between Serbia (with a capital in Saint Andreja) and so-called new Osmanli, who attempt to steal the knowledge of the Voices from *knez* Velibor, and to use it in their final goal – conquering the world.

The basic level of cultural contextualization in the both stories is connected to location reference – both stories take place in Serbia. In the first story, *Равнодушност црвеног сунца*, the activity is happening both in the present and past times, while *Jeka* addresses some imaginary future time, but with a clear reference to the ethnic identity of the main protagonist. In the first story, however, the location reference is extended by the time period also, as well as by the usage of the prominent individuals from the Serbian history – in this case, it is Sava Tekelija and his role in the first Serbian Rebellion. On the other hand, in the story *Jeka*, the cultural capital is not based on a real or possible historical content but is being contextualized through the war between Serbs and new Osmanli, obviously inevitable even in a scary post-apocalyptic world.

The world constructed by the author in *Равнодушност црвеног сунца* treats Serbia in the late 20th century, and this world is fundamentally different from the reality known to the more “culturally competent” readers. Namely, when the main protagonist, the woman, visits the town of Novi Sad in the beginning of the story, she wants to take a ride by using the public transportation, however, she is not faced with the familiar traffic jams and waiting in lines – instead, she just presses the button with a number of the electro-bus she wants to get on, and immediately

¹⁷ This is common plot in science-fiction. Probably the most known example of human “space civilization” with feudalism is *Dina* by Frank Herbert.

receives an answer from a melodious but synthetic voice: “Zwei Minuten”. “The electro-bus”, needless to say, has arrived precisely on time.

This cozy and obviously functional world, however, does not satisfy the main protagonist- the aim of her trip in the Vojvodina capital is an attempt to “return to the past”, in a time machine, the usual tool in science-fiction.¹⁸ Her “trip” to Novi Sad at the beginning of the 19th century is in fact motivated by the attempt to change the historical chain of events- to eliminate the past domination of the German political and cultural influences in Serbia. After she successfully succeeded in this attempt, she comes back to “her” (our) time, landing in Belgrade she doesn’t know. For her, the city is new and different, but for the general reader, more than a familiar one- the author takes us in a short walk from Kalemegdan Donji Grad to Knez Mihailova street, with familiar images of the dirty docs, noisy street-cars and loaded garbage cans. In this world, as the woman pleasingly realizes, people speak Serbian and use Cyrillic letters. The people she meets are very different than those she has met in the “German” Belgrade. Hence, one of the first images she encountered were some people sitting in front of a little house and doing nothing.

„Снајка – викну јој један од њих, испијајући неко пиће из смеђе флаше – јел’ ти вруће? ’Оћеш да се разладиш?“

“Hey you, little lady – said one of the men sitting and sipping a drink from a brown bottle – are you hot? Wanna cool off some?”

Even an ordinary event, such as going to a bookstore, where the woman attempted to buy a book on Serbian history, so she could learn about the “new” world, tells her about some different customs in Serbia. An encounter with a sales woman is an illustrative example:

„Ова само подиже главу ка њој, ни не покушавајући да сакрије нестрпљење. Ни говора о услужности према купцу на коју је била навикла (...) Питала се како власник књижаре трпи овакво понашање ове девојке. И зашто само она ради у тако великој књижари.“

“[the sales woman] she just raised her head toward the woman, without even trying to conceal impatience. There was not a hint of servility that the woman was accustomed to (...). She was wondering how the owner of the bookstore keeps up with the girl’s behavior. And why is she the only employee in such a big bookstore.”

The contrast between these two worlds, the “Serbian” and “German” Belgrade, is more than obvious. Instead of noiseless electro-buses, there are noisy street-cars, instead of servility and niceness, there are impatience and rudeness. The

¹⁸ Time machines and the motif of traveling through time is one of the most exploited motives in the science-fiction literature. In this case, however, the plot is not centered around potential paradoxes that may appear in this “walk through time”; in this story, the popular gadget is used exclusively as a genre tool, without any elaboration on how the time machine was created or how it the functions.

dichotomy constructed in this way is one of the most frequent and most exploited stereotypes presented through the opposition Serbs: Germans. The basic level of characterization in this context is the German working ethics – “they live to work. That is why they have so much, because they have saved and accumulated wealth for themselves”.¹⁹ This stereotype portrays Germans as “working machines, pedant, dedicated to work and deprived of sense of humor”,²⁰ and lives for more than 100 years. In 1923, Dragiša Vasić argues: “A German always works, he is always in a hurry: he does not waste any time and is serious as a machine... Sometimes he will join the dance... but he dances in the same way he works... He holds his woman as if she were some kind of technical thing, still life... because he is a man made to work, and not a man to play games”.²¹ Similar images, in their purest sense, could be found in the domains of sports, when, for example, on one side, is “a football of knowledge and heart” (Red Star) versus “Latek’s machinery from Moenhengladbah (Borussija)”, that is, “a football of speed and rhythm, power and boldness”.²²

If the Germans are so cold and functional, what about the construction of the other in the pair – “us”, the Serbs. According to the story, the working ethics in Belgrade after her intervention is not at a high level – lazy workers drinking beer, shop assistants are not servile enough or at all... In fact, this is an auto-stereotype, which could be defined in these terms: “we are the lazy people”.²³ But, although we “don’t know how to work”, we are, on the other hand, nicer and more hospitable than the “cold and restrained Germans”, which is illustrated by the example of the cheerful beer-drinkers who do not hesitate to invite a total stranger to share whatever they got to share.

So, what happened in the early 19th century that as a consequence had Germans ruling the entire Central Europe, including Serbia at the end of the 20th century? According to the story, the key event was a diplomatic success of Sava Tekelija, in his quest for help from the Austrian Emperor for the Serbian Rebellion Movement. This is an authentic historical event, and this renowned benefactor truly tried to provide support for the rebellions, not only within Vienna court but also with Napoleon as well.²⁴ However, this initiative failed.

¹⁹ M. Živković, *Nešto između...*, 91.

²⁰ Ibid, 92.

²¹ Andrej Mitrović, *Predgovor: Srbi o Nemcima*, u zbirci *Srbi o Nemcima*, Beograd 1996. , 15. citations from M. Živković, *Nešto između...*, 92.

²² According to Ivan Čolović, *Divlja književnost*, Beograd 1985, 236-237. This is an announcement of a football match between Red Star and Borussia, in October 1977.

²³ See Срђан Радовић, *Глобализација идентитета у закаснелој транзицији: представе о Европи и Србији међу студентима у Београду*, ГЕИ САНУ LV (1), Београд 2007, 54; Also Dragan Popadić, Mikloš Biro, *Autostereotipi i heterostereotipi Srba u Srbiji*, Nova srpska politička misao br. 1-2, Beograd 1999, 45.

²⁴ *Историја српског народа*, Пета књига, други том, Београд 1981, 19. Sava Tekelija is remembered as the first Serbian PhD and great benefactor that helped to found Matica Srpska. In Budapest, based on his legacy, so-called Tekelijanum was founded, as a school for Serbian pupils and a central place for education for young Serbs during the 19th century. As far as politics, Teke-

In the story *Равнодушност црвеног сунца*, the main protagonist manages to overturn historical events by bringing Tekelija and Karadjordje together, which brings about the fall of the Hungarian Serb, since Karadjordje did not want to accept the general Austrian protectorate over Serbia. What are the consequences for the state's future? The main protagonist of the story, the woman, learns about the main events through history books; she comes to a conclusion that the history of Serbian people is not bright, according to the scenario in which Tekelija failed. In a conversation with him, at the end of his life (she visited him with the help of the time machine), she says:

„Нисам ни помишљала да ће Турци тако лако поново прегазити Србију. Много људи погине.“

„И сад је тешко у Србији“, рече он (...)

„Биће још теже“, рече она. „Много ће се ратова водити и много ће Срба изгинути.“

„Хоће ли бар Србљи имати своју државу? Хоће ли се испунити мој сан о Илирском краљевству?“ рече он узбуђено.

„Хоће, али ће та држава мало среће Србима донети. Када сам вам послала поруку, вратила сам се у доба из кога сам пошла да видим шта сам учинила. Србија је опет била пред ратом.“

“I never thought the Turks would conquer Serbia again, so easy. Many people have died.”

“It is a difficult time for Serbia, now”, he says (...).

“It will be even more difficult”, she says. “There will be many wars and many Serbs will be killed.”

“Will the Serbs, at least, have their own state? Will my dreams of The Illyrian Kingdom be fulfilled?” he asked, excited.

“Yes, they will, but that state will bring very little luck to the Serbs. When I sent a message to you, I came back to the time I set off from to see what I have done. Serbia was at the brink of war, again.”

The not-so-bright future of Serbia implies that the decision of the main protagonist to change the history is at least problematic, when it comes to “people's fate”. It is evident that something must have influenced the woman to undertake so risky and uncertain deed.

„Зато што сам живела у будућности за коју сам веровала да је најгора од свих могућих. Цела средња Европа била је под немачком влашћу. Живело се добро, али су сву надарену децу

lija's influence was indirect even though some data show he had had the ambition to be the leader of the future state.

осталих народа одузимали родитељима још као бебе и школовали их по интернатима за Немце. Језици других народа су одумирали. Обичаји такође. Ја сам тек пред крај гимназије сазнала за своје порекло. Сазнала да сам Српкиња.“

“It is because I was living in the future I believed to be the worst of all possible. The entire central Europe was under the German rule. Life was good, but they were taking all the gifted children from their parents, from the rest of the nations, since they were babies and educated them in institutions for Germans. Languages of other people were dying out. Customs too. Only at the end of my high school did I find out about my background. I found out I’m a Serb.”

When it comes to the fate of the state after the 19th century rebellion, she says to Tekelija:

„У свету који сам уништила (...) цар вас је поставио за намесника Србије. А Били сте на челу Србије двадесет девет година, успевајући да вештим дипломатским потезима сачувате мир.“

“In the world I destroyed (...), the Emperor made you a vice-gerent of Serbia. You were the leader for 29 years, managing to keep peace by diplomatic measures.”

The narrative structure of the story offers a crucial dilemma – to chose “good life”, in peace and prosperity but under the alien rule or engage in war and suffer but keep one’s own ethnic identity. Tekelija’s wisdom and diplomacy, supported by Austria, obviously brought the needed stability to Serbia but the final consequence of such politics is vanishing of the Serbian people, in this context related to loosing the mother tongue and customs, as crucial markers of the identity. The reference to “children being taken away” – a creation of new “German janicar”, tells us that there is no difference between the invaders, between a huge and anachronic empire such as Ottomans', and a “developed” civilization such as Germany at the end of the 20th century. According to this narrative, the aim is the same – “soul kidnapping”, loosing the most significant gift left by the ancestors – national identity.

The main protagonist, in this case, is not bothered by the dilemma- even though she is well aware that the fate she is inflicting on “her people” is laden with temptations and troubles, she still does not want to re-turn history in the direction which would result in “the death of the nation”. The usage/appearance of individuals from the historical tradition, such as Sava Tekelija – becomes clear in this context. Because Sava Tekelija, even though he was a great benefactor and a fighter for the “Serbian cause”, was not a “real Serb” – he was raised and educated in an alien world, and prone to influences from outside, and ready to sacrifice the “essence” for material prosperity. Albeit his attentions are truly honest, his essential misunderstanding of his own people and their historical priorities leads to a debacle as the main protagonist understands it- to assimilation into German or any other nation.

In this case, the key word is fear – a fear of loosing the ethnic identity, seen from a perspective of a dominant narrative in the past two decades of the 20th century. This novel searches for answers in the historical tradition of the Serbian nation, presenting potential alternatives and solutions offered by our ancestors, and in this context, offering also a representative model of behavior in the contemporary time.

The future of the Serbian state, as presented in the second analyzed story, is also not bright. The novel *Jeka* presents an image of a post-apocalyptic Serbian empire in a conflict again with Osmanli. The narrative structure, though, is not focused on battles between the armies, but on a personal drama experienced by *knez* Velibor. The military aspect of the plot is solved right at the beginning, the powerful Turkish army effortlessly conquered the city of Vucitrn. The main part of the story relates to the chase of the Ottoman military official Armin after the *knez*, with a goal to take over the powers which allow *knez* Velibor to rule the so-called “Voices”.²⁵

The *knez*’s dilemma in this situation is a difficult one- to use “The Voices” and defeat new Osmanli, but with a considerable risk of breaking the oath and potentially cause new apocalypse, or to accept the defeat of the Serbs but keep the secret of “the lethal weapon”, even if the stake is death.

Velibor of Vucitrn is obviously facing a similar dilemma to the one that torched his “senior colleague”:

Царе Лазо честито колено,
Коме ћеш се приволети царству?
Или волиш царству небескоме,
Или волиш царству земаљскоме?
Ако волиш царству земаљскоме,
Седлај коње, притежи колане!
Витезови сабље припасујте,
Па у Турке јуриш учините:
Сва ће турска изгинути војска!
Ако л’ волиш царству небескоме,
А ти сакрој на Косову цркву,
Не води јој темељ од мермера,
Већ од чисте свиле и скерлета,
Па причести и нареди војску;
Сва ће твоја изгинути војска,

²⁵ Novelty, in this story, beside the apocalyptic vision of the future, is “Voices”. They represent a result of scientific discovery which allows a transfer of human thought in certain sound data. According to the story, these specific sounds- “solitoni”, are placed deep inside the Earth, existing in magma. The apocalypse on Earth was caused by an attempt to use “The Voices” in military purposes, which brought about volcano eruptions, drying of seas and similar catastrophes. Velibor’s power to communicate with “The Voices” is inherited through his family, but with a requirement never to allow “sound powers” to be used as weapon.

Ти ћеш, кнеже, с њоме погинути.²⁶

Emperor Lazar, you who are an honest man,
Which empire will you chose?
Will you chose the Heaven, or
Will you chose a life on this Earth?
If you prefer the empire on this Earth,
Then saddle your horses, and fasten the girths!
Knights, you take out your swords,
And chase the Turks away:
All the Turks will die!
But if you prefer the empire in Heaven,
Then you should build a church in Kosovo,
With foundations made not of marble
But pure silk and scarlet,
Then bless your army and order War;
All of your army will be killed,
And You Emperor, will die too.

This represents a classic traditional pattern that belongs to the Kosovo mythical cycle. The key references for a culturally competent reader are the location – *knez* rules from Vucitrn, a city in Kosovo – and so to speak – the social reference – the social order functioning on the basis of city-fortress. This provides a clear association to the Middle-Age Serbian state. The enemy is the same – the new Osmanli, but with the same characteristics of the “original” enemy. This image of a Turk, presenting him as “a wild, impulsive and fanatic Asian”, who has to be a barbarian if he wants to stay true to his religion, and who “never pretends to be a humanist, he doesn’t even have a notion of humanity, nor is he allowed to have one”,²⁷ could be illustrated with the following example:

„Тела заробљених Радунових људи била су обешена по гондоли заповедничког дирижабла (...) По трупима прибијеним попут трофеја видео је трагове ужасног мучења. На тренутак на кобилици угледа Радунов леш, удова неприродно савијених.“

“The bodies of the captured Radun’s people were hanged all over (...) The bodies, at a display like trophies, showed signs of terrible tortures.

²⁶ *Пропаст царства српскога*, Вук Караџић, *Српске народне пјесме*, II, Нолит, Београд 1969, 186-188.

²⁷ A description of Zivojin Zujovic, cited in O. Milosavljević, *U tradiciji nacionalizma...*, 286. An interesting fact, according to the author, is that the Turks, even though labeled as “eternal enemies” by the Serbs, were not always portrayed as having only negative characteristics. Even when they were labeled as “wild Asiatic clans”, their bravery and military skills were never questioned, or even some degree of tolerance. See: *ibid*, pp. 284-291. This is similar to their representation in the novel *Jeka*- even though the brutality of the new Osmanli is more than obvious, they are portrayed as extraordinary trained and efficient army, while Armin-pasha represents a model of “Eastern wisdom”.

For a moment, he spotted Radun's corpse, his extremities un-naturally detached."

Velibor, on the other hand, is portrayed as a "hero, who fights and dies for his faith".²⁸ His decision is similar to the Lazar's decision, he chooses the empire "for ever and ever". In the novel, the concept of "holiness" is not presented in the classical Christian code- in fact, this aspect is not mentioned at all. Instead, "The Voices" appear; even though they are to a certain extent a human product, they do possess Godly powers, they inhabit eternity, and have powers that largely overcome the understanding of the ordinary mortals. When Velibor refuses to use the power he has over the "Voices", he expresses a deep worship towards the great power of these entities. In addition, "holiness" of the Serbian prince is not under any doubt, considering that even the enemy, Amin-pasha, describes Velibor like this:

„Ти си свети човек Вел'бор пашо, то је сваком видљиво“, рече он.
„Али чак и светост мора да научи да ми се уклања са пута.“

"You are a holly man, *knez* Velibor, that is obvious to everybody", he says. "But even holiness has to learn to get out my way."

This is the point where the true character of the Ottoman soldier reveals completely. What he wants from the Serbian *knez* is not the territory itself but also powers over "Voices".

„Легенда каже да онај ко држи медаљон моћи заповеда над три војводе: белим, црвеним и црним (...) Црни има моћ да ваља читаве планине; онај на чијој се страни бори готово је непобедив. Ко зна име све тројице, тај је господар рата (...) Ти знаш шта желим, зар не? Откриј ми име црног војводе.“

"Legend says that the one who holds a medallion has a power over the three dukes: white, red and black (...) The black duke has a power to move mountains; no one can defeat the one on whose side the black duke is fighting. The one who knows the names of all three dukes, is the lord of the war (...) You know what do I want, right? Reveal the name of the black duke."²⁹

This time also Velibor refuses to break the oath, and tries to commit suicide with his sword. Belial, the black duke, though not summoned, shows up. Commenting on the event, Amin-pasha says:

„Послушај ме, Гласу. Од сада ћеш бити продужетак моје моћи. Послушај ме и изврши, убијај и пустоши. Мој слуго, заједно ћемо покорити свет.“

„У том тренутку, небо се провали. Белиал се смејао.“

²⁸ Dušan Bandić, *Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko*, Beograd 1997, 229.

²⁹ The black duke, known under the name Belial, is the most powerful of all "Voices".

“Listen to me, you the Voice. From now on, you will be an extension of my power. Obey and enact, kill and destroy. My servant, together we will conquer the world. At the same moment, the skies break down, Belial was laughing.”

The supernatural entity, hence, has revealed itself. Apocalypse has started again. Apocalypse caused by greed and desire for an absolute power. This is about a classical Biblical metaphor on Sodom and Gomorra, the destruction of the world which did not respect “the laws of God”. The coming punishment could wipe out the humankind from the face of the Earth. However, this is not a destiny fated for *knez* Velibor, the holly man. He remains untouchable in this replica of the Last Judgment, while lavas erupt and humankind dies in torment, Belial saves him. *Knez* recognizes that even if he dies, he will continue his life in another dimension, among the “Voices”. So, he is rewarded for a martyr's death – an eternal life in the “Heaven’s empire”.³⁰

Velibor’s decision not to use the “Voices” is caused not only by the given oath. Imprisoned by Amin-pasha, he assesses his options:

„Зашто не позовеш Белиала сада? упита се. Једним ударцем збрисао би и мучитеље и жртве. Ватром би наплатио Јеленин, Радунов бол. Шта је то до чега ти је још стало? Али слика легија бола над Европом од претходне ноћи још је била жива.“

“Why don’t you summon Belial now? He asks himself. With this one shot, he would destroy both the tormentor and victims. A fire would be a pay off for Jelena’s and Radun’s pain. What is it that you still care about? But *the image of pain and sorrow over Europe* (my curse) from the last night was still alive.”

In this way, the conflict between *knez* Velibor and Amin-pasha gains a new dimension. It is not the question of a local war, a conflict between two empires. The stake is the destiny of the entire “old continent”! This appears to be a version of the ubiquitous myth about Europe, according to which “Europeans are forgetting that they are indebted mostly to Serbia for their survival and peaceful development, for in Kosovo, Serbia has defended successfully Western Europe from the Turkish invasion.”³¹

This narrative is not just the “Serbian specialty”, but is also very popular among other peoples as well: “For the Austrians, the Slovenians appear as wild horde and they need an imaginary wall for protection. The Slovenians build walls

³⁰ D. Bandić, *Carstvo zemaljsko...*, 230.

³¹ I. Čolović, *Politika simbola*, 45. Slobodan Miloshevic also reminded Europeans of this fact, during a speech on the celebration of 600 years of the Kosovo battle: “Six centuries ago, here in Kosovo, Serbia had defended itself. But Serbia had also defended Europe. Serbia was at Europe’s dam, protecting European culture, religion, society as a whole. That is why today it appears unfair and also un-historical and totally absurd to discuss on Serbian membership in Europe”. *Политика*, 29. Jun 1989. *ibid.* 45.

before the invasion of un-civilized Croats; the Croats take a distance from their neighbors, the wild Serbs; the Serbs think about themselves as the last shield/protectors of Christianity which guards them (but also Europe) from the Islamic invasion. The cultural boundaries and walls are built up and shifted four times – and all justified by the protection of Christianity against the wild horde.”³²

The main lesson of the novel *Jeka* is found in the thoughts of the *knez* Velibor:

„(...) војске нових Османлија јуриле су на крилатим коњима и палиле град за градом. Историја се враћала. Царство српско и османлијско сукобљавали су се поново, јуришали једно на друго, макар и на небу, макар и после апокалипсе, а све то било је истргнуто негде из давнина, као да се прошлост мора враћати опет и опет (...) Исти сукоби понављали су се од памтивека, све док свака разлика између појединих периода не нестане.“

“(...) the army of the new Osmanli ran around on Pegasus and burned city after city. The history repeated itself. The Serbian and the Osman empires were in war again, going after one another, even in skies, even after the apocalypse, and all these were torn out somewhere from the olden times, as if the past had to return over and over again (...). The same conflicts had been reappearing since for ever, until all differences between certain periods disappeared altogether.”

History comes in cycles, hence. Even if it is the 14th century, when the Serbs and Ottomans fought over in Kosovo, or in the 19th century, when the rebellions fought for independence, or in the 20th century or some post-apocalyptic future, a fight for the nation preservation is inevitable. The historical cycle of events warns, that even in times of potential prosperity, there has to be caution about the possible conflicts. The image of the world, in which “all differences between certain periods disappear” in fact points out to an un-historical, mythical image of the nation existence, and where the only possible answer comes out from the “essential” holy story about Kosovo. To survive, and preserve an identity, is made possible only within a framework of this model.

Conclusion

The key words connecting the analyzed images are fear of losing (national) identity and strategy of resistance towards the ones who, presumably, want to “abduct” the identity. In this sense, the return to the “historical tradition” in the analyzed material, aims at assessing certain models offered by the past; which have unquestionable value and at selecting those historical models who have solved suc-

³² Slavoj Žižek, *Uživanje u pokornosti i sluganstvu*, Naša borba, 5.1.1997, cited by M. Živković, *Nešto između...*, 96.

cessfully, in this discourse, a problem of national survival at the “stage of nations”, such as *knez Lazar* or *Karadjordje*.

It is very interesting that almost all narrators emphasize the inevitable sufferings and not so bright future of the Serbs, while at the same time, this alternative is being fully accepted if the national identity is at stake. In this light, the analyzed narratives function as a reflection of a culture, selective or chosen tradition with constant selection and re-election of the precursors.³³ The motives from the “historical tradition”, in this genre re-interpretation, have an exclusive function of re-affirming the dominant public speech from the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990’s, offering desirable models in current socio-political moment- which represents the only correct, “patriotic” road into the “happy past” of the Serbs.³⁴

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Иван Ђорђевић

Историјска традиција у домаћој жанровској књижевности

Кључне речи:

жанровска књижевност,
научна фантастика,
традиција, национални
идентитет, страх

Циљ овог рада јесте мотивска анализа двеју приповедака које припадају корпусу домаће научнофантастичне књижевности, при чему се посебан акценат ставља на оне мотиве који у наративној структури приповедака представљају транспозицију елемената „историјске традиције“. Реферишући на социокултурни миље у Србији у последњих двадесет година, пре свега имам у виду захуктали процес ретрадиционализације, за овај период веома карактеристичан, и – са тим у вези – „употребу традиције“ схваћену као „процес у оквиру кога се елементи традиције исецају из свог основног контекста и користе за остваривање циљева који им по себи нису иманентни“. Употреба наведених мотива биће тумачена у контексту њихове трансформације и реконтекстуализације, у односу на друштвену реалност културе у којој ова књижевност настаје.

У овом раду полазим од претпоставке да је жанровска књижевност заснована на извесном „културном капиталу“, који је заједнички унутар комуникацијског ланца аутор – читалац. То се превасходно односи на ону врсту „крутости“, иманентне жанру, која се одражава у „прећутном“ знању реципијента о томе да чита оно што очекује. Та (по)дељена значења, заправо, представљају основни конституент који омогућава да се жанр идентификује као поткултура у оквиру дате културе, у овом случају – оне коју уобичајено називамо популарном. Оно што, међутим, феномен чини још интересантнијим за антрополошко испитивање јесте чињеница да сама „крутост“ жанровске форме, наизглед парадоксално, омогућава константно учитавање нових значења, која реципијент, с обзиром на базично и априорно (прећутно) културно разумевање које у оквиру жанра поседује, инкорпорира у сопствену концептуалну мапу. На тај начин се врши трансфер културних значења на линији *аутор пошиљалац* ('заробљеник' сопственог времена и продукт друштва у којем пише) – *читалац реципијент* (такође 'заробљеник' и продукт друштва, али и конституисан у оквиру жанра, односно поткултуре којој 'припада').

На основу анализираних грађа може се закључити да кључне речи које повезују представе које се у овом контексту стварају јесу страх од губитка (националног) идентитета и стратегија отпора према ономе ко, претпостављено, тај идентитет жели да „отме“. У том смислу, повратак у „историјску традицију“ има за циљ управо преиспитивање појединих модела које нам прошлост нуди и, уз позивање на њихов несумњиви ауторитет, одабир оних историјских узора који су, у овом дискурсу, проблем опстанка на „позорници нација“ успешно решили. Мотиви из „историјске традиције“, кроз овакву жанровску реинтерпретацију, имају искључиво функцију потврђивања доминантног јавног говора краја осамдесетих и почетка деведесетих година прошлог века, нудећи пожељне моделе за актуелни друштвенополитички тренутак.