

COMPARISON OF CERTAINTIES OF LIFE AND DEATH IN TWO POEMS: “EURYDICE’S ELEGIES” BY PIERRE EMMANUEL AND “ORPHEUS IN THE UNDERWORLD” BY BRANKO MILJKOVIĆ

In the following paper², the author will compare two poets of neo-symbolism, Pierre Emmanuel and Branko Miljković, regarding their differing modes of adaptation to the sphere of subjective meanings. While avoiding the deadly indisputability here in the realm of objects, Emmanuel senses that the infinity of re-definitions can bring him no solace either, for the freedom of the new system of signs is so extensive that it erases all solid boundaries between the subject and his object (or, as herein, Orpheus and his Eurydice). In fact, Emmanuel’s poem makes us unable to truly differentiate between the seeker and the object, because as the poem indicates, Eurydice (i.e. the object) searches for Orpheus (i.e. the subject) with equal futility. Miljković, on the other hand, manages to reconcile the desperately monistic present and the future of cherished subjectivity by believing that any aim of a person’s subjective, emotional self is reachable because of the very fact it is inherent to us, rather than transcendental, as in Emmanuel’s poem.

Keywords: Miljković; Emmanuel; Orpheus; Poiesis; Interpretation

1. Introduction

The similarity between the poem by Pierre Emmanuel “Eurydice’s Elegies” and the poem by Branko Miljković “Orpheus in the Underworld” is exposed within the referential interpreter’s painful awareness of his inability to contend with the bemusement incited by pure poetic mysticism. The sphere of connotation, as in the case of a hermetic poet, appears as a negative counterpart to the “disinterested liking” of Kant. The darkness which imposed its reign over consciousness lends the opportunity for shaping new ideas of *poiesis*, yet also terrifies with its lack of objective. Eurydice and Orpheus are separated by a darkness different from any other kind of barrier. The interpreter who starts defining such reality through the obscurity of irony loses his grip on one of reality’s aspects, that which is touchable and monistic, but he/she also obtains the possibility for many other aspects arising from waywardly beautiful, lively deicide. The sight obtained by means of darkness rep-

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resents the interpretation's advancement into the metaphysics and the myriad of ambitions equally aimed at giving interpretation a sense of totality. Even though infinity is the only serviceable basis of functioning, it appears barely sufficient to both Emmanuel and Miljković who perceive the true support for their *poiesis* in being, which seems as if it were competing with functioning in gaining sovereignty over human existence. The impossibility of answering whether Emmanuel and Miljković favor *jouissance* or *plaisir*, surges from the insolubility and, thus, a lack of comfort in the dichotomy of writing poetry and living it.

2. Discussion

2.1. The poetical quest of Pierre Emmanuel

We begin the comparison of certainty levels in the cataclysm of symbols in the (preserved) fragment from the poem by Pierre Emmanuel "Eurydice's Elegies". The beginning of the fragment: "Where am I/ Where did the overwhelming song of yours summon me with a cry" (Emmanuel 1940: 303) testifies to the poet's helplessness in a chaotic realm in which, judging by the poem's context, it would seem appropriate to apply the ominously neutral term "shapeless" rather than the romantically optimistic and fascinated "boundless". Truth be told, it was Orpheus himself who insisted on irony by turning to death as a medium of erasing all referential boundaries and possibilities for deeds which in a "humane, too humane" world could never be accomplished. The boundaries which enable discernment of forms within the deconstructionist plurality are the same treacherous element which stultifies and negates them, because it indicates the ineffectuality of their metaphysical function opposite the positivistic sphere which is supposed to greet them with new types of symbols.

Metaphysics is no less possessive towards her connotations as is single-minded society towards its principles. Bearing this in mind, Emmanuel replaces the subjects, hoping this alternative sort of pondering might be more likely to promote a discernible answer: it is Eurydice who searches for Orpheus now. Her awe towards the darkness which is the means of her light to be reborn actually stands for the preparation for the metaphysics of metaphysics, a kind of harmony which, in its archetypical significance, is so unsuitable in the underworld, stripped of time and humanity, that Eurydice senses it may as well never come, just as it is impossible for the past to return. Emmanuel's Eurydice in the perpetual "for-the-time-being" sphere is only left with surrendering to passiveness, for she understands that the absence of boundaries within the underworld is but a reverse side of its even more agonizing aspect: boundaries are everywhere.

As the darkness, whose only dogma is that truth cannot be known, denies approach to the interpreter who knows the truth, every alternative explanation is but a trial: the archetypical truth remains untouched all the same

whether we have sought it for centuries or attempted it but once, trivially (as though, in the meantime, history heightened its significance by complacently enlisting symbols in its service, rather than applying to serve the symbols). If myth, within the so-called “our sphere”, out of the epical records and oral traditions known to most, ever had an affirmation of its relevance, that affirmation was the phenomenon of truth. The few of those who had set on existence guided by its light are the incarnation of tragic heroes, even demigods, for the truth’s divinity defies time as well as its contexts, selfish and thus dubious. The truth-hushing positivism for the sake of plurality of impractical accounts stands opposite the subject, awed by the deconstruction’s threatening mystics and represents a new instance of oxymoron in Emmanuel’s poem: the first oxymoron belongs to the interpreter, the other one to the language. The meaning of Eurydice’s pious waiting alludes to uncongenial naming, whose hierarchy would be stable if the objects were familiar; the question “Where” begins and concludes everything. In the anti-humanistic environment, Eurydice’s freedom does not mean an independent selfness, but rather the anarchical wandering from one anti-symbol to another. As the dichotomy between togetherness in this world and separation in another gave the truth the perpetual metaphysical status, it is necessary to foretell its existence by the half-evident tokens in forms of verses, incantations, and soliloquies – each of which appears as an elegy in its ontological purposelessness.

In the ironic *jouissance* of wandering that is not familiar with precise subjects and objects, it is also not easy to determine whether it is the interpreter who commits a transgression against the truth, or whether it is the truth which wrongs the interpreter. Evidently, Emmanuel’s interpreting subject has become caught between two problems: if he becomes motionlessly immersed in the taciturnity and hostile capriciousness of death, he remains at the mercy of Molochian forces of the chthonic and irrational. Whereas no matter how hard he tries to locate the truth – which, as if for spite, in the same moment abandons its hypothetical foundation and also goes searching for its appropriate interpreter – the truth evades him and remains abstract all the same. The only token of the truth that Emmanuel’s Eurydice possesses is its absence, which, on the other hand, can scarcely even be called “fascinating”. In resignation, Eurydice appears to have an ever clearer perception of the truth underneath the shift of her forms: that truth is eternal oblivion (“...night/ fills the space in my chest with your absence”) (Emmanuel 1940: 303). The moment the being becomes stagnant in terms of challenges; her waiting is a competition with her very isolation and redundancy of acting.

Having lost objects of her memory and love, Eurydice still is not left without those very features, which serve her purpose to, in an almost comical, quixotic faith, adjust the Difference – as in terms of Emmanuel’s terminology, “a kind of untamed Nothingness” (Emmanuel 1940: 304) into becoming her unique weapon against static and agoraphobic darkness. The daft neutrality of death in that sense is meant to be vanquished by the emotional solidity of the term “Nothingness”, even if we stripped it of the perhaps not too neces-

sary attribute “wild”, any condition would be playful and relentless by its very opposition to death: then, the unnamed place whose shapelessness would otherwise resonate with a powerless “where?” always anew, commencing in the singing of an nonexistent world (here is shown a metaphorical, Derridean explanation, so to speak, of the fact that we are informed of but a fragment of an entire poem) is poeticized by Eurydice’s deathbed attempt to go into a “chasm where you [Orpheus] crawl in living death to mount upon your death’s top” (Emmanuel 1940: 304). Each reminiscence of materiality which is the only one left in the poststructuralist *tedium vitae* is deemed valuable, be that at the cost of seeming, within the vastness of the undefined, soppy and sentimental as in case of Don Quijote, or logorrheic and meaningless, as in speech of Pinter’s or Beckett’s characters. The road to the new life leads perhaps not as much through pain as through senselessness, and a row of ever baser fabrications. Attributing humane features and feelings to a force is an act of *jouissance* in its most naïve aspect, the irony without whose sanctity a desperate interpreter of the uninterpretable finds no consolation, no matter how much he has secretly smirked upon its misplacement. And that is, after all, unavoidable in the semantic stagnation so destructive that every thought appears senseless and contains both oxymoron and irony: just like Sisyphus, Emmanuel’s Orpheus keeps strolling from one misfortune to another within the labyrinth of treacherous signs, as he climbs up from the chasm just to reach “his death’s top” (Emmanuel 1940: 304).

Eurydice’s eyes are “carved by the Soul” (Emmanuel 1940: 303) as it was the awareness of the absence of truth that instigated the whole cataclysm of the state-to-date. Even the very existence of the truth does not matter, for in the world where semantic depletion and profanity of all functions easily devalue any type of totality, every action has a form of quest, indicating that there is no permanent satisfaction in the totality. Not only Eurydice’s Hades – the entire life is reduced to a nihilistic borough whose member just thinks that he has chosen the stable name for his fate, whereas in fact he has constructed his awareness of its existence upon its latent absence: the truth twinkles underneath the “cover” of deconstruction, but also vanquishes within her elaboration, profaned by the goal given to it by the interpreter. While Eurydice may think of it as everlasting, Orpheus’ cry does not lose any bit of the perishable surrogate form with the role of vanishing from death into “a wild sort of Nothingness” (Emmanuel 1940: 303), which is always on the verge of returning to the symbolic reality of death, as it is not obliged to fascinate the interpreter with Tantalus’ effort of defining security within the realm of insecurity.

Reality overpowers Eurydice’s longing: to Eurydice’s apology “precisely because it serves nothing”, it retorts: what is still left to be opposed to in a world where the phenomenon of purpose is no more precisely because it is being debated about louder than ever? There is even no more need for studying sociology and cultural theory in order to establish that practical, purposeful, and “the only right” objects presented in thousands of commercials mask the desperate necessity to find an alternative objective – and a suggestion that

each new type of teleology is redundant by its very not being unique. Eurydice thus in the end of the fragment expresses the dual nature of the truth whose revelation she awaits. For the subject to keep pace with his comprehension, he needs to possess a temporal consciousness of life, because it is only from that point that it becomes absolute and essential to the awareness. Anamnesis means the sinful extraction from infinity and giving the right of extraction to time, for infinity is irredeemably positivistic towards the consciousness which waits for its (infinity's) mythic epilogue. The moment at least sympathizes with the irony and does not mock it, they both being equally philosophically peripheral. "You have come. But when?/ My night has no history (...) How to dare embark on the delicate routes/ impending upon the precipice(...)/ Never have you come" (Emmanuel 1940: 304).

Relying on the oxymoron of reminiscence without history, Emmanuel's poem grows rich with mysticism, but also loses its subjectivist vivacity, which can only be ground on vengeance upon the cosmic oxymoron by the means of personal referentiality. Until then, hope plots against the one who nurses it: the unfathomed future reserves right to its own manipulative *jouissance* with an introverted alien who no longer differentiates between falsity and truth.

2.2. *The poetical quest of Branko Miljković*

Once lost, referentiality becomes but a rove of common words, hence not meriting the painful and uncertain invocations from the past, which are not only devoid of the sought-after air of truthfulness, but are ever more separated from the truth into the field which Meyer Abrams calls "the referential void above the chasm of latent meanings." To the question of why retort to the perplexity of the system which, despite the interpreter's intention, becomes itself perplexing and insufficient, Miljković gives an unambiguous answer (even if it may be the only concise term in his otherwise fluttering and unintelligible vocabulary): because the truth is contained within man himself. The truth that man reaches for his entire life is held in the progress of his very awareness. The fact that the truth is impossible to reach is no more inconsistent than the fact that the truth is certain: through human involvement, Nothingness becomes the beginning rather than a metaphysical epilogue.

The difference between Emmanuel and Miljković, in short, lies in Miljković's resolute assessment with Heidegger that metaphysics, a time restricted for the time being to experience, although perpetually prepared for the experience, cannot be overcome: those segments of present unjustified by the mythical past will be justified by the mythical future, considering that in cyclical time, which is Miljković's response to history's destructiveness, the two time categories intertwine. Within the same poetics, the historical distance between the events is erased, and a subjective semantic system is established. Miljković's resignation appeared to be creative, for in his revolution of total innovations, it is enough to deconstruct one sole phenomenon – the very resignation. Desire does not belong in the realm of reality, or rather, it is included in the realm as certainly as is the need for reality to be "meta-improved"; even

when a poem abandons its author, its essence is equally reflected in the craving of the poet who “does not turn.” (Miljković 2001: 31) Each memory of the past is the past itself, and it is enough but to turn one’s glance back to the long forsaken city to become a pillar of salt. But the fortunate other side of Miljković’s poetry, at first gloomy and philosophically defiant, is that when we long for authenticity of a poem, no matter how distressingly and with no evidence to support our cause – the poem already belongs to us. As Barthes said of symbols in a similar fashion, the past will take care of itself, and the poet is even not supposed to devise its hypothetical meaning, but to believe firmly, as though new references were already present, that the true form of ashes is the fire, which, indeed, did perish in the objective reality, but also became amenable to contact with our naïve, re-historical *poiesis* of senses and touch, the deserved epilogue of the eternity spent in poststructuralist meditations. Miljković’s Eurydice is completely intuition, which requires her absence, but in his poetry it fails to overcome the audacious authorization of a dream and insight.

“Woe unbound maturing in the fruit” (Miljković 2001: 31), the interpreter puts his trust in the humanistic nature of the latently flowing linearity which is suggested through the persistence of the distinct segments that are close to his subjective, rather than cogitative self. If supported by the force of functionality, apparently no longer being present, turn the infinite, historical aspect of suffering to his advantage; by dispersive into its relative, contextual sub-definitions, suffering claims an ever more intimate, although always somewhat purportedly undisclosed function towards the subject feeding on its fertile mysticism. The suppression of a former life does not imply its death, even though it is essential to feel awe towards a holy barrier between the subject and the past. The instant we ache for anamnesis, rather than pure truth, we have blatantly imposed on ourselves a duty of naming, which only history itself can exercise undisputedly. In a realm parallel to ours, just in the moment of the subject’s deepest resignation, a fortunate epilogue of an ontological drama unfolds, recuperating for the bitter beginning of the subject’s quest for truth that is present in the case of Emmanuel (“my eyes carved by your Soul”) (Emmanuel 1940: 303) as in that of Miljković (“You wander in dream wounded by stars”) (Miljković 2001: 31).

The pain is necessarily permanent since it leaves opportunity for the induction of truth from the Non-Being of metaphysics; the agony sanctifies its poet by alienating and restructuring him through the mysticism of unease and self-imposed ban. The ignorance that confronts us in the realm of objects, the one whose purpose is to reduce the plurality to our own system of senses, is analogous to the mythical exaltation of a child only just getting to know the world; “birth is the only hope,” states Miljković in “Tomb on Lovcen” (Miljković 2001: 18) precisely because of the aura of irreplaceability that the newborn subject, with ignorance as the best means of naming, finds in symbols. If it is allowed in the positivistic exhaustion that “birds rot” and “poisonous rains fall” (Miljković 2001: 31), it is because the perception that is the conclu-

sion of the apparent truth represents a token of the point in time in which death abdicates in favor of life.

A “mimicking” death can only mean a more magical life, the ironic victory of *poiesis* over its destructibility. If in Miljković’s poem “Orpheus in the Underworld” life and death are conjoined, his insisting, or at least his Kierkegaardian compliance with his loss, subsumes a gain on the other side, where his poetical self only waits to be perceived. “Dissolving birds” (Miljković 2001: 31) and “poisonous rains” (Miljković 2001: 31) have the form of a neutral material for contemplating infinity – death is overcome at the same instant when one attempts to poeticize its vastness. Hence Miljković meditates on an oxymoron of timeless, rather than contextual dimensions – the opposed variants of a future of “clouds full of birds and future plants” (Miljković 2001: 31), a portent he uses at the end of his poem “Triptichon for Eurydice”, and it is by this fragment of faith that he makes us wonder whether “Triptichon”, which otherwise appeared at this moment as a touching elegy of an irreversible loss of a beloved one is actually a poem of hope – a hope stronger than death, if death is but a preparation for it. There is an open question as to whom Miljković bears in mind when writing of “the one behind whose back the world came/ into being as an endless plot and a shift in pain” (Miljković 2001: 31). If Miljković’s opening words “Turn not your back” (Miljković 2001: 31) applies to an adventurous reader, is the “one” (Miljković 2001: 31) at the end of the poem the metaphysical life inducer into whom the reader morphs, actually/in fact Orpheus returned to the poem? After all, we are not to forget that, just as Miljković equates death to life for the sake of effectiveness of *poiesis*, he puts the reader and the abstract, intrapoetical hero in the same category: neither of them can trust referential symbols, due to the “shift in pain” (Miljković 2001: 31) of things’ essences, an event where poetical belief does indeed become more creative and independent, but at the same time ceases to appear effortless, straightforward, and naïve.

3. Conclusion

The quest for the poetic self in the cases of Emmanuel and Miljković ultimately depends, then, on whether the route to the appropriate symbolization is projected into the reality of objects, as on Emmanuel’s part, or safely shelved within the being, as Miljković would put it. Emmanuel considers that the only truly evident factor in his poetics is the futility of Eurydice’s or Orpheus’ quest: the more the quest for the true meaning is “prolonged” into the realm of temporal –indeed, the temporality in “Eurydice’s Elegies” is believed to be inevitable, for both the gloomily stagnant monism and pluralism, elusive as our quick-ending life, reminds us of our incapability of escaping the boundaries of physical being – the less sense it appears to have. The superbly inexplicable Fate being the only announcer of objects’ names, the interpreters are left powerless to differentiate between the possession of symbols or the absence thereof.

Unlike the one in Emmanuel's poem, Orpheus as elaborated by Miljković is passive, yet ironically, the quest for meanings appears to progress in his favor just because of that. The only certain action on the interpreter's/ Orpheus' part is "not to turn"; rather, the poet is to act just as the Fate does, relentlessly yet unaware of those actions. Hence, the general difficulty in reading Miljković's poetry: quite often, the syntagms and metaphors seem constructed with absolute, if occasionally seemingly illogical, liberty, making Miljković one of the poets who are simultaneously rich with metaphors and thus amenable to long corresponding studies, and whose poetic vocabulary is almost impossible to read and discern with certainty, precisely due to its "harsh" metaphoric quality. The poetical meaning, eventually, may be contained within the aspect of the poem which belongs to the imaginary unity between the poem and the reader, between Eurydice and Orpheus; if the reader is supposed to believe in it, he necessarily does so by admitting, as Miljković does, that the poet's questing "self" and the Fate which creates its route are the same entity, both equally extracted from the positivistic concept of history and both apparently "blind" to the outcome of their doings.

Appendices:

1. *Orpheus in the Underworld*

Branko Miljkovic

Turn not your back. 'Tis a profound
Secret unraveling behind you. Birds dissolve
High above your head, woe unbound
Maturing in the fruit as rains of poison fall.

You wander in dream wounded by stars. How bright
She follows your trail, yet out of all
Only you may not see her. Oh, as her light
Falls on you may they take her under pall

You will find the gateway with two bleak hounds.
Sleep, 'tis time for evil. Eternal is your bane.
Corruption is in heart. The dead will pronounce
You alive, if they exist. Those are the accounts
Of the one behind whose back the world came
Into being as an endless plot and a shift in pain.

Translated from the Serbian by Nikola M. Djuran

2. *Eurydice's Elegies*

(fragment)
Pierre Emmanuel

... Where am I?
Where has the terrible song of yours summoned me with a cry,
For what winter is the harp of insults
Whose torn strings glitter in the dark wind left?
Bloody are my eyes carved by your Soul; the night
Fills the space within my chest with your absence
And all up to the obstinate triangle where your death is inscripted
My body is being torn apart all the way to the lips of fate
Under the cruel lord's stigma. The shriveling time
Surges within my body which can no longer be defended
By death, but is refuted by a kind of wild Nothingness
Stretching me, a sonorous chord over a chasm
Where you crawl in living death to mount upon
Your death's top. The cover pierced by stars and bullets
The earth (or some rag of memories and blueness
High to the edge of the trench full of darkening night)
Conceals the reddish-yellow silence of the clouds
And the tremendous vapor of blood wherein vanishes
The cry undying that you once bestowed upon me.

You have come
But when? My night has no history
But where to go into the mindless rock
Of which I am a wild mellope and sweat? How to pass over
My blood not to petrify, how to dare embark
On the delicate routes impending upon the precipice
Hindered by the trail of the Shadow leading into the inside
Of the heavy Nothingness where I live breathing heavily
Of love of deceptive scent and of hate? Never
Have you come ...

Translated from the Serbian by Nikola M. Djuran

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ПОРЕЂЕЊЕ ИЗВЕСНОСТИ ЖИВОТА И СМРТИ У ПЕСМАМА „ЕУРИДИКИНЕ ТУЖАЉКЕ“ ПЈЕРА ЕМАНУИЛА И „ОРФЕЈ У ПОДЗЕМЉУ“ БРАНКА МИЉКОВИЋА

Резиме

Аутор рада пореди начине на које Пјер Емануил и Бранко Миљковић прилагођавају своју поетичку свест сфери субјективних алтернатива у односу на површинско значење песме којом желе да трансцендирају стварност. Обојица песника се подударају на плану избегавања уских семиотичких граница актуелног песничког језика и надају се реструктурисању поезије путем покушаја да проникну у поетику као њену мистичну, антидоктринару бит. Монистична идеологија у песмама је представљена као садашњост, нова значењска хијерархија као будућност а у архетипу умрле / изгубљене Еуридике персоналификован је контекст песме путем ког аутор схвата нова значења. Међутим, док Емануил не налази задовољење у анархичном плурализму значења и доживљава превредновање које му доноси неосимболистичка поетика као неподношљиву оригиналност, Миљковић ту слободу поздравља јер управо у њој види слободан простор за пројектовање субјективног виђења стварности, која би била једина важећа стварност у смислу да би се интимно тицала субјективног бића. За оптимистичног Миљковића је свако потенцијално ново песничко значење достижно на основу његове инхерентности свести (која је за Миљковића персонализован еквивалент саме поетике), док Емануил зазира од оригиналности превредноване стварности утолико што је никад не сматра довољно сводивом на субјективно умеће дешифровања.

Кључне речи: Емануил, Миљковић, субјективно, поетика, Еуридика, подземље, трансцендентно.

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