

LITERARY CANON OF CROATIAN RENAISSANCE CULTURE

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Abstract: Croatian Renaissance literary culture did not form its literary in the same way as did the Italians. Therefore, the “canonical order” of sixteenth-century Croatian literary culture is usually associated with the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century synthetic literary history. However, if we have in mind the thesis of Harold Bloom that “canonical writers” are those in whose poetics exhibit “anticanonical elements,” or in other words, that all great writers reading their predecessors face the fear of the impact and enable activities of their own imagination, then we can say – albeit very cautiously – that Croatian Renaissance literary culture has at least a few “canonical authors”: Mavro Vetranović, Petar Zoranić, Petar Hektorović and Marin Držić.

Keywords: Renaissance, canon, Mavro Vetranović, Petar Zoranić, Petar Hektorović, Marin Držić

I. INTRODUCTION

Rudolf Pfeiffer notes that the verb *ἐγκρίνειν* (*engkrinein*) in ancient Greek and Hellenistic culture denotes a list of selected authors, which Quintilian called *poetarum iudices* – which means that even then there existed writers who were role models. In the Modern Age, the latin term *canon* was first used by David Ruhnken in *Historia Critica Oratorum*

Graecorum (1768). By this term, Ruhnken marked the Alexandrian list of most admired ancient Greek rhetoricians (Wyrick, 2004 : 347). Since then, the term in Western literary tradition is largely used to list the most important works. It is evident, therefore, that the term does not come out of the early church’s list of inspired books of the Bible, but rather the term *canon* reflects exemplary works, perfectly balanced and harmonious. Such points indicate philosophical, juridical, and even theological uses of the term. Namely, for Epicureans, *canon* meant a list of logical criteria, for lawyers fundamental principles of ideals, and for the apostle Paul rules of faith – *regula fidei* (Wyrick, 2004 : 348). The literary canon was a kind of compendium of excellence, something that is the *sine qua non* of cultural identity. Its formation comes from the natural human instinct for ordering and homogenization (Kennedy, 2001 : 105).

In the center of the literary-theoretical reflection, the canon comes in the nineteenth century. Poststructuralism, multiculturalism, psychoanalytic, feminist and postcolonial criticism, the new historicism and cultural materialism all offered new insights on the formation of the canon. Then literary theory began warn about the historical variability not only aesthetic value of literature. Also, literary theory began emphasizing that the formation of the canon – a group of literary works that belong to the central importance of the cultural community –

can always be attributed to an academic institution or interest group. Furthermore, there emerged so-called alternative canons, which do not hide their historical, civilizational, cultural, class and gender specificity, and thus deny ambitions to be unique (Biti, 1997 : 170). Michel Foucault has even rejected the notion of the canon, replacing it with the metaphor of library, which sought to avoid the hierarchical connotations.

Relativistic understanding of canon soon met with criticism because it underestimated the complexity of the circumstances which affect the formation of the canon and its role in creating cultural identity. There have been discussions that are in line with the concept of “cultural capital” (Pierre Bourdieu), which take into account the complex sociological reasons for the formation and importance of canon. For example, Dean Kolbas said that canon is not simply a prisoner of the academic ivory castle, but its influence is considerably wider and extends into the realm of cultural production.

II.

Ernst Robert Curtius, in his book *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (1961), lists several testimonials on late medieval literary canon. Walther von Speyer (10th century), for example, had read Vergil, Homer, Marcian, Kapel, Horace, Persia, Juvenus, Boethie, Stacius, Terence and Lucan in school. It was not an accident but a normative choice. In the book *Ars lectoria* (1086) by the French grammarian Emeric, there exists texts that suggest the classification of the authors. First, Christian literature is divided into four groups: *autentica*, *hagiographa*, *communis*, *apocrypha*. The first group includes the canonical books of the Bible, the

second group includes works of the Church Fathers (Ambrozius, Hyeronimus, Augustine and Georgius), the third group includes Bede the Venerable, Sedulius, Prudencius, Arator, and the fourth group includes passion of the martyrs, hagiographies and Origen. Then, there are twenty-three pagan authors graded on a scale derived from metals: gold, silver and pewter. The golden group includes nine authors: Terence, Vergil, Horac, Ovid, Salust, Lucan, Stacius, Juvenus and Perzi. The silver group consists of: Plaut, Enije, Tuli, Varon, Boethie, Donatus, Priscian, Sergi, “Plato Translatius”. The pewter are: Cato, Homer, Maximian, Avijan and Aesop. Konrad von Hirsau (12th century) lists twenty-one authors in this order: Donat, Cato, Aesop, Avian, Sedulius, Juvenus, Prosperus, Aquitaine, Teodule, Arator, Prudencius, Cicero, Salustius, Boethie, Lucan, Horac, Ovid, Juvenal, Homer, Persia, Stacius and Vergil. Eberhard German in his rhetorical-didactic poem *Laborintus* (13th century), includes the following list: Cato, Teodul, Avian, Aesop, Maximian, Stacius, Ovid, Horac, Juvenal, Perzi, Vergil, Lukan, Claudian, Dares, Homer, Sidonius, Macer, Sedulius, Arator, Prudencius, Prosper Aquitane, Martianus Capella, and Boethie. The list of these authors later increases. Thus in Hugo de Trimberga’s *Registrum multorum auctorum* (1280), there is a list of eighty authors (Curtius, 1998 : 54–57).

Pre-Renaissance attitude toward exemplary authors (*auctores*) is clearly visible in Dante’s *Divina commedia*. When entering into Purgatory (4th canto), Dante encounters the poets of antiquity:

Mira colui con quella spada in mano,
 Che vien dinanzi ai tre sì come sire.
 Quelli è Omero poeta sovrano;
 L’altro è Orazio satiro che viene;
 Ovidio è il terzo, e l’ultimo Lucano.

In the Middle Ages, says Curtius, Homer was not much more than a big name. But without him there would be no *Aeneid*; without Odysseus' descent into Hades, there would not be Virgil's trip into another world; without this there would not be *Divina commedia*, and therefore Homer is mentioned, and as the first (Curtius, 1998 : 52). Horace was a representative author for satirical poetry, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* have been Repertorium of mythological stories and Lucan's *Pharsalia (De Bello Civili)* was a source for the study of the Roman civil war. Of course, Dante's pathfinder should be added to these authors: Virgil, who was for late Antiquity, Middle Ages and for Dante, *l'altissimo poeta*. Macrobius testifies about this in *Saturnalia* (I, 16, 12; V, 1, 1), stating that Virgil was versed in all science, theology and rhetoric (Curtius, 1998 : 451–452).

Lists of significant *auctores* were known to Croatian Renaissance literary culture – especially to humanistic section of Croatian Renaissance culture. In 1562, a teacher from Dubrovnik, Didak Pir (Didacus Pyrrhus or Jacobus Flavius), published an extensive book of Latin poems (FLAVII IACOBI | EBORENSIS | CATO MINOR, | SIVE DISTICHA MORALIA | ad Ludimagi | tros Oly | iponenses | ACCESSERE NOVA EPIGRAMATA, | & alia nonnulla eodem Auctore) in Venice. The fifth part, titled *Qui poetae et oratores tum graeci tum latini imitatione digni*, states the following Greek and Latin authors: Homer, Hesiod, Theocritus, Sophocles, Euripides, Pindar, Aristophanes, Herodotus, Thucydides, Isokrates, Xenophon, Plutarch, Vergil, Ovid, Horace, Lucan, Italic, Tibullus, Propertius, Cato, Marcial, Plautus, Terence, Cicero, Salustius, Livi, Tachi, Svetonius, Quintilian and Plinius.¹ Marko Marulić, in the letter to George Šišgorić, mentions the Roman elegists Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid as undisputed champions of the genre (Novaković, 2005 : 77).

One encounters such lists of exemplary authors also in vernacular works. For example, in the catalog of Marulić *Stumačen'ja Kata Vergil, Marcer, Lucan and Ovid* are mentioned (v. 157–162). In the Latin version of *Disticha Moralia*, only Vergil and Lucan are mentioned,² so it is obvious that Marulić compiled his catalog of ancient authors by adding two more: Ovid and Marcer. Marcer is considered the author of the work *De viribus herbarum* – to which Marulić alludes in his catalog. Later, *De viribus herbarum* was attributed to Ode Magdunensis. In addition, Marcer's poem *Ornithogonia* was an important source for the study of birds.³ The introductory catalog in Mavro Vetranović's *Pjesanca Plutonu* (v. 1–77) is especially interesting. In this catalog, there is a list of eighteen names: four scientists (Euclid, Archimedes, Ptolemy and Vitruvius), two artists (Apel and Praxiteles), five mythological creatures (Vulcan, Daedalus, Orpheus, Arion and Pluto), and as a kind of embolism, one turtledove, and six poets. Listed chronologically, they are: Homer, Solomon, Lucan, Ovid, Dante and Petrarch. Although in such a grouping it is hard to imagine some kind of meaning and poetic intention, there is no doubt that Vetranović's catalog reflects the late medieval and Renaissance cultural canon.

III.

Although local “canonical order” appeared in the 16th century – for example in the first prologue of *Tirena* Marin Držić mentioned Džore Držić, Šiško Menčetić and Mavro Vetranović as poets who celebrated Dubrovnik (v. 104–164) – Croatian Renaissance literary culture does not form its literary canon in the same way as did the Italians. Therefore,

the “canonical order” of sixteenth-century Croatian literary culture usually is associated with the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century synthetic literary history. However, if we have in mind the thesis of Harold Bloom that “canonical writers” are those in whose poetics exhibit “anticanonical elements,” or in other words, that all great writers reading their predecessors face the fear of the impact and enable activities from their own imagination (Slabinac, 2006 : 173), then we can say – albeit very cautiously – that Croatian Renaissance literary culture has at least a few “canonical authors.” Let us briefly look at the four noteworthy authors: Mavro Vetranović, Marin Držić, Petar Zoranić and Petar Hektorović.

Among Vetranović’s numerous works – a kind of panorama of Renaissance literary genres – the most glaring example of an “anticanonical poetic” is the poem *Pelegrin*. Although it is written in a manner of *peregrinatio* – so it was often brought into connection with Dante’s *Divina commedia* – in literary studies its generic affiliation is not clearly established. It is often determined as fantastic-allegorical-philosophical poem with autobiographical elements.⁴ Because the poem consists of different and various thematic elements – grotesque-comic elements, fantasy, pastoral and mythological elements, motifs from medieval literary culture – we can say that it is written in the manner of certain *summa poetica* (Tomasović, 1978 : 104). All these motifs, however, are structured incoherently and illogically, therefore Zoran Kravar claimed that Vetranović gave up the rational language of allegory and wrote a piece based on subjective and irrational meaning (Kravar, 1980–81 : 320).

In the manner of *peregrinatio*, Petar Zoranić’s *Planine* and Petra Hektorović’s *Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje* were written. *Planine* (1539, published

1569) is the first larger prose work of Croatian Renaissance literature. In literary historiography, this work is usually generically defined as the first Croatian novel. There are also frequent descriptive generic determinants: pastoral-allegorical novel, autobiographical novel, moralistic novel, love novel etc. *Planine* is a strange combination of various literary models and conventions. Indubitably, there are reminiscences of Jacopo Sannazaro’s *Arcadia*, but only as an external incentive. The work is marked by numerous episodes in which there are reminiscences of many canonical authors (Ovid, Virgil, Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio).

Similarly, the same can be said for Petar Hektorović’s *Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje*. Older literary historiography, *Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje* was determined as *ecloga pescatoria*, but later scholars point out that *Ribanje* in the conventional sense is neither *ecloga pescatoria* nor poetic epistles and travel writing.⁵ In recent literature, it is emphasized that *Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje* is some kind of generic hybrid.⁶

Works of Marin Držić are also generically difficult to determine. The paradigmatic example is *Grižula* or *Plakir*, written both verse and prose. This work is often identified as a pastoral comedy – contamination of two “pure” genres: comedy and pastoral. However, it is a much more complex work, a sort of combination of classical eclogue, medieval farce, mythological stories, comedy, and pastoral (Košuta, 1961 : 67–121).

So, for all four aforementioned works (*Pelegrin*, *Planine*, *Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje*, *Grižula*) we can say that they were formed as a result of creative and not mechanical imitation of canonical works. Mavro Vetranović, Petar Zoranić, Petar Hektorović and Marin Držić used a variety of models and

sources, assimilating and incorporating them into their works and so they created new “canonical works.”

IV.

Croatian Renaissance literary culture had no literary canon as had the Italian culture of *cinquecento*, which is vernacular poetry legitimized by exemplary authors from 14th century: three Tuscans (Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio).⁷ So, it is inappropriate to talk about some of the Croatian Renaissance poets as canonical writers in terms of exemplary authors (*auctor*). But, if one considers the relationship of writers like Mavro Vetranović, Petar Zoranić, Petar Hektorović and Marin Držić in the late medieval and Renaissance canon, the it can be seen in a different light. Namely – what has already been said – Harold Bloom in his book *The Western Canon*, proposed that the “canonical writers” are actually those in whose poetics exhibit “anticanonical” elements. Therefore, Bloom developed the notion of poetics of conflict – declaring that the aesthetic and agonistic is one. Inventive writers know where they can borrow some elements and skillfully change them. The basic determinants of such poetics are intentional intertextuality, strangeness, oddness etc.

There is no doubt that the Western canon was very well known to Croatian Renaissance poets, but their relationship to the canon was often twofold: they both accepted it and changed it. Thus they built their “anticanonical” poetics. In other words, although the works of Mavro Vetranović, Petar Zoranić, Petar Hektorović and Marin Držić encounter many reminiscences of canonized authors, there are no clear generical imitation. Moreover, their works “have complex and ambivalent relationship within the context of its creation” (D. LaCapra).

Choosing a particular topos from the Western canon – sort of a *thesaurus* – and transforming them according to their own context, Croatian Renaissance poets created autonomous works. At the same time, they avoid lifeless memory fixation and pointless repetition. So they “suggested” that there is a kind of memory that is not only reminiscence but also tracing. This kind of memory to the Western culture is known as the Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis* and the Augustinian doctrine of *memoria*, which reveals that in man, there exist an *a priori* principle of expectations and searching. So, it is a memory that is not only a remembrance, but also it can be new and perhaps unexpected. It is – inquiring memory.

ENDNOTES

- [1] Four years after was published new version: FLAVII | IACOBI EBORENSIS | CATO MINOR, | SIVE DISTICHA MORALIA | Ad Ludimagistros Olysiptonenses. | ACCESSERE EPIGRAMMATA, | & alia nonnulla eodem auctore, quae | sequens pagella indicabit. | OPVS PIVM, ET ERVDIENDIS | pueris adprime necessarium. | Psal. 33. | Uenite filij, audite me, timorem Domini docebo uos. | VENETIIS, MDXCVI. | Apud Felicem Valgrisium. Both editions described Đuro Körbler, “Život i rad humanista Didaka Portugalca, napose u Dubrovniku” in *Rad JAZU*, Zagreb, 1917, vol. 216, pp.1–169.
- [2] Telluris si forte velis cognoscere cultus, Vergiliu legito and Si romana cupis et punica no scere bella, Lucanum quaeras, qui Martis proelia dicet (Maixner, 1885 : 93).
- [3] Although catalog is some kind of poetic figure, and at first glance may seem that does not reveal real

- erudition of the author, research has shown that they were a place where poets, by changing some of their motives, often express their own opinion, their own poetic conception (Kyriakidis, 2002 : 212). This is evident in Marulić's catalog in *Stumačen'ju Kata* because he opposes his own work and his own views about the function of literature to ancient authors: *ako ć' razum prijat, ne budi ti muka / dobro živit i stat, sliši moga nauka* (v. 163–164) (Fališevac, 2001 : 328).
- [4] Milorad Medini, "Vetranić's Pelegrin, ein allegorisches Epos der ragusanischer Literatur des XVI. Jahrhunderts", in *Archiv für slawische Philologie*, Berlin, 1895, vol. XVII, pp. 505–544; Marijan Stojković, "Mavro Vetranić, savremeni satirički pjesnik" in *Nastavni vjesnik*, Zagreb, 1916, vol. XXV, pp. 136–148; Nikica Kolumbić, "Vetranovićeve maniristička faza" in *Dometi*, Rijeka, 1978, vol. XI, pp. 15–27; Josip Vončina, "Domaći književni odjeci u Vetranovićeve Piligrinu" in *Umjetnost riječi*, Zagreb, 1979, vol. XXIII, pp. 103–128; Zoran Kravar, "Emblematika Vetranovićeve Pelegrina" in *Filologija*, Zagreb, 1980–81, vol X, pp. 315–324; Ivo Mardešić, "Putovanje kao arhetipska slika za introspekciju / Vetranovićeve Pelegrin i Bunyanov The Pilgrim's Progress" in *Radovi Filozofskog fakulteta u Zadru*, Zadar, 1983, vol XII–XIII, pp. 155–162; Dunja Fališevac, "Elementi grotesknog i fantastičnog u Vetranovićeve Pelegrinu" in *Mogućnosti*, Split, 1988, vol. XXXVI, pp. 161–172; Antun Pavešković, "Pelegrin Mavra Vetranovića" in *Forum*, Zagreb, 1999, vol. LXXI, pp. 645–664; Pavao Pavličić, "Čitanje Vetranovićeve Pelegrina I" in *Forum*, Zagreb, 2002, vol. XXXI, pp. 792–823; Pavao Pavličić, "Čitanje Vetranovićeve Pelegrina II" in *Forum*, Zagreb, 2002, vol. XXXI, pp. 1398–1423; Pavao Pavličić, "Zabrane u motivacijskom sustavu Vetranovićeve Pelegrina" in *Dani hvarškoga kazališta*, Zagreb – Split: HAZU, 2007, pp. 5–18; Leo Rafolt, "Čovjek, biljka, životinja: logika slučaja i koncepti groteske i nakaznosti u Vetranovićeve alegorijsko-peregrinacijskom epu" in *Drugo lice drugosti*, Zagreb: Disput, 2009, pp. 159–195; Dolores Grmača, *Alegorija putovanja u hrvatskoj renesansnoj književnosti*, doctoral thesis, Philosophical Faculty, Zagreb, 2010, pp. 357–452.
- [5] Marin Franičević, *Čakavski pjesnici renesanse*, Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1969, pp. 121–182 and "Poetika Petra Hektorovića" in *Zbornik radova o Petru Hektoroviću*, ed Jakša Ravlić, Zagreb, 1970, pp. 15–24; Josip Torbarina, "Hektorovićevo Ribanje u kontekstu evropske tradicije", *ibid*, pp. 200–222; Pavao Pavličić, "Kojoj književnoj vrsti pripada Hektorovićevo Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje?" in *Poetika manirizma*, Zagreb: August Cesarec, 1988, pp. 192–216.
- [6] Tomislav Bogdan, "Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje" in *Leksikon hrvatske književnosti – Djela*, ed Dunja Detoni-Dujmić, Dunja Fališevac, Ana Lederer, Tea Benčić-Rimay, Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2008, pp. 766–768.
- [7] According to Ernst Robert Curtius, the reason for the formation of the canon in the Italian Cinquecento derives from the appearance of poetry in a vernacular language that is supposed to be legitimized by exemplary authors. Besides, in Italy there was no common literary language (Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*). Therefore, Pietro Bembo set up Italian linguistic theory so that it would be normative for poetry in the vernacular language. So, three Tuscans of 14th century (Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio) were raised on the model. Still, says Curtius, there is no closed, "classic," system of Italian literature. Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto and Tasso are great writers that have no common relation to antiquity (Curtius, 1998 : 271).

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