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The Racin Essays – A Key Phase in the National Awakening

Abstract: Kosta Solev Racin (Коста Солев Рацин) is indeed a timeless impetus, since he is received both as symptom and symbol of the most crucially defining phase in the evolution of macedonian national awakening. Racin’s journalistic and essayistic stand as the token representative of the scientific essay of its time. In this particular article, my own interests are solely focused on the three essays on the Bogomils, written and published in the period between 1939 and 1940, due to various occasions, as well as the articles “Towards a Clearer Understanding of Our Past” and “The Development and the Meaning of a New Kind of Literature of Ours”, which bears the aesthetic and literary-historical attributes of a literary manifesto.

Key words: *scientific essay, recontextualization, re-mythologizing, national consciousness, macedonian national awakening*

The future researchers most probably are left with only a handful of opportunities to discover something essentially new about his tragically interrupted personal history and his character as a creator, who as such, represent **the initial chapter in the development of the contemporary Macedonian national culture**. However, this does not suggest that the Racin topic cannot serve any new interpretations (Mitrev (Митрев), 1987: 110; my bolded), which in turn stands justified by recent readings on the topic. Racin is indeed a timeless impetus, since he is received both as *symptom and symbol of the most crucially defining phase in the evolution of our national awakening* (Mitrev, 1987: 110).

Racin's journalistic and essayistic input was created in the spirit of an *accountability to one's people* (Mitrev, 1987: 111). In my own understanding, it stands as the token representative of **the scientific essay** of its time, whereas from today's perspective it can be seen as *an equal partner to the serious scientific work* (Stalev (Сталев), 2003: 125). Since the essay form, as a reflection, a stance, an argumentation of a given thesis, is in fact particular to each rational being, and perhaps here lies the reason why Racin too finds it so close to his own sentiments. Proof for this is also the number, of little over twenty texts scattered throughout the then Yugoslav publications, and the manuscripts, left as a part of his unpublished

legacy. However, in this particular article, my own interests are solely focused on the three essays on the Bogomils, written and published in the period between 1939 and 1940, due to various occasions¹, as well as the articles "Towards a Clearer Understanding of Our Past" (in the Macedonian original, *За поправилно сфаќање на нашето минато*)², and "The

¹ "The Bogomils of Dragoviti" (in the Macedonian original, *Драговитските богомили*), an essay penned out between 1938 and 1940, which up until 1948 remains in manuscript format when published in an edited edition by Blazhe Koneski (Блаже Конески). The Macedonian text "The Bogomils" (*Богомилите*), copied on a manual duplicating machine and disseminated after the publishing of *White Dawns* (in the Macedonian original, *Бели мугри*), in the last month of 1939 and the beginning of 1940, is an essay which comes to us through Gjorgji Shoptrajanov's (Ѓорѓи Шоптрајанов) (announcement in the literary magazine *Makedonski jazik* (*Македонски јазик*), Year I, Volume 8, 9; Year II, Volumes 1, 2, 3). The third one, "The Rural Movement of the Bogomils in the Middle Ages" (in the Macedonian original, *Селското движење на богомилите во средниот век*), was published originally in *Narodna čitanka iz nauke i književnosti* (*Народна читанка из науке и књижевности*, (Сељачки покрет Богомила у средњем веку. Belgrade: 1939, No. 7, 20-24), and then in the newspaper *Naša reč* (*Наша реч*) (Skopje: 1940, II, No. 16-17)).

² The article "Towards a Clearer Understanding of Our Past" (originally published under the title *За правилније схватање наше прошлости*) is published under Racin's pseudonym N(even) P(ejko) in the periodical *Kultura* (Zagreb: 15 novembar 1937, god. II, br. 7, 1).

Development and the Meaning of a New Kind of Literature of Ours” (in the Macedonian original, *Развитокот и значењето на една нова наша книжевност*)³, which bears the aesthetic and literary-historical attributes of a literary manifesto (Drugovac (Друговац), 1990: 1983). These are writings that point out his dialectic stance which in turn continuously reminds us, while also warning us that *a national consciousness is vitalized through a coming to terms with the grand events of one’s own past* (Mitrev, 1987: 112). Henceforth, Racin bases his own work on the idea of continuing the unfinished work left behind by our reformers (Mitrev, 1987: 110), thus, *the work started by Pejčinović (Пејчиновиќ), Miladinovci (Миладиновци), and Žinzifov (Жинзифов), once sidetracked by the historical boundaries of the times, will now be restored to its matrix, and thus find its worthy disciples* (Racin (Рацин), 1987: 169), especially when the forward-thinking youth in the Vardar Region, as he himself coined it, *at last*

³ This article by Racin, “The Development and the Meaning of a New Kind of Literature of Ours” (in the original publication under the title *Развиток и значај једне нове наше књижевности*), was published for the first time in the periodical *Radnički tjednik (list za socijalna i ekonomska pitanja)* (Zagreb: 25 listopad 1940, god. I, br. 23, 5-6). It also bears a manuscript version, which translated and edited into Macedonian by Gjorgji Miloshev (Ѓорѓи Милошев) was published by the magazine *Idnina (Иднина, Скопје: 1950, год. II, бр.4)*.

has found its own way, and must tread carefully, awoken to the dangerous sidetracking which may befall upon it (Racin, 1987: 102).

It seems that we are given an essay, always when the I-researcher and the I-researched subject are brought into a state of balance. The formula is rather simple: there is always an equals sign between the knower and the knowing. Even so, when the equalizing becomes complete, the knowing does not end there; it surpasses the borders, entering a cyclical motion which once again enters the consciousness of that I which does the knowing, points out Tatjana B. Eftimoska (2011: 9-10). The reader of the essay pays witness to a rather curious act of the author’s self-knowing, of his auto-referential exploration of the undisclosed spaces of his own I. It is an act which, again paradoxically speaking, is neither solipsistic nor self-fulfilling, and thus it stands as a kind of phenomenon for the reader.

But what are those spaces for Racin’s I? Those are the spaces which come to a self shaped in the days when our forward-thinking intelligentsia, particularly the student population, beings to articulate, ever so openly, *the question about the development of a Macedonian national culture, about the strengthening of the Macedonian consciousness with the masses* (Koneski, 1987: 95).

For Racin, the texts on the Bogomils validate and expand the philosophical direction,

which moves from an avant-garde cosmopolitanism towards a revolutionary nationalism, expressed through a heightened expressionist enthusiasm. This enthusiasm comes to pass through his vocal affirmation of Bogomilism, which bears the serious ramifications of a sect as expressed in these three essays. Racin has no intention of writing systematically on his chosen topic. He allows his thoughts to roam free, through digressions and contradictions⁴, as an integral part of the expressionist sensibility. Also, quite leisurely, he leaves out the usage of any referential literature in the essays. He, even when referencing specific scientific works and opinions, of some of his contemporaries, does this more so to underline the aesthetic-philosophical effect rather than to provide his texts with a scientific intonation. Hence, the scientific polemic becomes a lyrically exulted sermon. These intentional or even unintentional “falsifications” most likely come as a result of the liturgical (biblical) un-

⁴ More on the topic of the said digressions, and particularly on the contradictions which the three essays are built on, see the MA thesis of Metodij Zlatanov (Методиј Златанов), entitled *Racin and the Bogomils (a Reading of Traditions)* (in the Macedonian original, *Рацин и богомилите (исчитување на традициите)*), defended at the Faculty of Philology “Blazhe Koneski”, in March 10th, 2006, which has also been made available in book format, published under the same title the following year (Skopje: TRI, 2007).

familiarity on the behalf of the author. Still, we are more likely prone to believe that in Racin’s case, they are more akin to a certain kind of a need to fine-tune the dualistic teachings of the Bogomils to the matrix of the Marxist ideology, and its dialectic materialism. Thus, in the third essay, published even under a pseudonym, a more expressed usage of general terms from the political economy of Marxism can be traced, installed in the social and cultural processes of the Middle Ages. In it, Racin himself *recontextualizes the reading of Bogomilism along the lines of the anti-nationalist, federalist social constellations of the Yugoslav pluralist concept* (Zlatanov (Златанов), 2006: 100). On the other hand, the essays on the Bogomils contain a number of elements which are exceptionally important to the Macedonian iconography, since, as Goran Kalogjera (Goran Kalodžera) points out, *Racin, through the narrative about the Bogomils, presents a number of data which are of exceptional value to the Macedonian livelihood on this ground dating back to the time of their coming on the Balkans* (2009: 103).

On the other hand, when reading the said essays from a present-day perspective we are quite prone to recognize in his intentional or even in his unintentional “falsifications”, also a certain intertextuality, since these essays, as new texts, realize a committed continuity of the literary tradition. The pseudoscientific tone

allows for the erasing of the borders between the factographic and the imaginary, while the usage of scholarly language, i.e., writing in an erudite style, supports the thesis that we can even recognize in it Borges's technique of "estrangement" of the literary reality. Therefore, these essays by Racin can be read also as inter-medial works, i.e., hybrids, whence instead of description as the traditional category of prose, the commentary form gets developed, even a kind of a dialogue with the reader. According to Mikhail Epstein, this specific manifestation of subjectivity is what makes the essay stand out as a different genre, separate from the autobiography, the journal and the sermon; it is its *differentia specifica*. If the autobiographic-memoaristic prose discloses *the I* in the past, the journal – the fragmented *I* in the present, in the midst of its presence as a process, whereas the sermon – the coveted, potential *I* – *the I* in the essay *is so far removed from the true self that it may appear most definitely as a Non-I, as all in the world...* (Epstein, 1997: 14; my bolded).

Henceforth, the following key question emerges, one in regards to Racin's recontextualization of the Bogomilism, namely if the said recontextualization also entails a re-mythologizing undertaking or rather, an ideological travesty of Bogomilism itself?

That which acted as the strongest impetus for Racin to address Bogomilism's religious-philosophical concept is in fact the present du-

alism, as the common denominator between the two ideologies, the Bogomil Movement's and the Marxist Movement's. The High Modernism of the late 1930s transforms itself into a revolutionary modernism. In this process, the de-mythologizing, whence myth is reduced to a blasphemy, accepts the ideological travesty. In fact, the whole of culture, globally speaking, but also particularly segmented, develops organically from the previous culture/s, and as such always remains an unfinished narrative. *For today the gain from the national romanticism of the 19th century about cultures as monoliths has been surpassed. Instead, cultures are more so then ever understood as dynamic and receptive ways of constructed meanings* (Mesić, 2007: 167). Thus, Racin too, in the name of his own culture, places his selfless trust in Bogomilism, oftentimes following incongruous arguments, but only in domains which justify or support his Marxist stance. In these essays, he attempts a parallel between the martyrdom ethos of Jesus Christ and the one of the Bogomil priests, especially the one of Father Bogomil, which in turn allows him the opportunity to construct an ideal character of a revolutionary and a martyr, an ideal character of a true fighter for justice as the one *naked man barbarian genius* from "The Manifest of Zenithism", or the one from his poem "The Fireworks" (originally published under the title *Bampomem*).

Namely, each religious dualism makes an attempt to answer the following question: Why does evil exist? Bogomilism's dualism contains an internal paradox. It advocates for an equality for all people, both ethnically and socially speaking, which as an idea stands compatible to Racin's politically engaged outlook on the world, but as such, it conceives of a dualist anthropology according to which man's being is split into two antagonistic qualities – the spiritual and the material one, that is to say, good and evil. On the other hand, Bogomilism advocates an anthropological passivity, which unquestioningly gives birth to a pessimistic outlook on the world at large and on man's presence in that world. However, 'Racin's Bogomils', as advocates of social activism, defy those Bogomils who viewed life as an agony and as a senseless suffering.

That, which Racin finds particularly close to his own sentiment, is Bogomilism's love of man's freedom which in turn resembles an existentialist cry. Bogomilism's social struggle which is realized as the toppling down of the oppressive system of rule, disregarding whether this expression refers to feudalism or the church, with one common goal – enforce change or establish an ideal system of rule. This is exactly what had drawn Racin in, for he too yearned for an ideal order. For the Bogomils, this kind of a change is in fact an internal transformation inside man himself, and not some ni-

hilistic, religiously-philosophical or social coup d'état. Hence, Racin, following the precepts of modernism, accepts the ideal about man's final release, as his own existential and social determinant. *Two essences: the national and the international one intertwine inside Racin's future world and strengthen its unity* (Mitrev, 1987: 114).

The three essays on the Bogomils by Koco Racin are far more prone to be understood as a cultural meditation in three acts, rather than as a coherent scientific work in the field of social history or the philosophy of history (Zlatanov, 2006: 119). They indeed point to and reflect on more so the author's own sensibilities, the philosophical viewpoints of his time, rather than present a serious scientific document on the appearance and the development of this Middle Ages's phenomenon. Starting with some commonplace beliefs which determine the term culture, such as the belief that each culture comes from somewhere, that it possesses its own space in the world, and that in this space it stands separate from other cultures (Mesić, 2007: 160-161), Racin's idea follows then quite logically, namely that Bogomilism is to be viewed as just a part of his own culture, from the past, that had as such affected the culture of his people. On the other hand, cultures evolve and change. The culture in question (in our case, the one produced by the Bogomils) needs to be reproduced by each

new generation, while society provides the international framework for the transmission of the culture in question with the help of education and socialization, Milan Mesić points out (2007: 167). Racin is in fact attempting that same thing – to reproduce Bogomilism's ideology as one part of a culture. The starting premise in the three essays is the suffering of the people, the suffering of the common man. He centers this around the cultural spaces of the native *Povardarje*, which to Racin stands as a euphemism for the then Vardar Macedonia (and taken from today's perspective, a euphemism for the Republic of Macedonia). This very space, which is the home of Bogomilism, can now become the home of the new literature and the new culture which will build itself on the preceding one – the folk culture. Therefore, Racin begins his essay "The Development and the Meaning of a New Kind of Literature of Ours" with an encouragement: *After the lengthy, strenuous process of consciousness forming amidst the people from Povardarje, the contemporary folk literature is a significant cultural occurrence and cultural achievement* (1987: 167).

In the "The Bogomils of Dragoviti", through a refined expressionist sensibility, he recognizes inside Bogomilism's appearance an archetype for the leftist oriented anarchism

and discovers a marked trait of the folk culture⁵ The dualist tradition of Bogomilism grants him the opportunity to enliven the expressionist ideal, an opportunity to read through it an engaged revolutionary avant-garde perspective as the manifesto of the free man. Hence, we can freely say that these three essays belong to that part of his work which can be tied to expressionism and to which Metodij Zlatanov is the first one to point out, which is an additional indicator that we are *not dealing with an interpretation*, rather with *a recontextualization of the traditional matrix*, on the one hand, and *a precursor of the poststructuralist geopoetic prose*, on the other hand (2006: 120).

In the future, a serious hypertextual read needs to be undertaken, on the one hand, of the three essays on Bogomilism, which in turn would show the extent of the moments that correspond with the poetics of expressionism, and whether those are more sustainable than

⁵ *Within the Povardarje folk history, during certain time periods, there exist not two traditions, the Orthodox one versus the Bogomil one, but rather three – the Orthodox, the Bogomil and the Pagan (Old Slavic) tradition and that they produce more or less permanent cultural artifacts as documents attesting to their existence. Oftentimes, they get intertwined, contaminated, but their essence remains primarily religious and henceforth enlightenment-centered. From Racin's stance, paradoxically speaking, the enlightenment spirit of the Bogomils is anti-religious* (Zlatanov, 2006: 20).

the moments which enter into a dialogue with the poetics of Bogomilism's dualism, whereas on the other hand, of the essay "The Development and the Meaning of a New Kind of Literature of Ours", which certainly provides the foundation of the Macedonian contemporary literary-critical thought and a few of the other ones, as the already mentioned "Towards a Clearer Understanding of Our Past", or of the essays, "The Meaning of Ilinden" (in the original, *Значењето на Илинден*), "The National Question in Macedonia" (in the original

Националното прашање во Македонија), even the lovely "The Macedonian Folk Song" (in the original *Македонската народна песна*), which unfortunately is only available today through an excerpt. In fact, such a reading would once again affirm Koneski's thesis, that *in Racin we have the most renowned Macedonian people's intellectual for his time, our most cultured man* (Koneski, 1987: 99).

(прегледен научен труд)

⁶ By conceiving of his manifesto, states Drugovac, Racin without a doubt feels deeply the hegemony of the other, modern and ultramodern manifestos of his own literary epoch... (...) However, by looking more closely at socialist literature, Racin chooses an entirely his and specifically macedonian aesthetic program (Drugovac, 1990: 184).

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Весна Мојсова-Чепишевска

Рациновите есеи – судбоносна фаза во националното созревање

Резиме: Рацин е вечна провокација зашто тој се прима како *симптом и симбол на најсудбоносна фаза во еволуцијата на нашето национално созревање* (Митрев, 1987: 110). Рациновата публицистичка и есеистичка продукција е создавана во еден дух во кој *провладува одговорноста и долгот кон народот* (Митрев, 1987: 111). Според мое убедување таа е вистински репрезент на **научниот есеј** кој уште во неговото време, а во нашето посебно, се покажува како *рамноправен партнер на строгиот научен труд* (Сталев, 2003: 125). А есејот како размисла, како став, како развивање на теза и аргументација е својствен за секое мислечко битие и можеби за тоа му е толку драг и на Рацин. Доказ за тоа е и бројката од нешто повеќе од дваесеттина текста расфрлани по тогашната југословенска периодика и во негова оставштина, во ракопис. Сепак, во оваа пригода мојот интерес е насочен само кон трите есеи за богомилите, напишани и објавени во периодот од 1939 до 1940 година по различни поводи, како и кон неговите статии *За поправилно сфаќање на нашето минато* и *Развитокот и значењето на една нова наша книжевност* која е со естетички и книжевноисториски атрибути на *литературен манифест* (Друговац, 1990: 183).