

# THE PHENOMENON OF LOVE IN BALKAN LITERATURES AND CULTURES





Aleksandar Jerkov (Yugoslavia)

## THE EMPTY MODEL AND THE SAD QUEEN: THE LOVE AND THE THOUGHT REGARDING THE LITERATURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

To conceive the literature, the way we know it in our civilization circle, and literature in general, a lot of prerequisites must be fulfilled. When the historians and theoreticians of literature, philosophers and estheticians think about it, they tend to add great significance to their studies. However, in the world in which we live today, the results of their thoughts would have had much less significance if the illusion for the necessity of this kind of thinking did not last centuries ago. The interpreters of literature are therefore attentive keepers of this tradition, but at the end of the twentieth century they were brought in a very difficult position. Today they look like some new scholasticians: knowledge has never been so perfected, and the social need of it so little, if it still exists. At the first glance, it seems that we are closer and closer to the truth of our skill, just a little bit more and we can determine the „gender“ of the angels of literature - by all chances they are beautiful women souls; and how many soft angel bodies could be called and placed on the „top“ of a verse; we are already alert to determine and describe in details what the narrative „syllogisms“ are like, in which the writer's thought can be seen as well as the way in which the function of the literature structure is proved; we are still debating in an excellent way how the reader decides between two equally attractive „layers“ of meaning and so on... These are all familiar, for this occasion just little adjusted motives of a long time ago scholastics, yet they sound so convincing as a cynical description of knowledge collected by interpreting the literature. The way that the importance of the scholasticism was extinguishing as a style of contemplating, is the same way that a style of critical thinking of literature is drowning today. A generation of interpreters is extinguishing, who considered themselves and their work highly dignified, even because they traced the road for their own end; and a kind of thinking is extinguishing because the time of its social necessity is over.

And yet, this difficult and unpleasant century is filled with different knowledge; it is a century in which the human confidence faced much harder challenges than the wild hordes from East were in the past, to whom the Creator wiped out civilizations as if with



rough move with a sponge, or rearrange the contours written on the map of the world. When it is about the literature, a long way has been passed in understanding how from a ritual and myth significance the word has come to an artistic expression, and how the artistic expression from a privileged keeper of the sublime meaning has become an example of a good writing. Still it has not ended with this, but in this century the literary expression has again returned to the everyday. In the everyday life, the lowered literary means have given powerful weapons for advertising and marketing, or were deduced to expressionless form of bestseller and books that are read in the metro.

We are far from the beginning of the literature and from the basic questions that arise, and without which neither the answer to the questions on relation between literature and love, nor the relation between contemporary thought of the literature and the problem of love would exist. The reason why love is not decisive subject of contemporary thinking can be understood only if one meets the antique literature. Homer's question, that old puzzle, does not at all derange the built image for the roots of the Western Literature, with a row in which at a first glance we cannot doubt: Homer Epics, Ionic lyrics, Athena's play: respectively, myth, historiography and philosophy, and then prose in dialogues and early love-adventurous story. When the order is determined, it is said more then just a chronology, it is shown how something necessary has spoken and directs one to the fact that from one spiritual sphere we come to the other, from one artistic expression to the other. Today, we are not only rarely searching these answers, because it seems that in the contemporaneity the sum of literary genres and artistic expressions is caught like some sort of necessary cluster that will never change again, but also the old dilemmas have slowly been forgotten, as the horizon of humanitarian questions in studying literature has been abandoned. The methodological poetry twilight has darkened the basic questions and especially the one that only matters: why do we need the poetry today. This question, however, can not be answered from the point of view of the simple contemporaneity, because the contemporaneity is never whole and therefore with difficulty can understand the causes and consequences.

Therefore the thinking of contemporary appearances must always grasp in the past, so neither the thought of the literature in the twentieth century nor the inseparable difficulties it is facing, cannot be understood unless realizing how those difficulties started.

The literary thought that in spite of all challenges has insisted on one very important task – to discover the artistic form of literature and by that provide its position among the theoretical and critical verbal genres, has abandoned the idea of wholesome, which is the only were the meaning an the purpose of that form could be understood. In the same time, the thought about the literature by rule fails to perceive that the very way of its own judgment it is too much connected with the questions, determined by tradition to whom it belongs, and much less with opportunities which the subject of its study-



ing leaves open. It was acceptable as long as the tradition is understood broadly, but when the thought of literature recognizes its own tradition only as thinking for the literature, then the study subject is limited so much that the basic meaning and purpose of study are lost.

From Plato and Aristotle, and let's not mention those who seem less significant, until today the literature by rule is understood only in one way: either as verbal form, or as social function of esthetic activity. Maybe that's why it is easily forgotten that all of that, which could always obviate the crisis of studying literature and limiting today's need to bring in question each certainty of that study. Poststructuralism, deconstruction, feminism, new historicism, dark esthetics - all of that is not more radical than that challenge of research which came from Nietzsche and Heidegger, even Adorno and Horkheimer, but it seems that the direction was changed, the vector of scrutiny, so the community of the interpreters of literature found themselves wondering, because they do not always need to look at the literature from the same linguistic and formative perspective. The situation has, however, recently become alarming, because the doubts do not rise due to the scarcity of interpretations, but due to their abundance, in which the serious deliberation easily decays.

However, is there any hidden possibility to talk about the literature in a different way? Let's say a different image than Hegel's triad myth - religion - philosophy, which in the literature is shaped as myth - religion - literature, and then the meaning of the literary form and literary expression remain connected to oblivion (Heidegger) or trace (Derrida), simulation (Baudrillard) or dislocation (Foucault), cleavage (Lyotard) or demobilization (Sloterdijk).

The subject of our gathering, directed towards the question of the relation between love and literature, may be of greater help than some systematic solution. Instead of big methodological preparations, maybe thinking about this relation between literature and love can be noticed as a crisis of the theoretical literature thinking today? It is better since it is accidental and determined, first of all with the personal interest for the literature, which is also a form of love, and sentenced to love, as highest expression of all that makes us human - for love makes us human.

It is an important, new possibility: to look at the literature face with the eyes of love, to lie to the thought of love the theory and methodology of literary studying. At this point, however, the thought of the literature helps us in a very familiar, old and its classical expression. For, when one says that love is the one that makes a man human, then an old image comes back of how in the literature a new epoch of human history begins, the one in which the archaic time of non-reflected heroism ends with the most well-known tears of the greatest of all heroes, which were living on the earth. In Achilles' tears for the dead friend and for its own mortal destiny, who imagines the parent's mourning over the dead child, a new type of humanity is determined. On one hand,



the determination to confront the death, as a better man's destiny, and on the other hand sensibility and comprehension in the beauty of life that appear – which in *Odyssey* will give a special dimension to Achilles' words that being the most miserable being but alive is better than being a dead hero. However, if the composition and the basic thematic were taken into consideration, *Iliad* is in many things actually an *Achilliad*. In that case it is good to recollect the remarkable study – to increase our pride, it is a work of our man, Milan Budimir – who piercingly pays attention to that, that *Iliad* epic is about the Achilles rage and the fight of Greek heroes, but also an epic about Achilles' love.

It is not only the hero's dignity hurt when the slave was taken away, but also his love feeling. Briseida must be returned to the hero untouched, for she is not just a slave. The base of *Iliad* is doubled, and in key moments the motive of love is intertwined with the one that attracts most attention, the heroic decoration and hero's honor. To this we only have to add Helena's image, not only as beauty symbol, but also as a woman so much loved that Menelaus forgave her the infidelity, so that in the secret of love we could see the driving power of the epic. In truth, Achilles' rage and Greek defeats could be, with good reasons, interpreted as a moral to the consequences from the dissension among the heroes, which would be very valuable to listen to even in the present. It could be brought up in connection with the other Homer's epic, but with less freedom in its interpretation, we should immediately say that *Odysseys* too could be read as epic of family love and faith, of the secrets of marriage lodge, and that no life outside its own home and own family could not satisfy a man, of the necessity to come back where a man belongs with his birth and family ties. It is not only stronger than the adventure, but it is also stronger than the erotic love, which a seductive and wise narrator, such as *Odyssey* is does not lack, especially not in the embrace of fascinating goddesses.

And of course, with several steps now. Leaving the friend's or tribal's love in *Safe's* works aside, another high ideal and leaving the question of tragic guilt, which has replaced in the play the basis of love and passion, in the next epic form we also meet the truth for love: for the successor of the epic, from antique stories until the baroque novel, the love entanglement is decisive. There is no antique story without love, yet it is not love baffled and annulled by ominous fate, but it is love challenged with difficulties, so that in the end it will show its power and magnitude.

The disentanglement of the love novel, in which fulfilled devotion of one being to another triumphs, discloses something about the point of the story telling, which is maybe later forgotten. And that is the fact that the story rewards, it does not fail, story, just like the tale, has in advance a promised end which talks about regained harmony in the world, about the joyful union of being, about the fulfilled success and social progress. How does the thought of the literature approach that? When we talk about the antique, this characteristic of union fits a special anthropological perspective in which the wholesome of the human being and life is never disregarded. The model of that unit-



ing thought confirms the relations of the real, beautiful and good, or high ideals of the **kalkogatije**, so that neither the thought of the literature nor its educational significance for man and his psyche, character, are not excluded from what a man is and how he lives, and are not reduced only to the literary form and verbal expression. This, naturally, immediately directs us to the solely core of anthropological and humanistic problems, to the big crisis in the thoughts of literature in the twentieth century.

The contemporary thought of literature is caught by what happens after the heroic period of methodology and theory. The heroic raid of all forms of story telling and communicating knowledge has ended in such a way that the theory of literature has discovered its own significance for all of the social sciences and all of the forms of story telling as such. In the moment of highest reach of the thought of literature, the so long expected influence of thinking of literature on the course of the history of the dominant knowledge, from philosophy to psychology, and suddenly in front of the style of the critical thinking and the sensibility which comes in expression in it, an abyss of new insignificance opened. How has the critical thinking got into this ominous steep, on which the other styles of thinking have also met the end as equal happening of the history?

The history of insisting on the methodology could take us far, from one hand, and the idea of autonomy of literature, on the other hand- lets immediately point out the main defendants for the rise and the fall of the research of the literature in this century. Once it is completely separated from the social life and entirety of human expression, when it becomes a subject for itself, literature has its study entrusted to the discipline that has no more real and whole touch with the knowledge about the whole, whose style of thinking neglects the basic teaching of the Greek way of thinking to which the ideal of all-inclusive is more important than the hair – splitting precision. The process of forgetting to think of the whole, in order to think of the particularity, is in the twentieth century, of course, connected with the history of methodological schools, on which beginning stands the one, which definitely breaks the connection between the man – creator and its work, between the work and the society in which it was created and in which it is read.

It is not hard to guess -we are talking about the so called Russian formalism, and here we will come closer to the romantic irony and sad queen, promised at the beginning of this text.

One of the basic thoughts of the Russian formalists was the one that the literature is an art which uses heavier form and revives the readers attention, regenerates the perception and makes us see things which we seized seeing, because habits and automatism has developed, or the “blisters of the soul” as Schklowski descriptively said. However, the deflection of the automatism of the perception says very little about what should be perceived. The texture, the subject, and all that is talked about, is material that should be transfigured, and it serves only to motivate the introduction of the literary



acts, that are, now, main characters of the literature science.

As much valuable as considerably naïve, noticing of the meaning of the art work, today is not that important because of its exceptional echo in the thought of literature of the twentieth century, but it is important since it discovers a state of relations between literature and social world, actually the need to remove the literature and to make itself independent, to move from other forms of symbolic expression. The connections with the world of life, in which, not to forget, just now a revolution is intruding its authority, are methodologically cut off. However, the reasons to escape from the totalitarian society depend very little on the form of the ideology, and much more on its kind, so that it can not be taken as a decisive reason; why should we try then, in the theory of literature to escape as far as possible from this totalitarian ideology, and which was not the case in the past centuries. Therefore, the wish to separate the literature from the whole is not essential, nor imposed, but wanted; it represent an expression of the understanding and position of the literature in the world in general, it is expression of the spirit of the time, that is looking for such a cleave.

That kind of cleave, however, which is seen at the end of this century, has a lot of ominous consequences, the most important of which is the one, that the society has finally recognized that cleave, for the Russian formalists, as well as for the American deconstructionists, wherewith the methodological ring of separating the literature from society and the world closed.

It is not an occasion to contemplate in detail, nor to especially deal with the idea to read for the sake of reading, which echoes at the end of this century as a far consequence of the poetical program according to which one writes for the sake of writing. If we are interested in the destiny of love and its relation toward literature, from the perspective of the theory of literature, than it has to be determined what kind of connection has the methodology of literary research with love, and whether the question of love could be introduced as solution for the problem of methodology.

The love novel, after the antique, had brilliant rise in the baroque, when the roman prose was still a literature in which the happenings of the enamoured were followed. The new century prose begins with break down of the baroque novel, and particularly that poetic distinction has attracted Victor Schklowsky, to whom the subject of love, as we know, was close in a very special creative way, so that he wrote his famous essay for Don-Quixote and Tristram Shandy on developing a plot and how the novel is made. So, what does the Russian formalism say about love and poetics with the words of Viktor Schlowsky?

"Description of happy, mutual love does not create a novel," says Schklowsky, interpreting the constructing of the story and the novel at the beginning of the twenties. And if it does create a novel, then it is "only on the background of describing love with obstacles", he says imagining that the omission of obstacles is seen as so called minus-



action, so it is refusal from the accustomed norm, absence of what is expected. In order novel to exist, love with obstacles is needed, says Schklowsky in "The Resurrection of the words". By this point it could be possible to agree with him, because really, all love novels were stories about love that had to conquer many challenges. Such is the example, says Schklowsky, "A loves B, B does not love A: when B has fall in love with A, A does no longer loves B", like in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. This place is often quoted, but it does not point out to love with obstacles, but on one hand to unusual psychology of falling in love, and on the other hand to unsuccessful love.

It is not a model of baffled love, of the verve that the ominous destiny has brought up on the battlefield of man's suffering, with every kind of tragedy, even with romantic. It is love that absurdly evades some cynicism of misunderstanding. If it is necessary for the novel that love meets obstacles, does that mean that it is now necessary that it also remains unfulfilled?

At the end, what Schklowsky sets aside, is why love is not returned to A and why A has stopped loving. The example that Schklowsky has used, which talks about human inconstancy and silliness, tells us more then it was supposed to tell. They don't only describe the scheme of relations that makes a novel, but they also describe a sketch of characters that give the literary character. What kind of a person is the one, that every now and than loves, and every now and then loves not, and what kind of person is that, that does not love when it is loved, but falls in love when it is not loved any more? Or is it a description of the modern man and nonsense of its apocalyptic sensibility? Haven't Schklowsky unintentionally, in this and that kind of choice of example, said also something that he had not actually had on his mind, and that is what the modern man is really like? Because, one thing is the romantic irony of love, the need in the baffling to fulfill its absolute function, so the eternity would look tragic: dead darling, forever separated lovers, all that is confirmation of love. And in this scheme as a model of plot, it is said that A and B do not love each other when they are loved. The man, after the romanticism, has experienced very important anthropological modification and erotic sensibility today is the best recognized in some sort of absurd misunderstanding with itself, and not in the tragic depth and pathos of the romantic irony of love. According to that, in this drawing back that builds the plot, hasn't Schklowsky had shown one compositional, plot principle, that provides the cynical deed of man's renunciation of itself and of real love, an act of negative projection of lust, that is started by the love verve?

The consequences of the thought of literature are, however, far-reaching and destructive. The very moment when the meaning of the relation between A and B is transformed in that which what is moving one and the other being is not any more in immediate connection, but all remains an absurd evasion, the plot cynicism, then the plot, as literary theory term, is freed from the social meaning. The plot, according to that, remains outside of the logical row of reasons, because the social relations and the



world of life serves only for such plot to be realized, and not vice versa.

In order to see this kind of consequences better, the view of the entanglement and plot, outside of the methodological frame of contemporary thought about literature will help us. When they talked about the same problem in the twenties of this century, from another school of thinking that did not try to separate the literature from the society, a completely different model was obtained. It is about the famous Forester's definition of plot – organization, building a plot – from *Types of novel*. "The king died, and then also, the queen died", says Forester, "that is the story". But, "the king died, and then the queen died from sadness", that is already a plot, because the essential logical tie between the events is established. The queen died from sadness, because she loved the king, and that testifies itself what kind of marriage they had, what kind of society it is in which the queen is not forced to live with the king, from dynastic reasons, etc.

What is the logical tie in the example that Schklowsky quotes? As if he talks about two absurd beings, and not about people that are bound with something; however, in order to love one another, even to fall in love in wrong time, they must have capabilities which will love in the other. Since Schklowsky displays an example which he analyses, talking about the scheme of relations between A and B, Pushkin's work, it is crystal clear what are the reasons for such relation between Eugene and Tatiana, and Schklowsky knows them well, but it seems to him that the meaning of those relations is what has to be left out. The reasons connected to the character of the hero and the relations of the characters in the social environment are sacrificed in order to gain neutral plot model. The very moment when he renounced the hero and society, Schklowsky has to renounce love, which sentenced literature to a model, to a condition in which love does not exist. Between Eugene and Tatiana, however, love exists, but not as in this narrative absurd passing by each other of certain A and B. The model of thinking demands that we leave all that is important in life, and with it obliges us to devastating anthropological image. The anthropological aspect of thought for the literature discloses the literary methodology developed on the rejection of social relations and characteristic, psychical attributes, the very ties between lovers, with whom, in the plot model and in the thought about literature suffers the one that represents the love. The thinking which does not see that in the love plot the queen must die from sadness, for the tragic greatness of love to survive, fails to perceive and in the interpretation to use that, what in the literature, and in life is the best, that what makes the man human being, which can be symbolically expressed and who's symbolic expression is worth the attention.

Love was happy in the antique, because the lovers would find each other at the end, as it is happy in the fairytale, where the hero and heroine at the close are always met by the happy end. Love, like that, happy and fulfilled, has become plunder of the lowered genres, as the character of the modern man does no longer provide basis for such a displaying of happy outcome. The anthropology of the modern times shows a baffled



being, whose opinion is also baffled, so therefore he needs a plot model of absurd unrealized love. Not only because the plot of happy ending is ceded to the trivial genres, but much more due to the reason that the contemporary world does not recognize any more the necessity of happy love outcome, it remains to the thought about literature the big dilemma of how the literature should again start ruling with the human symbolic space. The question could be asked too, in this way: wouldn't be necessary to find a new form in which the love would be essential and happy ending inevitable?

The thinking about literature is therefore at end of the methodological era in front of a challenge, and it can be presented, in this case, also as an anthropological challenge of happy love. The chances are that this challenge will be seen in one very old key, so, not in the erotic excitement, nor in the sexual freedom, which could be understood, but where the strength and power of love verve initiating to a deeper unity of truth, goodness, and beauty, that are, still, equally irresistible to the male and female being. Instead of devastating methodology, thought about literature must search for symbolic roots, for a new vision of literary anthropology, which speaks powerful about the quality of the soul of one queen, that can die from sadness for her dead king. Very little could be said on that attribute of the soul, in the poststructuralism, and in the feminism, new historicism or postcolonial critiques.

The queen's sadness, from the viewpoint of deconstructivism, has to betray itself in the literary work and to discover a fissure, in which the meaning of sadness will be inverted in something else, or in its opposite; for the feminism, the queen's sadness would be unbearable example of patriarchal phallusocracy, in which the woman that stays without husband is assigned only that kind of destiny, to die, as without him, her life is worthless; postcolonial critique would show Eurocentrism, in which the white king and queen are obligatory, where the king has maybe died from malaria, after visiting the colonies, and similarly, while whole story does not turn into an in advance given image; for new historicism, the queen's sadness would show how the social power and position of the royal family are written in the text, which speaks about it, and what is the cultural poetics of that sadness, which is closer to an other, decisive step, that reacquires interpretation in the literary anthropology that the cultural poetic is just denoting, mapping, in a wider civilization system. The thought of love and literature therefore is opening a gate of one new interpretation of the literary creation, in which a literary anthropology should be build.