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KATICA KJULAVKOVA

# *The Balkan Chronotope*

*The Hermeneutics of Evil: a Re-stabilised Archetype,  
an Anthropologic Constant or a Trans-national Logos of Profit*

Speaking of the archetypal structures of humanity, which have marked the entire literary typology since the beginning of the literary arts, we have primarily in mind, unfortunately, the diabolic, perverse, irrational and volatile human relations; the various kinds of generous familiar tragedies: murders of all kinds, crimes and sins, which constitute the soul-stirring narrative, dramatic situations and characters. Let me enumerate only some of them: Cain's jealousy and fratricidal relations in general; matricides, infanticides and the syndromes of Medea and Cassandra; incest, Oedipus complex, Jocasta's fate, forbidden love between brother and sister, sacrificial rites, banishment or the putting to death of the single or youngest child (son or daughter); Saturn's/Chronos' brute instinct to eat their own children, terrible maledictions that mothers cast on their sons (expressed to perfection in Macedonian popular ballads), myths such as the one about the infirm Dojčin and the black Arab woman...

It seems that evil has the thought processes of a nymphomaniac or a satyr; that it is immanently insatiable and vigorous; that it changes its shape like Proteus to hide and then re-emerge to be born again. Many writers use this idea in their works and one of the most heart-wrenching poems on this theme is *Pesjo*

*brdce* by Blaž Koneski: evil has no beginning and no end. It is obvious that the *differencia specifica* of the human race is not so much the art of the word/skill of logos, but rather, the poetics of sadism, the satanic predisposition to take pleasure in the torture of the Other (human being); the torture of the other human essence. In other words, it is the methodology of sophistication and perfecting of the forms of torture, sadistic rhetoric and stylistics. The animal realm knows no such ritualistic aspects and institutionalised sadism. The realisation that inhumaneness is originally/immanently human and a civilisational experience (which is nurtured and encouraged by ideologies, institutions of the system and the establishment) is parasitic!

It is preferable and more pleasant to speak about the poetics of dreams and about the principle of hope, but in specific social and historical circumstances, the realisation of the logic and epistemology of evil is a priority. This is because we believe in the possibility of confronting evil with several pragmatic options and strategies. If we cannot completely vanquish evil, then let us do so at least temporarily and for a longer period. Let us neutralise it, attenuate it or (at least) outwit it (trick its wily nature). Just like the legendary Prince Marko who, thanks to his cunning and blind heroism, saved himself from an overwhelming and invincible enemy. He made everyone believe that he was present on the battlefield, but in fact, he escaped by stealth and hid away in a secret location.

How are we to confront evil? Is it not true that every human being – or a human being as such – is, by the anthropological definition, obsessed and determined by evil? What is the nature of the world in which evil is a constant and dominant force? Another question comes to mind which offers a valid “argumentation” in favour of the above premise, which encourages ethical contempt as well as epistemological curiosity: What is the origin of such intense passion for the theme of evil in literature and its images of the world? Why is it that the pragmatics of evil are constantly being regenerated and modernised? In this context the following questions also come to mind: Are the pragmatics of evil a Balkan specificum and speciality, or is there a special Slavic “antithesis?” Is evil perhaps a universal, general human “good” (property, acquired trait, tradition, convention!!!)? Is the Balkan chronotope predestined to cyclical destruction, reconstruction and construction, to the fact that we destroy and then rebuild from the start – from less than point zero? The epistemology and hermeneutics of evil are today absolutely imperative in order that

we may, with their help, vanquish the inertia of evil, and create a new philosophy and strategy of anti-evil, anti-war – a strategy of the culture of peace, as has been proclaimed by UNESCO.

In my lengthy dramatic poem, *Izgon zla (Banishment of Evil)*, I appeal for good thoughts, which are a way out of the vicious circle of evil. What is necessary is an individual as well as a collective catharsis of the discourse of evil and vengeance. We need to forget a little, to be the child inside of us for a while, to wisely forgive and reconcile a little, so that we do not poison our souls and subconsciousness with misery. We must do this so that our subconscious cannot rule over us even after death; so that we may preserve the meaning of our existence and of the existence of our children and future generations. A shift in the direction of good is a precondition to at least push evil away from us, to cast it out, if we cannot free ourselves from it and cleanse ourselves of it for all time.

In my poetry of course I do not talk about establishing a new order (if we consider that evil is the internal structure of chaos, the absence of reason, the castration of humanity) that would sanction institutions which produce misery, destruction, hate, mass delusion and hysteria, and ideologies which foment the forces of evil and the rhetoric of war. An example of this is the dogma of a certain nation under threat – one of the fundamental premises of the worst neo-fascist ideologies of the Balkan and European regions after World War II. The wars in the Balkans usually begin with mass illusion and pseudo-concepts, which indicates that war, as a mystification or personification of evil (in this framework belong also other personifications: tragic, Aristotelian transcendence and excessive will for power and domination; for money and conquests of foreign soil and property; for foreign past, foreign countries, foreign identity; a passion for a violent redrawing of borders; a sense for despicable intentions, for deceits, abuses, national vanity and chauvinism; for social, psychological, familiar and sexual frustrations...), is not an inherent anthropological instinct of the individual, but primarily a premeditated trait that refers to the institutions of power and state, and is supported by them (political leaders, army, police, government, political parties, the media, etc.).

The evil of war is perpetrated by the interests of people at the highest level of power in one or several countries, and by interest for profit which is included in the contemporary shadow theatre, in the Karagiozov theatre, which has been known in our land since the ancient times; in the theatre which is directed and supported by democratic regimes and international associations,

hiding behind the scenes their primal instincts of domination, segregation, discrimination and the profit-motivated rhetoric on democracy, humanism and human rights. In the past, and unfortunately also today, this rhetoric motivated a host of destructive movements and violent conflicts. This idea was well put by Thomas Mann in his novel, *Doctor Faust*, where he says that "...the greatest evil perpetrated in the world is by those leaders who speak in the name of the people..." In the name of the people mindless killings took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the close of one of the most inhuman centuries in human history, at the end of a century which claims the right to reveal itself – which is paradoxical, as always, when it is a question of fundamental phenomena – in a humanistically Uranian image (the capricious and destructive age of Aquarius, the age of technological and information advancements and apocalyptic and auto-destructive instinct!)

Contradictions are like prophets – they have the power of vision: everything that we defend does not come true. And for this reason precisely what was (declaratively) inadmissible happened; everything that was forbidden and tabooed happened; a grotesque inversion of higher principles, higher national goals, all inhuman, undemocratic, uncivilised and irrational in their points of departure. But unforeseeable things also occurred. There was more entropy than one could imagine. The borders that were unchangeable, were changed; the countries that should not have broken up, broke up. Everything shifted; everything was masqueraded; everything was destroyed. There are several ways of breaking up a whole! In the end, it turned out that "history, like Cassandra, is prophetic, and just like in case of Cassandra, everyone turned their backs on history. The victors do it because they prefer not to realise that everything ends in defeat. The vanquished do it because they refuse to believe that there are no innocent victims..." (Marguerite Yourcenar, 1942, quoted from *Eseji*, Novi Sad, 1991, p. 47).

We, who hail from Balkan countries, particularly those who live "on the margin" of Europe, as we have been recently labelled by the democratic Europe, thereby impudently belittling historical and contemporary facts; we, who live in the Balkan chronotope and reflect on it (it is the time-space, or space-time, which absorbs not only our age but also all past ages; not only current, but also past spatial and national, cultural and civilisational circumstances); we, who construct and project literary, artistic, intellectual, emotional and personal images of this Balkan chronotope; we, the writers of this immanently European space, the chronotope which,



in the imagological perceptions of other nations, civilisations, collective consciousness and memories, is often recognised as stereotypical, erroneous and deformed. And from the viewpoint of negative selection and mythologised prejudice, this chronotope is also identified as the keg of gunpowder; we should, therefore, have exerted our influence, so that this image would change and become more three-dimensional and subtle, poly-semantic and real. The Balkan chronotope, considering the entire historical burden that it carries, is not only a Pandora's box of discord; it is not only the lair of evil and the hotbed of wars motivated by such irrational impulses as the beauty of the mythical Helen, or internal religious differences between the Orthodox and Catholic Christians or other religious differences between Slavic nations (Islamised Slavs) and other Balkan nations of non-Slavic origins (Albanians, Greeks, Turks, Romanians, Roma, etc.). This is because the identity of the Balkan chronotope occurs primarily in archaic facts, according to which it is the foundation of the European culture, including Western European and Central European cultures and civilisations; because the Balkan chronotope is a paradigm for dialogue (openness, communication, interculturalism) and a palimpsest (civilisational multifacetedness, multi-ethnicity, multi-lingualism); and also because the Balkan chronotope is the key to deciphering and resolving many recurring social and interethnic constellations in the contemporary Europe, in the Europe that lies beyond the Balkan ghetto. Nevertheless, the Balkan stamp of the reincarnation of evil is not unique and singular – neither in today's world, nor in the past. This realisation is no consolation for us, and also poses no threat to the second part of the European and non-European world! The stamp of the Balkan chronotope, such as is being recently enthroned, institutionalised and conventionalised in the pseudo-centralist consciousness of the Western world, is deeply imprinted in other figures of the European chronotope – in the American, South American, Asian, Near Eastern, African, Australian ... This presentation is an attempt to clarify the archetypal, primal anthropological dimension of evil, due to which evil manifests itself in different, fragmented (in the geographic and chronological sense) chronotopic situations, in human history throughout the world. This presentation is also an attempt to shift the focus of perception of the contemporary world and the position and role of evil in it.

The history of the world, the written story of humanity's past – including sacred writings of various religions origins – represents an intricate and mysterious chain of stories about countless genocides,

holocausts, ghettoisations, civil and fratricidal wars, conquests; colonial, avenging and irrational wars, and conflicts. The history of the modern, Western democratic world is rife with examples of constructions, carried out on the foundations of destruction, bloodthirsty objectives and even more bloodthirsty means. History writes about the role of great powers in fomenting armed conflicts and their perfidious fuelling of these hotspots in the service of industrial interests (the production of perversely efficient weapons, such as atomic, chemical and psychological weapons, and the production of nuclear energy and nuclear wastes). The history of the world has not forgotten the genocide of Indians and Jews (among others), the Vietnam and Korean wars, apartheid, nazi invasion, Stalinist totalitarianism, Franco's dictatorship and the South American brand of dictatorship. Humanity remembers and continues, day after day, to keep track of the ghastly images of millions of hungry children, women and people in general; of the information on discrimination and racism, neo-fascism, neo-colonialism, hegemony, violation of the universal and inherent rights of nations and their identity and name; about the strategic domination and exploitation of different chronotopic origins in which the "democratic world" is involved!

The truth is multifaceted and has a *Rashomonic* structure, so that it is not easy (and there is not need) to accept the one and only centralised, established image of the world. The democratic world has, despite this, adopted a minimum of consensus on the ethical norms and respect for human rights and freedoms. There are general points of reference and criteria for ethicalness and humanness. For this reason, the *Rashomonic* projection in no way justifies nations, states, institutions and individuals – and for that matter no one in the world and, in this context, not even the Balkans – in their crimes. But one thing is certain: the Balkans is not the exclusive black sheep in the noble, humane, civilised Western world and other non-Balkan world. There is no reason to ostracise the Balkan countries, due to stereotypical imagology and their unwelcome and "original" chronotope of evil, from the company of civilised countries. This society knows all too well that the Balkan chronotope – the ancient Macedonian, for example and Hellenic – influenced the cultural systems of three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. It knows all too well that the *collective memory* of the Balkan nations, just as their literary and historical heritage, is a wealth of civilisational strata which have an exceptional significance for the development of the European culture, and are at the same time "historical" and variable. Imperialistic, federal and confederal political systems change and will

continue to change. In other words, the list of independent and autonomous countries will continue to change. This society of the chosen and powerful knows that the Balkan chronotope of the good, reason and art has influenced and can continue to influence, in a positive way, the intertext of the world and the cultural systems of the world.

A new view of the world that has been emerging in recent years would, by analogy, have to pull into its wake also the new hermeneutics of the Balkan chronotope, of the Balkan cultures and literatures, namely, the new interpretation within the framework of the new historical and communicational contextualisation. This contextualisation includes, in addition to the writer, text, reader and their "intentions" (Umberto Eco: *The Limits of Interpretation*), also the extra-textual, extra-verbal, civilisational, social and coded informational factors (linguistic, national, traditionalistic, psychological, biographic, social, racial, ideological, commercial). The new hermeneutics topicalises and includes the mythical, sacral and archetypal matrixes, as well as the new conventions of writing and reading literature and art. Unavoidable is the reconstruction of the contemporary reality and history of humanity as well as the reconstruction of the principles of their interpretation. Also unavoidable in this set of principles is the interpretation of human beings and their civilisational values. The new hermeneutics can produce a new systematisation of cultural values and principles of evaluation; a new chronotopical contextualisation and regionalisation; a new reading and interpretation of the Balkans and the "western Balkans" (The latter is a false, awkward, politicised and provocative construct, foreign to the tradition and history of south-eastern Europe!). The new hermeneutics will perhaps offer us a chance for a new political structure and for another coronation/enthronement of the dethroned reason, humaneness, nobleness, good, and happiness.

The infernal triad of destruction-reconstruction-construction, which is served to us today as a necessary evil, as a way out from even greater evil (the choice of the lesser evil), could be re-encoded and transformed from the central, dominant and constant branding of the Balkan chronotope into a peripheral, random property and an eloquent remembrance of the unpleasant, forgotten past. This triad reminds one of the scheme of literary evolution which has been theoretically justified and introduced by the Russian formalists in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But the mentioned scheme should not be automatically taken as an equivalent. Literary evolution passed through the following



stages: establishment of new values (topicalisation, innovation); stabilisation, traditionalisation, automation and conventionalisation of the mentioned values; and de-automation (which includes also the projects of rejection and negation of tradition). This evolution emphasises the deposit of individuality and authenticity or originality, which may leave the impression of non-recognition and destruction of tradition. It in fact stimulates and generates a new interpretation of conventions, history and tradition; new strategies of hermeneutics; a new value system. This takes place at a higher level of the poetic, aesthetic and philosophic system of conventions. The literary cycles of innovation and traditionalisation (e.g., reconstruction and construction) do not destroy the artefacts in literature, but rather, only review and re-assess the value systems and criteria. The criteria are a premise of an evolutionary and not of a destructive model of the functioning of art (and the world!).

We may speak of the true destructive attitude towards literature and cultural values when it comes to primitive, unmotivated, politicised restructuring of cultural systems and civilisational and artistic artefacts. This happens when entire bodies of literature are amputated; when inquisitions and mounted trials are conducted against artists and their works; when books are banned and authors blacklisted; when libraries are burned down (those of Alexandria, Sarajevo, Belgrade and library of the Mexican writer Sor Juana de la Cruz...); when philosophers, rhetoricians and writers (Socrates) are poisoned and sentenced to death; when writers, artists and reporters are killed and persecuted in concentration camps, prisons and in exile (Latin American, European, Soviet, Yugoslav...). The list goes on and on! This attitude is the product of governmental, political and church institutions of power, and here lies the big difference! If writers co-operate in the establishment and regime of this kind, they themselves become part of this mindless crime. But institutions are created by political and state regimes; not by writers as individuals, but by writers as influential parts of the regime (academicians, party leaders, ministers...). Diabolical experiences, ascribed to the Balkan chronotope and recognised as its identity, are quite well known in Western Europe and North America. For this reason both regions could, on the basis of their experience of destruction, help the Balkans to make the transition and resolve the current burning problems of the processes and strategies of destruction.

Unfortunately literature does not hold the power to transform the world and educate states and regimes. It can only exert its influence on individuals, not on superpowers. The challenge of

the literary experience exists, but this as well is human misery. Individuals must have first-hand experience and survive it to realise what it is all about in order to become a better person. People do not learn from the experience of other regions and ages; from other nations and traditions. Perhaps this aspect of education could become one of the principles of the new epistemology of evil and new explanation of the Balkan chronotope: of the Macedonian, Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Greek, Albanian cause and culture.

Language and literature remember, but man must master the technique of reading the memory, practice mnemotechnics and establish a dialogue on an equal footing with others. We are not divided so much by civilisational specifics and gaps, as by conventionalised prejudices, institutionalised aversions and profitable interests (the postcolonial mythology of profit!); by the logistics of the division of the world into the powerful and the weak; by the archetype of the will for power and by the terrible, primal, uncontrolled and also institutionalised sadism! If *we* are those others, we must sincerely accept the dialogue and not the arrogance stemming from the rhetoric of power; the arrogance hiding behind the sophisticated democratic mechanisms and "corpuses". This arrogance further instigates the pragmatics of evil, the destruction *ad infinitum*, and the blind forces and chaos that can no longer be only "Balkan," because some consequences (environmental implications, for example) are not and cannot be only regional and sub-regional: Sooner or later, they will come home to roost.