

## AMNESIA OF EVIL, ANAMNESIS OF GOOD

When Blazhe Koneski writes in his poem “Pesjo Brdce” (“Dog Hill”) that “evil multiplies itself like weeds after plucking,” he says so in a context that offers the interpreter knowledge that no matter how fierce and long the battle against evil, the “devil’s breed” is constantly reborn like a Phoenix, and it multiplies like weeds, so one evil becomes two, and so forth, exponentially, until they threaten survival, not only of the individual, but also of the community, not only of man, but also of humanity in general. The lyrical despair expressed in this poem is so immense that even death is wished for as salvation and is emphasized as a prototype of absolute loneliness in which there is no good, but at least no evil either!

This poem is one of the saddest in contemporary Macedonian poetry. It is pessimistic, solipsistic, elegiac, emphatic and beautiful at the same time. It is written over the hypotext of the popular legend about King Marko, according to which he fought many a night against the foe, but when he realized that the enemy is always more numerous and stronger, he gave up the fight and fled, leaving the illusion that he is still there, within reach, so “the enemy does not realize that there is nobody in the fortress, that he disappeared into the night.”

Thus, what in the legend has the image of an enemy, of personified evil, in Koneski’s poem transcends into a metaphysical category, into an invisible yet powerful “being.” The king’s cunning in deluding the enemy after realizing that he cannot vanquish it with the sword is transformed in Koneski’s poem into a metaphysical longing for disappearance, perceived as death, but death out of which, like “in a night of conception,” something new and good can be born.

Koneski’s poem and the legend coincide in the basic theme, which has an archetypal structure. Both texts create one common intertext. Based on an ancient primordial image of evil and its power, they are recorded as a palimpsest upon the experience of the Macedonian people, sometimes written down, sometimes passed down orally, but one that always creates a fictional “illusion of reality” (R. Barthes), as if it were a novel or a play, an illusion of something that happened and keeps repeating.

That experience is neither a privilege nor a precedent in the history of mankind. It is not indigenous to the Balkan and the Mediterranean nations that link the cultures of three continents. It is most probably a general human pragma, *fatum*, an eternal warning that springs from the regular rhythm of the cyclic repetition, it is a fear that maintains the *alertness of consciousness*: anthropological, ethnical, ethical, and aesthetic. The phrase “alertness of consciousness” is a pleonasm, yet welcome in its emphasis of the fact that it is a consciousness *always already* formed, clear, lucid, therefore self-conscious and *self-reasoning*.

Using the poem “Pesjo Brdce” as a paradigm of a good poem, one can demonstrate and reconstruct the dominant way of remembering in the poetic text: the poem remembers in such way that it incorporates other texts, other experiences and other knowledge, quotations and allusions, reminiscences and associations, other memories, recollections, remembrances, stories, legends, mementos, memorabilia... When thinking about the general theme of the round-table discussion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ohrid Regional Conference, Literature as Memory, I could not escape the impression that there are a number of synonyms in the Macedonian language designating the phenomenon of memory, just as there are many words in other languages for

designating a certain object (plant or animal), according to traditions, taboos, collective trauma, or ideals.

The poetic way of remembering reminds us – once again – that nothing, not even what we cherish as exclusively personal and unique, begins today with us or happens for the first time, but this way of remembering simply evokes an aesthetic illusion of uniqueness and originality. It demonstrates that general human memory, the collective tradition of a nation, and the individual experience and memory of the world are intertwined through subtle, unconscious, and accidental coincidences into a complex, multi-layered and homonymous texture, into a polyphonic and polysemantic sign that actualizes ancient, thus essential and infinite topoi, which resuscitates and ontologizes them into an art form. Koneski himself in his essays elaborates this knowledge at the level of auto-poetic conception.

The poetic mode of memorizing is selective, but there is more. It is reflexive or self-reasoning, critical, dialogical and intuitive memorizing, and still more. It does not store and accumulate facts and information. To remember poetically means to create visions. To remember poetically means to think through metaphors and analogies, through comparisons and reflections of *distant yet close* things weaving one into the other, in a manner that is not typical of ephemeral and arbitrary words, of colloquial and utilitarian discourses and practices. To remember poetically means to perceive and be able to express, in a selective and meticulous way, the paradoxes and opposites in the Universe, in both the microcosmos and in the macrocosmos, the ambivalent pragmata that man is faced with, but also those that he generates and causes himself. The poetic mnemotechnic is hybrid, one might say androgynous, moving along the borderline between the noumenal and the phenomenal, the intuitive and the rational, the logical and the paralogical, the lyrical and the epic. . .

Memory is most a probably prelinguistic phenomenon, but it is imprinted on language, protected by the magical shield of linguistic signs and utterances. Memory, after all, is not a characteristic that exclusively belongs to humankind and the human mind. Everything that lives has its own ability and mode of remembering: through images, feelings, senses, sounds, and smells . . . But, human beings have the daimonic privilege of transferring their memories in both vernacular and poetic words, and people transfer them into their natural linguistic systems and their symbols. Many traces are forgotten and hidden in the altered forms and meanings; therefore one must listen carefully, have a developed sense for the word, a kind of sixth sense, a sixth dimension of the world that opens the gates of Time, where there are no strict intrinsic divisions of past, present, and future, where all is indivisible, condensed and diagonal.

The etymology of language, which assumes the necessary comparison and a stepping into other languages and other language matrices, testifies to the fact that the Word is mysteriously open for the processes of the reading into and writing into new meanings and the erasing of old ones. The verb “to remember” (*“pomni”*), for instance, in the Macedonian language has retained another meaning closely related to remembrance/commemoration (*“pomen”*), to commemorate those who have passed, died. Memory implies looking back at what has been, to the past, to history, to something happened somewhere, even if only as part of the imaginative universe of humanity. And that imaginative universe sometimes can be much more eloquent than the world of epic and the world of mythological tradition and mystification of national visions of the past.

In the process of creating and writing *ecritures*, in the antagonism between those who paint the images (the iconographers) and those who break them (the iconoclasts) different *constellations of memory* and erasure, i.e., the “washing” of the text and memory occur. Several factors have an impact on these constellations of memorising: the dominant conventions of written and spoken expression, the conventions of aesthetic expression, the concepts about what is beautiful, good, and useful, censorship and self-censorship,

prohibitions and freedoms of speech, fantasy, the status of authors and books, language codes and functional styles, the division between the official and the vernacular standards of language, second-language interference in writing, writing in a non-native language, conversion of codification principles, etc.

This does not raise the question of oblivion, because oblivion is an element of memory, its double, its projection and symptom. Memory and oblivion, *anamnesis and amnesia enter the system of Poetic Interplay*, a system that involves strict rules, competent and skilful players, in terms of both author and reader. Mnemosyne and Lethe ignite the dynamics of poetic perception, optics, and herme-neu-tics. M(n)emo-ry and lethargy create a binary and complementary opposition that feeds the culture of thinking and the practice of respecting tradition, even when we stray from it in order to follow the innovative model. Innovation is primarily actualization and perfection, and not destruction and degradation of inherited models and systems of values and conventions.

Therefore, even when a minimalist approach towards poetry is involved, both poetry and the poet cherish the gift for forgetting, selecting, and ignoring banality, kitsch, provincialism, and pettiness. Thus a wide space is cleared for the transcending of little things into higher spiritual and aesthetic categories. This, of course, is not an issue of “weak memory” or absolute oblivion, because it “annihilates precedence, the past” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Second Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 1954, 290). This raises the question of aversion towards all forms of involuntary, compulsory, and extra-aesthetic pressure, such as ideological coercion upon the poetic mind and style and upon the poetics of remembering.

“That which lasts is created by the poets,” says Hölderlin in the poem “Memory” (Heidegger, 1982, 138). That is why they should be protected and cherished in every society, in all civic and democratic regimes. They perceive the world differently, because they behold it *through* language, their *third eye*. If you tarnish that sacred spot you might as well throw sand in their eyes, take away their sight, their vision, and their identity. The poetic is at the same time the human.

In this part of the world, which bears the foundations of European culture, philosophy, literature, and art, where legendary figures such as King Marko were born, who (according to belief) possessed strength greater than that of God, so He was compelled to deprive them of it so that nobody would be His equal, where earthly forces and subterranean reservoirs threatened to overwhelm entire civilizations, where there is no lack of desire for dominance and revenge, where the art of mass blindness is present today – when I say this, I really mean today, in our close and intimate modernity, burdened with cruel threats to democracy and diplomacy, tattooed with atrocities and exoduses, “humanitarian disasters,” arrogance, with insensible and cataclysmic environmental acts – a virtue is needed that only writers can provide, a virtue for dialogue based on mutual respect, an ability to admire differences that create diversity in the world and its cultures, letting them “read” and “translate” each other. That is the only way they can be remembered as poets, not only as people; that is the only way for them to forget the errors of politicians and find it in their hearts to forgive them in the name of higher principles and goals, such as humanity, freedom of spirit and fantasy, of cultural and linguistic identity, of tolerance and communication, and, why not, of love and happiness.

It seems appropriate to mention what an obscure ancient Hellenic “poet of dithyrambs, tragedies and lyrical poems,” Ion of Chios, also known as “Morning Star,” has written: “Happiness is utterly different from wisdom, but it produces works very similar to the works of wisdom” (*Presocrates I, Fragments*, Hermann Diels, Zagreb, 1983, 327).

In this same context, I would like this 5<sup>th</sup> Ohrid Conference, and others to follow, to become a symbolic and real incentive for a dialogue that will be creative and liberated from all the prejudices and misconceptions (whether due to the past or politics) of writers in

Macedonia and their colleagues from neighboring countries, among writers from the Balkan and Mediterranean countries, among the so-called Eastern European, Southeast, Central European, and Western European countries, because peace and the pleasure in and from Dialogue provides hope, and I do hope that there is hope, that we will overcome crises and animosities, that we will become wiser, and therefore, perhaps, happier.

I hope that, even though we are not figures from legend, we will be able to fool Evil for a while and live in peace, so that we can dedicate ourselves to what we often forget – beautiful, spiritual, and peaceful human life, which also involves our primary vocation, *pure* literature, which I am deeply convinced exists despite all the crises, traumas, and tragedies.

### **Works Consulted**

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