

Don-Quixotism of Poetry

On the Courage of Writing Poetry at a Time of Rapacity

*Bajram Kosumi**

Poetry Defies Modernity

Writing poetry at the time of modernity is intellectual courage. In the 21st century modernity. Writing poetry at this time means defying all modernity. Could it be that poetry and modernity are the extremes of two different cultures? Although this question is extreme, one thing is certain: modernity and poetry are very far apart from each-other. In particular, modernity and poetry in Kosovo are very far apart from each-other, but the same is true elsewhere, because the country is only becoming a wild copy of the elsewhere.

Poetry Is Mangled

Literature, poetry in particular, is a surrounded castle, against walls of which fire and stones, arrows and spears are flung..., indeed, those flings are not real medieval weapons; instead, they are cynical and mocking weapons: contempt like arrows, depreciations like gopedre stones, cynicism like fire, mocking like water poisoning. Ultimately, literature is severely mangled.

It has sustained three serious injuries from the all-round attacks: from the cult for money, from virtual life and from literature itself.

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The cult for money, so meaningfully conveyed in the myth for the American one-dollar note, subjects each and every value to its own self, thus creating a new hierarchy: everything that is further from money is, therefore, worthless. The cult for money in Kosovo takes grotesque shapes: the rapacity to devour everything lying in front of own self, including even the very land that sustains us and feeds us. In the midst of this rapacity literature only makes trouble.

Because literature is human communication and not money.

Virtual life is making people ever more discontent, more embittered with all, more desperate and hungrier for everything, designers of subconscious campaigns for conquests of the entire humankind.

However, literature is human communication and not a weapon for domination.

Finally, literature is endangered by its own self, under the pressure of manners to devise a piece of literature that flees from literature, literature that does not communicate with man, and the reader finds no ideas through which he or she could communicate in literature.

Consequently, the numbers of those who have the luxury to read have reduced steadily.

Cvetan Todorov: the Danger to Literature

Cvetan Todorov, one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century literature, a major contributor helping literature to embark into the road where it is today, in the book of the recent years, *Literature in Danger* (2007), rings the alarm bells that literature is endangered by its own self, because it is losing the idea whereupon it communicates with the reader, and literary criticism and history of literature are likewise put in the service

of their own selves, rather than help the reader understand literature.

Thus, literature today is very injured.

Poetry, meanwhile, is at the brink of its grave; it is the first and most fragile victim of modernity.

Famous Traitor Novels

It is precisely for this reason that I deeply appreciate anyone who takes the courage to write poetry. I appreciate him or her, first of all, for having the courage to challenge modernity. I personally have a higher appreciation of postmodern novel; however, the courage to write poetry is much greater than the courage to write a novel, because the novel has made room for its survival by adapting to modernity. There are plenty of famous modernity novels which have betrayed the ideals of literature; yet they are famous. For about ten years Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* sold 17 million luxury copies and 6 million cheaper editions. Can one ever imagine that a modern poet's poem could sell over twenty-three million copies? While praising the nomination of the poetry book by Jan Wagner for the Fair Award of Leipzig (2015), as opposed to the novels, the German literary critic Felicitas von Lovenberg says that "it is likely that this Fair will go down in history" for this very reason. However, this poetry book that beat novels could barely sell some six thousand copies.

The Coca-Cola Literature

The Da Vinci Code was a top-hit for several years in the US and European markets. The number one bestseller. I know housewives and farmers in Kosovo who have read this book, of

the kind who, I guess, have never heard of another novel of the late twentieth century, *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco.

Perhaps nothing better than the word **bestseller** marks this mangled literature. The word 'bestseller' judges the values of literature and art in a general sense, and conveys in the background what the cult for money has done to art and literature. Bestseller means something that earns the best sales. In the case of drinks, for instance, Coca Cola is a bestseller. A piece of literature where bestseller values prevail is analogous to Coca Cola in its own realm. Coca Cola literature, a worthy representative of that bizarre verse of an Albanian song "Both beautiful and unfaithful".

Certainly Goethe's *Faust* would not be a bestseller. I suppose that if Hegel, one of the greatest minds of the modern European history, competed in the bestseller market of ideas, he would be utterly worthless and would starve.

Art Only Makes Sense if It Communicates with Man

For this reason, after reading Ismail Sylva's *Religion of Grief*, I had the pleasure to write the afterword to the poetry of that book at the end of last year. Ismail's poetry restores the individual and social status of poetry, as an art that communicates with man, with great certainty. Art, in whatever form, cannot exist without a direct and deep communication with man, his mind and soul. Otherwise, it would remain just a fad, or a manner. In both cases, something ephemeral, in extinction.

Ismail Syla's Poetry Shows a Spiritual Abyss

Religion of Grief proves the contrary.

This poetry could be interpreted with just a symbol: **the temple of rapacity**.

In the temple of rapacity there is an insatiable hunger, greed, grief, disagreement, oddness, despair.

In the temple of rapacity:

- a healthy man is ashamed of his health;
- an honest man is ashamed of his honesty;
- a righteous man is ashamed of his righteousness;
- a beautiful man is ashamed of his beauty;
- a loving man is ashamed of his love;
- a man who sheds his sweat on his land is ashamed of his sweat;
- a man who sheds his blood for his land is ashamed of the blood shed ...
- ... and vice-versa, the opposite type of everyone is proud of his rapacity, is proud of his meanness, brags and swaggers, and occupies space and room, and occupies your homeland and narrows down your homeland and suffocates you ...

However, there are always rebels, people who do not succumb to evil: who are not ashamed of health, of honesty, of justice... Yes, but it is those others who:

- make a healthy man sick;
- taint an honest man with disgrace;
- pass a judgment on a righteous man;
- strip a beautiful man of his beauty;
- reduce a loving man to a beast;
- corrupt a man who sheds his sweat for his land;
- deny a man who sheds his blood for his land ...

This is what, more or less, Ismail Syla's temple of rapacity is like.

This poetry shows us the spiritual abyss into which we are subsisting in suspense, in danger of getting lost in it at any moment.

In the temple of rapacity poetry does not offer any value at all: no power is gained, no house built, no fame won through it. So what value is this to us then? Poetry is worthy of scorn, of derision.

Catharsis in Art Has Never Been Accomplished! There Is no Catharsis, There Is no Art!

But in this abyss of the soul, Ismail's poetry makes me believe otherwise.

Ismail's poetry makes me believe that the power of art and poetry still influences our scattered minds and souls. Art does not solve our problems, but it does make us aware of them, wake us up to the abyss along the edge of which we are treading.

The programmatic verses of the poem *Catharsis*:

*Spectators enter heavily;
Cain-minded, in the show,
But they come out relieved
With an Abel spirit.*

bear powerful testimony to the social, psychological, human and moral mission of literature, expressed, since antiquity, through Aristotle's catharsis, and out of which literature and art risk extinction.

Art makes us more human and, whenever we have a dilemma that literature is dying, the most powerful counter-

argument is exactly this mission of literature and the perfection of the use of our language. We enter the theater Cain-minded and walk out Abel-minded. Art ennobles us, tames us, civilizes us; the more art disagrees with everyday life, the more it civilizes us and makes us aware of how to perceive life, how to live our lives and how to die. Literature is not an army of weapons, but an army of beautiful words and ideas that make us happy, and cleanse ourselves.

Poetry as Anti-delirium

From the times Socrates teased aedi Jon the Paltoni concluding that "The poet is a unique being: light, flying and holy, and cannot sing before he is enraptured, before he is outside of himself and his sober mind ..." and till the romanticists and bohemists, lyrical poetry was considered a delirium, a state unlike Aristotelian catharsis. Poetry has served as an asylum for the poets inspired by the muses, fairies and other gods of art. And when a man was tired exhausted of the dullness of reality, of daily wolfishness and rapacity, of hatred and cynicism, of jealousy and envy ... then he confined himself in the castle of poetry, and continued to live there in the heat of inspiration, until one day he cut the veins and wrote the last poetry with his own blood.

However, in addition to this poetry, poetry as anti-delirium has always been created. Poetry which, although not acting as a drug, at least saddens, terrifies, alienates and alarms you by placing you in unacceptable life situations. This poem quenches your infatuation. It puts the black spot to death. It untangles the Barbarian Kingdom within you.

Modernity Should not Be Understood Only as a Transfiguration!

Modernity has, more than any other period in the past, invented a lot of ways, media and forms to evade reality. In the first decade of the 21st century, even in the most global medium possible, in what has made the world not just a global village, nor a global metropolis, but simply a global room, even further, a tiny global box, a laptop, iPad or mobile, that is, even at the height of globalization, a man is on Facebook lonelier than ever, and his virtual life farther than ever from his real life. The US President Obama used, in a moment of desperation and homage, the phrase “lone wolves”, hinting at the new strain of humans, a product of computerization and greatly detached from reality, dreamers for the conquest or change of the world.

For this reason, I admire Ismail Syla, Merxhani, Avdyli, Visar Zhiti ..., or even the older ones who amazed us and cleansed us with vital verses, such as Dritëro Agolli ..., for their courage to write poetry when all ridiculed them. I thank them for sending us saddening and alarming messages of the spiritual abyss of the Temple of Rapacity, within which a man has been praying for quite some time now.

Thus, in the end, driven by purely pragmatic and not virtual interests, I ask of poetry to live and, to the extent it can, offer our greedy souls, a piece of ice.

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