

The Carnavalesque “monde à l’envers” and the Parody in the Novel “The Burlesque of Master Perun, God of Thunder” by Rastko Petrovic

Summary: This text conceals a few different theoretical problems, which are basically alike. The main standpoint is one prominent text, that pertains to the Serbian avant-garde literature-“The Burlesque of Master Perun, the God of Thunder”, whose author (Rastko Petrovic) managed to incorporate manifold of diverse texts into a single novel, using parody as a way of transforming the past tradition, both literary and cultural. It is most important to notice the way this parody is being enriched, the carnivalesque, defined (by Mikhail M. Bakhtin) as a sum of different cultural models-texts, ritual and visual forms of presentation, gestures, street communication, etc. In Petrovic’s novel, spatio-temporal correlations are being irrevocably confronted, the way of living in the Slavic paradise, and in Devol, Nabor Devolac as typical antihero, and parody of the epic hero, but Petrovic also tries to obtain a total disintegration of the structure and the sentence through parody. There are many kinds of verbal constructions, that truly characterize the narrator in many ways, colloquial, everyday, thus creating a distinction between the auctorial, and the personal narrator. The end of the text provides (through merging of accents) a new integrated perspective. Basically, through the way parody is arising and spreading, we can also figure out the carnivalesque as a specific way of sensing the world. The identity of several characters is changed in a playful manner, thus reinforcing the parodic discourse, which is powerful, and ambivalent. In this novel, parody functions in a wide range, from characters to stylistic transformations, and change of reader’s/author’s perspective. We consider the generic determination in the title as totally conditional, since the novel does not permit to appear the judgmental dominant ideology, which could otherwise define subaltern consequents (burlesque is characterized usually by its law style, and honorable characters).

Key words: avant-garde, parody, carnivalesque, burlesque, parodic narration

The approach to a kind of avant-garde text such as “The Burlesque of Master Perun, God of Thunder” requires more than a single methodology. Inspired by the predecessors in this particular actualization, such as Stanislav Vinaver, Radovan Vuchkovic, Dragoljub Ignjatovic, Zoran Gavrilovic, Svetlana Slapshak, etc., we are welcoming a specific method-how to interpret this text as more than mythological, Meanipean satire, according to its characteristic non-referential, parodic dominant aspect. This kind of actualization of parodic specifics this avant-garde text brings upon indicates differentiation in the status, and more close theoretical analysis. Although, as Svetlana Slapshak implies “Stanislav Vinaver is the only authentic interpreter of his (Petrovic’s) text in the sense of close-reading”¹, our intention is directed to more deductive, but similar insight in general.

The prominent scholar of Serbian literary history, Jovan Deretic, irrevocably grounds the literary work of Rastko Petrovic as avant-garde, starting from his first poems in the journal “Zabavnik”, to the novel “The Burlesque of Master Perun, God of Thunder” (1921), the cycle of

¹ Светлана Слпшак. *Митургија Растка Петровића*. У: *Књижевно дело Растка Петровића*, ур. Ђорђије Вуковић (Београд: Институт за књижевност и уметност, 1989) 161.

poems “Revelations”, travel writing “Africa”, indicating that since the emergence of his most famous novel “The Day Sixth” (after his death), “Rastko Petrovic gained his major work of art, and became one of the most important Serbian writers in the 20th Century”². Deretic affirms the extravagance, and specific expressionism of Petrovic (although some of the critics are doubting this kind of determination), and asserts the following implication about the early novel: “*The Burlesque of Master Perun, God of Thunder* is one of the most awkward books printed in our country in the years after the first World War. It cannot be said what is not included in its hundred pages: Slavic gods, and Christian saints, Slavic goddesses, and St Marina the Great Martyr, Slavic paradise, Christian hell, and one hospital in Belgrade, Devol farmers and fishermen, the monks of Sveta Gora, and Van Gogh.”³ This statement rapidly acknowledges the carnivalesque, and the vivid diagrammatic of this, often neglected novel in textual analyses.

In order to give wider perspective of the novel, we cannot omit the question that arises instantly-why is the work of Petrovic so heterogeneous, and how can we explain this fact. This is one of the topics that Velibor Gligoric comments, depicting the studies in Paris that Petrovic used to visit, where he started to explore the native cultures, as well as art, literature, and every kind of aesthetic expression. That is why Gligoric quoted the popular statement of Isidora Sekulic, rendering it impressionistic comment: “Moreover, Rastko Petrovic is like a dragon, that hits the tail so that the earth is shaking, that is fiery and strong, whose eye is phantasm and fairytale, but totally close to this ‘dragoness’ is a simple history of a girl, that makes dinner for the dragon, and preens his head in her lap...”⁴ Gligoric does not forget to point out the carnal aspect, kind of “bodyness” that characterizes paradise, earth, and the divine principle in the novel “The Burlesque of Master Perun, God of Thunder”. This fact is also underlined by Zoran Mishic, in the form of “motherhood and cannibalism” as well-known carnivalesque determinations.

Yet, there are also some consequences in the insights of Serbian Avant-garde, that should not pass unnoted. For example, Jan Wierzbicki inquires into the difference of Serbian Modernism and the Avant-garde as not strictly determined stylistic formations (in Serbian tradition). However, this is something that needs to be delimited, and Wierzbicki emphasizes the first difference- closeness of Serbian Avant-garde to the general European model, something

² Јован Деретић. *Историја српске књижевности* (Београд: Нолит, 1983) 517.

³ Ibid., 519.

⁴ Велибор Глигорић. *Растко Петровић. У: Књижевност између два рата*. Ур. Светлана Велмар-Јанковић (Београд: Нолит, 1972) 374-375.

totally different in Serbian Modernism, restricted to its local characteristics: “*Modernism* is in that sense sequel (culmination) of the past century: aesthetization of poetic language is conducted into extremity, we are located into the temple of art, whose clerks-poets use the esoteric, liturgical, saint, and aesthetically marked language. *Avant-garde* is a destruction of this temple.”⁵ That is the reason why Wierzbicki rejects all the statements about Petrovic’s expressionism as erroneous. If the *Avant-garde* attempt to reinvent art, to make it more “popular” in the strict sense of term, modern expression is high poetry.

According to this affirmation of the *Avant-garde*, Miodrag Maticki underlines the “proto-melody” in the lyric of Rastko Petrovic, relating it to the influence of Apollinaire: “Apollinaire influenced Rastko Petrovic in terms of specific evocation of folklore material (...) Rastko Petrovic also understood that he was living in such a moment, when our culture, and especially arts, were found in a gap between the Oriental, and the Occidental.”⁶ All this, enriched with the specific Petrovic’s syntax, makes his works of art constant, and motivational subject for analysis. It is the syntax of the human “parole”, speech act, and again a disintegrated, divided communication, both in space and time. Many critics have stressed the generic compilation that Petrovic used to reunite various hybrid texts, as well as the non-limited generic determination. In this case, paradigmatic example is exactly “The Burlesque”, which is rendered “Encyclopedic, Vavilonic construction, mixture of quotations, paraphrases, and pastiche, fiction, and fact-finding.”⁷ This is precisely our point of departure, the generic accommodation as subjectivness, but also as one of the main structural elements in the novel.

To acquire adequate analysis, we are undoubtedly willing to return to some of the assertions Slapshak made. First, there is the problem of parody as an aspect, a certain point of the Meanipean satire as a dominant genre determination of Petrovic’s novel. Although our intention is not to affirm dialogue with previous critical standpoints (strictly speaking), here we must exhibit infallible definition in order to readjust parody to its carnivalesque aspect (albeit, we do not need a significant effort to agree parody with Slapshak terms like “cultural fiction”, “disqualification of tradition”, and “chaotic cyclic recurrence”).

⁵ Јан Вјежбицки. *Српска авангарда и Растков случај*. У: *Књижевно дело Растка Петровића*, ур. Ђорђије Вуковић (Београд: Институт за књижевност и уметност, 1989) 63.

⁶ Миодраг Матицки. *Прамелодија у лирици Растка Петровића*. У: *Књижевно дело Растка Петровића*, ур. Ђорђије Вуковић (Београд: Институт за књижевност и уметност, 1989) 151.

⁷ Ђорђије Вуковић. *Новатор и претеча*. У: *Књижевно дело Растка Петровића*, ур. Ђорђије Вуковић (Београд: Институт за књижевност и уметност, 1989) 381.

The analysis of parody usually implies two aspects: parody as a trope (figure), and parody as mode of speech. The nature and ontic birth of parody is, as Genette confines, more directed to the opposition of two modes of representation-narrative and dramatic. Parody, understood as “low action in the narrative mode” is severely damaged by the non-preserved antic texts, like the ones of Hegemon of Thasos, the comic epos “Margites”, etc., but the etymology of the term explains the nature of parody: “singing beside, that is, singing off key; or singing in another voice-in counterpoint; or again, singing in another key-deforming, therefore, or *transposing* a melody.”⁸ However, all this specifications include variations in the forms, and aspects of parody-it can be directed to the subject, style, or content. Genette also cites the Latin “Poetics” of Julius Caesar Scaliger, who really manages to emphasize the way parody was born: “Just as satire was born of tragedy, and mime of comedy, so parody derives from rhapsody. In fact, when the rhapsodists interrupted their recitations, entertainers would appear, and in an attempt to refresh the audience would invert everything that had been heard. They were therefore called parodists, since they surreptitiously introduced, alongside the serious subject, other, comic ones. Parody then is an inverted rhapsody, one which through verbal modifications brings the mind back to comic subject.”⁹ This explains why, along with the transformation, parody brings about the mockery (and, usually, in ancient times, mock-heroic element).

Although Petrovic’s novel is, generally speaking, burlesque, and pertains to forms that modify style without altering the subject (as Genette implies), it is only conditionally rendered in the title (in fact, the whole text is really more than burlesque). Parody cannot only be seen as a modification of the subject in a noble genre, it correlates with satire and irony, but in a specific manner. Linda Hutcheon reworked this segmentation, implying the relatedness of parody, irony, and satire: “(...)Irony can be seen to operate on a microcosmic (semantic) level in the same way that parody does on a macrocosmic (textual) level (...)”¹⁰ According to this statement, the evaluative level (the pragmatic one) is shared both by the parody, and the satire. This actually brings into attention the importance of the context. However, as to the seriousness and the comic effect, Modern attempts are directed to separate parody from burlesque as more creative,

⁸ Gérard Genette. *Palimpsests, Literature in the Second Degree*. Trans. Channa Newmann and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) 10.

⁹ Cited according to Genette, op. cit., 14.

¹⁰ Linda Hutcheon. *A Theory of Parody, The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2000) 54.

transformative, and meta-fictional, intertextual form (similar to the affirmation of Margaret A. Rose).

In order to understand the allusive and creative aspect of parody, we need to reevaluate the terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's methodological paradigm. First, we should explain the concept of "carnavalesque literature" as a certain part of the whole literature, where serious and comic, good and bad, living and dying exist in their direct relation. This concept is derived from the medieval tradition of carnival as a double life, dialogism of a specific kind, and in every level, concerning subjects, thoughts, values. The carnivalesque literature (similar to its visual forms) is also characterized through dethronement, fight, wedding as a ritual, meat in meanings of belly, stomach that eats everything, and is being eaten, carnal projections. Bakhtin also gives a suitable context to describe the carnivalesque-two antic forms: Socratic dialogue, and the Menippean satire. As for the dialogue, the way truth is being obtained is a unique characteristic, but the Menippean satire is a kind of mosaic of quotations (in that sense, Slapshak determines Petrovic's novel). Its specifics are humor, inspection of truth, fantastic, and mythical-religious element, three-folded structure, the effect of the double subject (stratification of personality), polemics about certain philosophical, religious, and scientific ideology. But Bakhtin also highlights one specific aspect of this satire-it can be devoured by similar genres, and to that extent Petrovic succeeded to incorporate it into the novel. On the other hand, when Bakhtin writes about double-voiced speech, the fact that parody is not determined as unidirectional double-voiced speech (that is the case of stylization), but is in fact polydirectional, implies existence of two (or even more) intentions and accents (which is also characteristics of hidden polemics as well).

To claim the existence of parody in a polyvalent (and hybrid) structure as "The Burlesque" is a task that requires arguments. First of all, we direct our intention to the possibility of existing source of some quotations (although, most of them are transformed). In some cases, they are more observable, as noted by Slapshak¹¹. The fact that there is a manifold of personifications, and "aliveness" of nature gives the atmosphere of parody, as well as its context, sometimes tautological: "the God of Thunders, thunders out of anger". The ontic principle of beauty, or the so called "kalokagatos" renders Slavic paradise closed for all the intruders-ugly, ill, or old. The omnipresent narrator gives certain facts as not knowable, or based on some

¹¹ Светлана Слапшак. *Митургија Растка Петровића*. У: *Књижевно дело Растка Петровића*, ур. Ђорђевић Вуковић (Београд: Институт за књижевност и уметност, 1989) 168.

sayings, through which we can see the same duality again. The possibility of this kind of narration is parodied by structure, that is full of indecisive enunciations. To this second type of narrator pertains the incorporated story of quarrel between Dajbog, the God of Sun (the factual solar principle is undermined and fragmented), and Troyan. Troyan is a kind of htonic creation, at the same time connected with the legend of King Trayan. The way he commits adulteries obtains parody with new duality-the mixture of antic (Homeric), and Christian tradition, incorporated into a totally new context-the Slavic pantheon. Quite notable is the metamorphosis, the transformation of God Troyan into a bull, naturally as a symbol of fertility, and the cycle of life. The death of the bull, as well as his transformation into a golden idol depicts the total fragmentation of the natural law, though equally prescribed and obtained by the text. The existence of the Slavic paradise is analogue to the life between the Devol farmers. This fact explains exactly the structure of parody-two “worlds” in conflict and dialogue.

Similarly, the story of Manus and Auhrena, the Goddess of Dawn depicts conflict and polemics between the two narrators, the voice of people, and the “creator” of the sense. This story is also very significant to point out the parody of the so called “sentimental love of the Gods”, and the sentimental love in general. What really pertains to the auctorial narrator can be well noted from the following quotation: “Manus is the Moon, Auhrena is the Dawn, Sorya is the Sun, and Perun is the Fiery Rain in the morning. But that is of secondary importance, the important thing is that youth is what I have, and I am twenty-two years old; that my eyes are green, my forehead is high, my mouth is full of love.”¹² It is interesting how this ambivalence, and double-toned manner is finished into a picture similar to the Homer’s “Iliad”, but here the assembly of gods is revoked by the foliation of the chain (not the shield) as a signal of heroic challenge.

The second part is totally unrolled around the main character (if there is something of this kind in the novel). At the beginning, the list of Slavic tribes is given as a signal for the grotesque, hyperbolized, combining the tragic and the comic in a specific mixture, but also as a parody of historic documents, arranged by their specific logics, and deterministic chronological point of view: “(...) in the end of the 8th Century after the birth of the Byzantine God, and at the beginning of the 6th and 4th Century after the creation of the world.”¹³ This pseudo-historical

¹² Растко Петровић. *Бурлеска господина Перуна бога грома* (Београд: Рад, 1955)15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

transformation is enriched with the folk cumulative story. Thus function the folk songs, legends, motifs, etc. That perspective enables us to perceive the voices in conflict with the main subject, as well as the clash of two civilizations-the Slavic, and the Arabic (this is the well-known Slavic literary motif of the Black Arab). The mixture of the accents disables the reader to define one dominant ideology.

This novel also reveals parody, and its origin from the epic-the young brother of Braten, allusively called Boreas, designating the connection between the nature, and the life as it was always (“I have heard that the Greeks live for 200 years”¹⁴), ideological polemics as a kind of motto-“It is better to drop death as soon as possible, when you are useless and slack.”¹⁵ The erotic dream of Nabor, filled with anticipation of the future events, functions as a kind of microcosmic reality, a micro text pointing to the whole textual ground.

The effects of the parodic transcontextualization can be perceived in the following examples: “Youngsters kissed, they hugged, slinging their strong arms over each others shoulder. One of them put his hand onto his chest, and pronounced the formula: ‘Oh, let it be victorious, let it be victorious, heroes are kissing!’ Veles said: Amen.”¹⁶; “The birds were singing: Praise the Lord in Heaven!”¹⁷ All this enunciations which forger the triadic Christian orthodox conception, followed by ones that are supposed utterance of Stefan Lazarevic, pseudo-biblical transformation of a prayer, and the carnivalesque sense of blood, earth, and a chronological life, give undoubtedly the most accurate perspective of the ambivalence in the novel.

Nabor’s presence in Slavic paradise and Christian heaven is deceiving us into a factual character attributes-he manages to slip into it while being alive, fact that gives him a whole characterization. He is a kind of antihero, physically blessed, but without any virtue, and this is also a proof of the multileveled parody, focused not only to the style, which is a mixture of diverse elements, but also to the subject. The festival of the wheat and fire, together with the death (murder) of the son of God Radgost are another demonstration of the intersection between parody, and the carnivalesque-destruction of the well-established subject, inherent relation between life and death, ambivalent concept and equality: “In the valley, in the mountain, or in the Paradise it is all the same! Always the same ground beneath, and the sky is far away. Perun

¹⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹⁵ Ibid., 31.

¹⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹⁷ Ibid., 45.

looks like an aged horse!”¹⁸ The motif of the “bloody” wedding, enriched with the erotic and polemic aspect, gives the ambivalence a new strength—the cosmogonic is perplexed with the allusive and symbolic attack on Patras (the fight over the domination of this place), and supposed sexual intercourse (Nabor actually only swallowed an arrow). The disappearance of Nabor again strengthens the carnivalesque.

The third and the fourth part of the novel assigns the total fragmentation, and its heterogeneous way of being. The time and space relations are completely disintegrated, the mixture of Apocrypha underlines the intertextuality—St. Marina The great Martyr is in hell, and her companion St. Peter is like a mythical Charon, heaven is superimposed to folk paradise, the Satan is like an innocent and naïve child. The range of ideology versus the famous medieval text provides a wider stratification of parody, here understood as a form of intertextuality. Therefore, the relations of certain characters are made possible: Perun, Horzu, and Svantovid in limbos, Triglav as Cerberus, Hilbudius, Vladimir, Jurislav as Agamemnon, Achilles, and the other Homer’s heroes, followed by the direct textual evocation of the “Divine Comedy”.

The appearance of the painter Van Gogh as one of the characters is a kind of narratological signal—history is being analyzed, and then reintegrated into a single narration, ruled by the personal narrator. This is the place, where the effects of the fantastic are perceived in total. It functions as a preface to the new existence of Nabor, parodically deformed into a new figure. Father Simon (Nabor) is now present in the Christian Heaven, a monk that “embroiders” a certain biblical episode (analogue to the ekphrasis perceivable in the 18th book of “Iliad”), enriched with the colloquial utterance. His factual death in heaven, connected with his lies, and cheating, highlights the ambivalence. As well as this, the fourth part is transformed into a genealogy of Nabor’s family, filled with parody of the three witches in “Macbeth”, disintegration of death as an end, and transcontextual story of Milos Obilic. All these arguments, combined with the appearance of the direct descendent of Nabor, Bogoljub, who is revolutionary defines the anatomic section, both in text, and in the Belgrade hospital, incorporated genres, and the whole forcefulness of parody.

“The Burlesque of Master Perun, The God of Thunder” is a text, which spreads a range of interpretations. Its significance can be seen in various passages, depicting the structural and conceptual heterogeneity. However, parody as a trope, and as a transformation of the “parole” is

¹⁸ Ibid., 77.

vividly decomposed-it is tenable and cast light upon certain similar, but also divergent demarked problems. We were concerned with the problem of all kinds of intersection, textual and non-textual, that define the disclose of the factual range of parody. This interpretation is one of the many possible, and our intention was not ruled by the desire to obtain a self-contained whole.

Карневализиран “monde à l’envers” и пародија у роману „Бурлеска господина Перуна бога грома“ Растка Петровића
(Сажетак)

Текст обухвата неколико разноврсних, али и такође сродних теориских проблема. У фокусу интересовања постављен је један знаменити текст из доба српске авангарде—*Бурлеска господина Перуна бога грома*, чији је аутор успео да у романескуну форму инкорпорира веома различите текстове, служећи се углавном поступком пародирања минулих традиција, књижевних и културних. Нарочито је важно приметити да је та пародија савршено обогашена карневализацијом, која је (у бахтиновском смислу речи) збир различитих културних модела-текстова, обредно-визуелних форми, уличних гестова, мимика, заумних језика итд. У овом роману Петровић координира различите временско-просторне егзистенције, начин живљења у словенском рају и у ареалу Девола, Набор Деволац као типичан антихерој и пародија епског хероја, али писац такође покушава да кроз пародију постигне тотална дезинтеграција структуре текста и реченице. Постоје разноврзне вербалне конструкције, које специфицирају приповедача на различите начине-колоквијалне, свакодневне, а које стварају дистинкцију између ауторизованог и персоналног приповедача, тако да крај текста кроз спајање акцената промовише једну нову интегрирану перспективу. Уствари, кроз пародију и проширењем њене функције може се уочити и ширење обима карневализације, која се појављује као посебан начин осећања света. Игре које се одвијају око идентитета неких ликова, као на пр. Набор-Отец Симеон, Триглав-Кербер, Огњена Марија-Беатриче, Свети Петар-Харон итд. само појачавају пародиски дискурс, који је ионако веома амбивалентан. У роману, пародија суштински функционише на све могуће начине, од ликова до стилске трансформације и промене перспективе. Такође, ми сматрамо да је жанровско опредељење у наслову само условно, јер, насупрот тзв. ниског стила бурлеске, који обухвата високу карактеризацију ликова (по мишљењу Аристотела), роман не дозвољава да се уопште појави став доминантне идеологије, која би на такав начин дефинирала своје потчињене консеквенте (ликове).

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