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MILICA PARANOSIĆ: RAZGLEDNICE**

Abstract: *Razglednice (Postcards)*, a piece by Milica Paranosić, has been commissioned by Hungarian Embassy in Belgrade on the occasion of the birth centennial of Miklós Radnóti, a Hungarian poet of Jewish origin who spent his last days in Nazi working camp in the Serbian city of Bor. In four movements, the piece conveys four Radnóti's "postcards" in Hungarian (narrator) and Serbian (soloists and choir), and in the manner of "dramatic oratorio" that transcends the conventional generic boundaries, as well as those between text and music, traditional and classical music, body and language...

Key words: vocal-instrumental music, Serbian music, Milica Paranosić, Miklós Radnóti, *Razglednice*

In the autumn of 1944, after setting out on a journey of no return, the famous Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti (1909–1944) left probably one of the most

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gruesome “travel logs” in the heritage of mankind. With the vehemence of their expressivity, Radnóti’s four *Razglednicák* (*Razglednice*),¹ all of them composed in but a few verses as befits their “genre”, are carved into the body of the recipient and – as newly acquired scars or “snapshots” of a nightmare – remain there forever. One could say that it is precisely those characteristics of structure and content (succinctness of structure, visuality and “corporality” of content) that make them an excellent model for a vocal-instrumental or stage musical work.

It is here, in between the vocal-instrumental and the stage musical work, where Milica Paranosic “places” her interpretation of Radnóti’s *Razglednice*. Responding to a commission by the Embassy of the Republic of Hungary and Klára Szentgyörgyi, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Miklós Radnóti’s birth (2009), Milica Paranosic composed *Razglednice* (*Postcards*) for narrator, soloists, mixed choir, percussion, violoncello and bassoon.² The work had its premiere performance in Bor, in the May of 2009, because it was exactly from this Serbian town where the Hungarian Jew, Miklós Radnóti, had been interned in a Nazi labour camp, that under the supervision of Nazi officers, he set out in a column of camp internees on his journey to the north on foot – to his home, knowing that he would not reach it alive. In the notebook, subsequently found in his pocket during the excavation of mass graves, he wrote his very last impressions and thoughts in the form of verses.

Although professional paths and choices have led Milica Paranosic in directions that are different from conventional genre solutions, of the kind that one may to some extent deem this one to be in *Razglednice*, her experience in working for the

1 *Razglednicák*. They were translated into Serbian by Danilo Kiš (1935–1989) and published in his *Pesme i prepevi* [*Poems and Poetic Translations*] in 1992. In May 1944, Miklós Radnóti was deported to forced labour in the Nazi camp Heidenau, one of many labour camps around the city of Bor. As the Soviet army advanced and the Yugoslav partisans’ operations intensified, the camp was evacuated in late August 1944. On the way from Bor, via Belgrade, Zemun, Novi Sad, and Crvenka – where SS troops executed eight hundred internees – Mohács, Szentkirályszabadja and other Hungarian towns, Miklós Radnóti was, supposedly, killed in Abda. Sergeant András Tálás was tried in 1946/1947 for war crimes, but not including this one in Abda. The remains of Miklós Radnóti were found during the excavation of mass graves, among other things, thanks to a black notebook discovered in the inside pocket of his coat. There was an inscription in Hungarian, Serbian, German, French and English on its cover: “Please, forward this booklet which contains the poems of the Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti to Mr. Gyula Ortutay, Budapest university lecturer, Budapest, VII. Horánszky u. 1. I.” The notebook contained the four *Razglednicák*. Cf. Győző Ferencz: “Radnóti Miklós” at <http://radnoti.mtak.hu/index-en.htm>, accessed on 7th November 2010. The same web presentation by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences contains further information on Miklós Radnóti, as well as the English poetic translations of *Razglednicák* used in this text.

2 At the premiere in Bor in the May of 2009, the work was performed by the Mixed Choir of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, conducted by Biljana Radovanović, with the narrator Gábor Mészáros, the actor from the National Theatre in Subotica, Srđan Sretenović, violoncello, Goran Marinković, bassoon, and Srđan Palačković, percussion. Soloists: Nina Kovač, soprano, Marija Mitić, soprano, Ana Radovanović, mezzo-soprano, Dejan Ljutovac, tenor, Danilo Tošić, tenor, Vuk Žekić, baritone; singers of traditional music: Ana Martinović, Jovana Karnić. With small alterations in the line-up – Ladislav Mezei, violoncello – the work was performed in the Atrium of the National Museum in Belgrade on 27th April 2010, and within the *Europoetika* festival in one of Budapest’s churches, on 30th April 2010. With the help of the Hungarian Embassy and the Faculty of Music, it was also released on a compact disc.

stage and her primary commitment to collaborative multimedia projects (e.g. with the *Vision Into Art* group) where she also acts as a performer, actually make *Postcards* a work in which Paranosić, in a certain sense, sublimates her experiences so far, showing various assets of her powerful creative sensibility and its unbreakable bond – often on the brink of engagement – with the world around her. In responding to the conditions of the commission, Paranosić makes a choice worthy of a mature compositional approach – fully aware of the potential effects of a vocal-instrumental genre. The intimacy of Radnóti's verses requires a narrator. The collectivity from which they arise and the totality they address simply clamour for soloists and a choir. It seems their deadly dramatics can only be embodied in percussion. Their infinite darkness only additionally supported by two basso-continuo instruments. Of course, this pseudo-Baroque line-up, this dramatic oratorio based on the testament of the Holocaust, “speaks” also by music from music (by the elements of musical representation in Milica Paranosić's way), as well as by the music from/of the verses, by the music stemming from the phonetic qualities of the text. Thus putting into motion numerous mechanisms from the rich history of the vocal-instrumental genre, as well as her own skills in combining media, Milica Paranosić in *Razglednice* transcends genre boundaries, stepping into the domain not only of stage music, but also of performance, because, in a certain wondrous way (thanks also to the chosen literary model), it is as though the audience is “invited” to “enter the work”.

Razglednica 1 / Postcard 1

Iz Bugarske divlja topovska kanonada,
hrupi o planine, koleba se, pada;
tiskaju se ljudi, stoka, kola, misli,
put se ržuć vraća, oblaci se stisli.
Ti večno si u meni sred tog komešanja,
nepokolebljiva sjaš sred mog saznanja,
i nema, ko anđeo kad sluša ropac,
il ko u trulom stablu strvokopac.

30. AVGUST 1944. U PLANINAMA.

From Bulgaria thick, wild cannon pounding rolls,
It strikes the mountain ridge, then hesitates and falls.
A piled-up blockage of thoughts, animals, carts and men;
Whinnying, the road rears up; the sky runs with its mane.
In this chaos of movement you're in me, permanent,
deep in my conscious you shine, motion forever spent
and mute, like an angel awed by death's great carnival,
or an insect in rotted tree pith, staging its funeral.

30 AUGUST 1944. IN THE MOUNTAINS.

The gradual narrowing of the focus in the text of the first *Razglednice*, moving from the “distant” sounds of cannon pounding to the “commotion” in the poet’s immediate environment to the (bodily) images of his inner world, was formally conveyed in the first “movement” by a division into three sections. In the first one, the steady and uniform beats of the timpani approach from a “distance”, under the held choral chords, of which the sopranos “detach” themselves soon (b. 12), establishing a “model” for repetition, characterized by the staccato reiteration of the pitches and the occasional second-interval motion over the held notes of the other choral voices. The narrator/Radnóti in the Hungarian language exposes two thirds of the text before the soloists in an octave “imitation” (alto in b. 15, then soprano in b. 25) start exposing the first verse of the Serbian translation. Their melodies are also coloured mostly by semitone movements and syllabic treatment. In the “codetta” of the first section, the alto and the soprano are joined by the solo tenor in “free imitation” (b. 32).

On the whole, the “first impression” is one of gravity, of regularity which, by repetitive technique, imprints in the listeners’ consciousness a (pre)sentiment of the intransigence of fate, whose final moment is drawing ever nearer. Variants of this material appear in the second *Razglednice* (quaver movement in choral chords, b. 27 onward) and the fourth *Razglednice* (the beginning, homophonic choral texture in crotchets). The first *Razglednice* is the origin of the procedures and materials that are important for the entire work, setting them as “ready-made” solutions or only hinting at them, which is attested to by introducing the whisper/speech of the choral singers and soloists in its second section. The “instrumentalization” of the voices (by singing on a neutral syllable – but singing nonetheless), announced by the repetitive model, now grows into the transformation of the voices into the percussion (b. 36 onward). With its loud, rhythmic whispering in a fugato, the choir exposes the “second part” of the poem, and the percussive effect is complemented by the whispers and exclamations of the soloists, where the phonetic potential of the verses is fully exploited, by turning the “whinnying” into the harsh sound of rhythmic “martellato” shouting the syllable “rz” (b. 39–41). The pseudo-recapitulation of the first section begins in bar 45, by re-exposing the repetitive model, augmented at first, with the “echoes” of the whisper/commotion from the previous section and the beginning of the last verses of the poem in the solo alto part. Another important “notification” on the subsequent content of the work is the announcement of the “angelic” voice of the soprano, here only drafted in the florid entry on the verse “I nema, ko anđeo...” (b. 57–61). By transferring the soloists’ whisper into the choir, by the narrative exposition of the final verses in Hungarian, over the incessant beats of the timpani, the *Razglednice* enters its coda, where the now “exhausted” held notes of the soloists, which show only traces of resistance (inner voices minor-second apart) and penetrating cowbells instead of the timpani, open the abyss of horror which is yet to play out.

Razglednica 2/ Postcard 2

Na devet kilometara odavde gore
stogovi i kuće se ruše,
a na poljima, sedeći nemo,
preplašeni seljaci iz lula puše.
Ovde još bosom nogom jezero muti
čobanica mlada
i oblake piju, nagnuta nad vodom,
kudrava stada.

CRVENKA, 6. OKTOBAR 1944.

Nine kilometres from here the haystacks and
Houses are burning;
sitting on the field's edges some scared and speechless
poor folk are smoking.
Here a little shepherdess, stepping onto the lake,
ruffles the water;
the ruffled sheep flock at the water drinks from
clouds, bending over.

CRVENKA, 6 OCTOBER 1944

The somewhat “muted” cowbells trigger, only for a few seconds, the painting of a new pastoral landscape of the second *Razglednice*. Paranosić here “summons” her experience in using folklore, her fascination with folk singing and the sound of the gusle.³ The country idyll of Miklós Radnóti, untouched by the horrors of war, does not lull the author for one moment. Her attention is drawn by the image of “speechless folk” and burnt haystacks and village houses. She asks the choir singers to “roll” the held notes (perfect fourths) from their throats to their lips and back, thus achieving a “mute howling” of imprecise pitch – turning them once more into instruments with which she achieves the effect of a distant wind and/or country fire. At some point the cowbells disappear, and the timpani roll should resemble a “terrifying mooing”. Against this background two female vocals stand out, two keeners who, by a nasal syllabic rendition of the first four verses, definitely evoke the rural setting, but certainly not its idyllic side. The required distance in their performance completes the “reporter’s style” of Radnóti’s verses. As already said, bar 27 is the starting point of the variant of the repetitive model from the first *Razglednice*, which now accompanies Radnóti’s rendition of verses in

3 By the late 1990’s, Milica Paranosić was doing research in the sphere of traditional music and music-making, and at the beginning of the new century, after she was presented with the gusle, more and more often in her performances she appeared as a gusle player.

Hungarian, and then in bars 32–33, the role of the narrator is taken over by the violoncello and the bassoon, while the choir and the (standard) soloists begin to sing the remaining verses. The required “imprecise”, imperfectly tuned sound of the violoncello and the bassoon suggests the “ruffled” water, but also the folk-music intonation; and the increasing blossoming of their parts contributes to the general climax reached in this section of the *Razglednice*. However, the parts are essentially anchored to the second-apart relationships, much the same as the keeners, creating a peculiar sound mixture of the basso-continuo instruments and the gusle. The instruments will reduce to a single held note, the choir will return to the perfect fourths, the cowbells and the timpani to their “scary” functions, while the narrator and the keeners, now together, are “reporting” (from b. 44) about the “ruffled sheep flocks”. Again the movement ends with the threatening and penetrating sound of the cowbells, thus reminding us of the beginning and ending signals in the *tableaux* of Igor Stravinsky’s *Petrushka*.

Razglednica 3 / Postcard 3

Iz volovskih gubica krvava bala toči,
ljudi bolno-krvavo mokre,
četa se kužno u gomili vrti.
Nad nama frkće gnusoba smrti.

MOHAČ, 24. OKTOBAR 1944.

Bloody saliva hangs on the mouths of the oxen.
Blood shows in every man’s urine.
The company stands in wild knots, stinking.
Death blows overhead, revolting.

MOHÁCS, 24 OCTOBER 1944

Most striking of all, the third *Razglednice* fully exploits the already suggested potentials of the “instrumentalization” of voices, theatricalization of the literary basis, and corporalization of sound. In this completely rhythmic image, the listeners are “thrown” into a turmoil of horror initiated by the verses. They are carried away and hurled, battered and torn apart by the waves of sound, by the scratching of the consonants, gyrating with the choir in a ritualistic, quasi-dervish dance to death. At the opposite end of the “spectrum”, the “silent” angel (the soprano), sings incessantly, repeating its innocent little tune – a kind of *preghiera* – flooded by the waves of sound, barely audible above them now and then. The composer seeks various nuances of speech – from a whisper to a scream. She adds a “sound-

track" to the choir singers in the form of "chains"⁴, requiring them to walk forward and back, suggesting the "wild knots" of the company.⁵ Rhythmically, the uniform scansion allows for a gradual rise and fall of tension, and the effect is definitely enhanced by the skilfully used syllables from the Serbian translation, such as: "kr" (krvava, krvavo, mokre), "rt" (vrti, smrti), "fr" (frkće) etc. Radnóti joins the choir by "abandoning" the angel (or has the angel abandoned him?) in the middle section of the movement, based on multiple repetitions of the text, and time and again he repeats his text together with the choir. The composer allows the "free mixing" of the words, by which she clearly emphasizes the general atmosphere achieved by the treatment of the sound and the performance-like aspects of the musical flow, rather than by the semantics of the text. It is only important that the singers end this part of the work with the word "smrt" (death). The ghost people retire and the angelic soprano (b. 66) is gradually supported by the second soprano and alto, interweaving in the expositions of the *preghiera*, backed up also by the pedal notes in the continuo instruments and by the "touch of magic" of the bells in bars 72-73.

Razglednica 4 / Postcard 4

Sruši se kraj njega, telo se prevrnu,
Već zgrčeno beše ko struna na mrazu.
Metak u potiljak. – Ovako ćeš i ti, –
Šapnuh sebi – polegni na stazu.
Trpljenje procveta u smrt što mori. –
Der springt noch auf – začuh nad sobom,
Krvavo se blato u uhu mi skori.

SENTKIRALJSABADJA, 31. OKTOBAR 1944.

I fell beside him; his body turned over,
already taut as a string about to snap.
Shot in the back of the neck. That's how you too will end,
I whispered to myself: just lie quietly.
Patience now flowers into death.
Der springt noch auf, a voice said above me.
On my ear, blood dried, mixed with filth.

SZENTKIRÁLYSZABADJA, 31 OCTOBER 1944

4 Although this effect was eliminated from the recorded version as "not being authentic" (since the internees wore a kind of clogs and were not chained), we think that "revisiting" this effect would be multilaterally important, both with respect to the "total" sound and to the potential expansion of the meaning towards a humanistic critique of all forms of slavery.

5 The Serbian translation of this verse uses the image of people "shuffling around pestiferously".

The final *Razglednice* begins with a pistol shot, instead of the timpani or cowbells. It also “triggers” the return of the repetitive model in the choir. The soloists in a homophonic texture interpret the first few verses, accompanied by the Hungarian narration. Then they take over as “narrators”, uttering simultaneously or consecutively the verses, “Ovako ćeš i ti – polegni na stazu”. The violoncello and the bassoon bring the variant of *preghiera* (b. 38), which becomes but another layer in the situation that repeats itself up to bar 88. Singing for “Trpljenje procveta...” – speech for “Der spring noch auf” (He is still twitching). And then, in bar 88, the angel, “angelically, calmly, completely free” (on the vowel sound “oo”) takes over the *preghiera* once and for all from the violoncello and the bassoon. The repetitive choral pattern slowly “dematerializes”, “becoming blunt” and falling silent, blending itself into the *pianissimo* held notes. The florid soprano melody, from bar 125 onward, is additionally coloured by the “heavenly” campanelli (*celestia a piacere*), and then from bar 131 Radnóti/the narrator utters the last verses of the first *Razglednice*:

*“S némán, akár az angyal, ha pusztulást csodál,
Vagy korhaadt fának odván temetkező bogár.”*

The basic three-note motive of the *preghiera* disappears in the campanelli, the long notes still being held *pianissimo* until – the final pistol shot.

Although Milica Paranosić’s angel, like Miklós Radnóti’s, may have become “speechless” with terror, the fact that it was summoned again, both in the work and by the work *Razglednice*, speaks about our need and responsibility to remember our own failings, in the hope that, one day, they will make us worthy of an angelic address. Because the moment when the static nature of the vocal-instrumental genre turns into the mobility and corporality of stage music is also the moment when the ideological “message” of the vocal-instrumental genre surrenders to the benefit of communicating universal human values.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović

Весна Микић

МИЛИЦА ПАРАНОСИЋ: РАЗГЛЕДНИЦЕ

РЕЗИМЕ

У делу *Разгледнице*, наруџбини Амбасаде Републике Мађарске у Београду, ауторка Милица Параносић користи своје богато перформерско искуство које је стекла у раду са групом *Vision into Art*, да би слушаоцима указала на могућа, па може се рећи и нужна, прекорачења граница вокално-инструменталног жанра. Мада осмишљено као савремени „драмски ораторијум“, на стихове трагично преминулог мађарског песника јеврејског порекла, Миклоша Раднотија (на мађарском језику и препеву Данила Киша на српски), дело *Разгледнице* осваја својим савременим сензибилитетом, остварујући тако неопходни савремени музичко-сценски исказ о ужасима који припадају прошлости наше цивилизације. Жанровске границе Параносићева напушта повременим искорацима у сферу перформанса (*III разгледница*), константном језичком „поремећеношћу“ услед билингвалности, улогом наратора са једне, и хора и солиста са друге стране, као и коришћењем фонетских квалитета језичких јединица музички – скретањем у квази традиционални третман гласова (*II разгледница*) и инструмената (виолончело, *II разгледница*). Ту, у окружењу које се налази између „чистих“ подручја, композиторски исказ Милице Параносић, нераскидиво срастао са оним поетским Миклоша Раднотија, налази се у стању „постајања“ хумани(стички)м.

Кључне речи: вокално-инструментална музика, српска музика, Милица Параносић, Миклош Радноти, *Разгледнице*