

MRGUDA BY PETAR KOČIĆ – A VICTIM OR A REAL HERO

UDC 821.163.41-32.09 Kočić P.

Sunčica Denić

Pedagogical Faculty in Vranje, University of Niš, Serbia

Abstract. *A strong love and suffering because of it, almost an archetypal motif and a common mythopoetic theme, is the basis of the story Mrguda by Petar Kočić. Mrguda represents poeticized death with the power of great ancient heroes of post-Homeric age. It seems that only by death is Mrguda able to restrain body strength and desire, the fire that cannot be quenched; to overpower physical by spiritual. The character of Mrguda can be seen not in the fight, as Vitomir Vuletić wrote, but in yearning for death – or phraseologically – in heroic death. Does a suicide possess heroic or brave qualities, that is an eternal question. Mrguda's taking is, in one hand, taking of the body, while the soul remains to live; taking the soul would go into another direction – the body does not belong to the universe, memory and eternity anyway.*

Key words: *Petar Kočić, Mrguda, a strong love and suffering, poeticized death, traditional, patriarchal, modern realistic-psychological short story*

A strong love and suffering because of it, almost an archetypal motif and a common mythopoetic theme, is the basis of the story *Mrguda* by Petar Kočić. *Mrguda* represents poeticized death with the power of great ancient heroes of post-Homeric age. It seems that only by death is *Mrguda* able to restrain bodily strength and desire, the fire that cannot be quenched; to overpower physical by spiritual. The character of *Mrguda* can be seen not in the fight, as Vitomir Vuletić wrote, but in yearning for death – or phraseologically – in heroic death. *Does a suicide possess heroic or brave qualities*, that is an eternal question. Medicine has characterized suicide as a cowardly act, and the teaching of Christ condemns suicide, interpreting it as an attack on Lord-Creator himself. We do not have the right to take what's not ours, something we have not created by ourselves, as, according to another theory, we have the right to be the master of our own body. *Mrguda's* taking is, on the

Received December 25, 2020/Accepted December 31, 2020

Corresponding author: Sunčica Denić

Pedagogical Faculty in Vranje, University of Niš, Partizanska 14, 17500 Vranje, Serbia
Phone: +381 17 431 960 • E-mail: suncicadenic@gmail.com

one hand, taking of the body, while the soul remains to live; taking the soul would go into another direction – the body does not belong to the universe, memory and eternity anyway.

The rebellion of Mrguda's being, although she is the pinnacle of that rebellion, can be felt long before her end. It would seem – from her birth, her conception, because “her mother was restless as well”. Although she tried with all her being to take care not to be seen blushing when going past the house of the Boreković, not to be reproached by anybody, not to provoke anyone to think ill of her or say something bad about her, as she would fight back because of her fierce character – as the writer says. Mrguda feels and bears the burden of her licentious mother, and the fact that she is “of the bastard kind” makes her go wild, defend herself, resist the so-called Biological excess as much as she can. With her characteristics, strength and beauty, she evokes something big, something which will make a big cut, like in Ancient Greek tragedies, and confirm the old knowledge that something created like that does not belong to anyone. The poetic quality of her character is under a certain curse and charisma; it possesses power thanks to God's mercy. She is tall and beautiful. Her face light brown, with high cheekbones, and the rest of the body perfect, fresh, robust like a fed lamb. Her large, deep, black eyes are always watery for some reason; and her nose straight, fleshy, with round nostrils, a little bit turned-up. Her lips are full and always red. Only when she gets angry do they quiver and turn pale.“ Apart from all this, Kočić wrote, “Mrguda has, what people say, sweet blood – sweet, overly sweet! And when she starts to sing: *My loved one is getting ready for the army* – almost every woman whose son is in the army starts to cry. The bastard knew how to sing that song with sadness.“ (Kočić, 1968, p. 49)

Kočić's characters are decisive, firm, strong and dynamic, different from Stanković's, although they are often compared, but Stanković's characters are indecisive at the end, while ready for great suffering. Kočić's Mrguda kills herself, clearly pointing out that that is the price of her purity and her love. With Borisav Stanković, a declaration of purity and love is quiet and melancholic death, carrying the secret as a cross.

Jovan Cvijić characterized the Dinaric region as patriarchal. It is an area inhabited by physically strong people, with a strong moral code, deep sense of justice, unselfish and brave – decisive, ready to make a sacrifice. “A Dinaric man“, Cvijić wrote, “is a man who has preserved his old Slavic sensitivity and Christian generosity, but has also inherited a lot of new and old features from the former inhabitants of the areas he settled. A Dinaric man is full of strength, explosive, strong-willed – he will do what he means to do, and is venturesome and bold. (...) His senses are highly developed (...) and his every gesture is very audible and obvious”. (Cvijić, 1921, pp. 242-243)

The material poverty and other kinds of poverty of Kočić's people did not cause moral impoverishment. That world is always morally rich, and that strength makes a specific world of Kočić's characters. We can single out Mrguda there, a poeticized character, above a lot of other characters, a passionate and lyrical icon of tragic schematism: folk and Christian tradition, and new, Western open-minded and active milieu. What also contributes to the untypical quality of her character is her uncompromising attitude to everything: to love, purity, belonging, and heritage.

In a certain sense, Mrguda gives a direction to her suffering. It can be measured by the so-called *Kosovo measure*, by which Miloš Obilić proves his justness and decisiveness. That religious-patriotic orientation of the Medieval Serbian hero is conditioned by the moral tone and conviction: through death to **apogee** – the acme. The strength of love is confirmed by giving. And the greatest giving is the giving of heart, life.

In this short story (and partly in *Tena*), Petar Kočić depicted Mrguda's emotional, instinctual being, whose essence emanates from nature itself, from physicality and lusciousness. "The development of the conflict between natural beauty and wild drives, (...) in the intellectual sphere of meaning assumes the tragic quality of the exile of beauty and lack of sense of beauty" (Filipović, 1980, p. 154), as in the case of *Field Poppy (Bulka)* by Veljko Petrović, about which Vuk Filipović wrote the above. Mrguda is thrown into two landscapes, as if into two worlds: the outer and the inner one. Those are two opposites on which Kočić built her character. Those are the paradoxes which function as a certain *accord of differences*: rebellion and suffering same as heaven and earth, or, better said, earth and heaven. (Certain holy fathers said that it is a real feat to *live heavenly on earth*).

Image one:

"Water everywhere around her, light and vast fragrant spring foliage. The air clean after rain, glimmering and glowing like glass. Water ripples and slowly flows around her white, round legs (...)" (Kočić, 1968, p. 48)

Image two:

"The wind cracks and breaks branches of the row of cherry trees above the building, whistles powerfully, then howls briefly and sharply and shakes the building. The wind plucks and shakes off dry, withered leaves..." (Ibid, p. 50)

Image three:

"The river hums in the distance. Water hums on the water wheel and falls into the trough. Through pleasant humming and flowing of water, you can almost hear someone's whisper. You turn around – but you cannot see anything. You can just hear the river humming, and feel the autumn's night labored breathing." (Ibid)

Kočić uses the landscape to calm down or stir the dramatic nature of the plot in this novelistic story. Stanko Korać, writing about the landscapes of Vladan Desnica, said: "Outer landscape encloses a man in a certain view of the world, the inner landscape is used by man to fight against the corruption of the world. In both cases, art shapes strange details without which it wouldn't be able to exist" (Korać, 1972, p. 98). This outer order depicted in three images suggests emotional, inner, affective state, and it will create an actual moment of *mythic suffering*.

Image one:

"She raised her head, threw the battledore on the shore, stretched herself, and suddenly broke into song almost unawares: *My loved one is getting ready for the army*. Her eyes filled up with tears, and her body began to shake quietly. Her voice was loud and pleasant; it was overflowing with bitterness, defiance, ardent passion." (Kočić, 1968, p. 48)

Image two:

"She had a sinful thought, which made her tremble. – What I thought, it's no good! It's sinful and hateful to God. God, why did you create me like this? What should I do with this strength and fire? Damn blood, why are you torturing me like this?!" (Ibid, p. 50)

Image three:

"So, Maleta's Mrguda hanged herself, I wish earth would throw out her bones! This town plunged because of her..."

– Do not swear, child! (...) The town is God's will. Mrguda made a mistake, but she also repented her sins." (Ibid)

Perhaps it would be better to give images of the two worlds alongside one another; however, even like this, one can feel hierarchical harmony through this inner and outer dynamics, towards peacefulness – silence and serenity. The space of dramatic action

belongs more to Mrguda's inner space of escape or departure; the virtue in it is symbolic action and her reflective spirit, which asks more from life than can be expressed in words, and gives everything to love. Mrguda decides. She, contrary to Stanković's heroines, is not obedient, does not succumb to the agony of loneliness and sorrow. Sofka's **I won't** and **I can't**, when it comes to her is **I will** and **I can**. Bora's Cveta in the short story "At Night" puts a fist into her mouth, constrains herself, prays and strives to contain her feelings, not to display even a glimmer of passion, not to show an error or a sin, while Mrguda – like an epic revolutionary hero speaks, caresses, shows: "I love you", she says to Mika, "I'm dying for you ... I would give my soul for you! You want some soul? (...) Is the soul in the blood!" (Kočić, 1968, p. 48) She throws a handkerchief soaked in blood from her cut upper arm in front of Mika as a proof of true love. For Mrguda, Mika is the apple of her eye and her treasure, and *his caresses turn her body, burning like a dark blue mountain sky, into a dead pale one, exhausted and burnt out from kisses and devotion*. In the structure of Mrguda, the boundary between the earth and sky is almost invisible. The highest point of her love experience is complete surrender – almost like dying. A similar exhaustion, let us remember, is experienced by Sofka in *Impure Blood*. When asked by ardent master Marko whether she loved everyone in the house, she answered: Everyone, the house, you, and you the most. "But then she felt an extreme weakness. She felt a surge of heat rushing into her from his hand, accompanied by a strange, never-felt-before feeling." (Kočić, 1968, p. 49) However, based on the choice of the thing to surrender to - death, Mrguda is closer to Marko than to Sofka. He also for love and its miracles *went with moonlight to find some other Sofka, into the spaces of dreaming and spirituality*, without breaking old rules or divine laws, while Sofka's chasm had another dimension: it smelled of resin, and had an ashen face. Comparing Stanković and Kočić is almost a regular qualification of the spiritual and stylistic unity of the two writers, and we can say - friends, two of the greatest loners that Belgrade ever saw.

According to Radivoje Mikić (2006) "erotic frenzy in the works of Bora Stanković is always depicted as a combination of life and death (...), as the moment when life itself in a young person seems to be dying out under the weight of intense feelings, which can be seen in a series of images of life process fading away and dying out".

"Her cheeks were so flushed that it seemed that blood would come out of them any moment. She closed her eyes, leaned on me with her whole body, clasped my hand tightly, while hot sweet breath was coming out of her dry silent lips. Thus I held her in my arms, embraced, squeezed and numb." (Stanković, 1979, p. 98)

This is an image from the story "St. George's Day". Mikić saw Borisav Stanković's characters living on the relation: Eros - moonlight – death, and as an important motif of the writer he did not include the so-called *incessant sorrow for something*, as a metaphysical resume (Ibid). While they try to stifle and suppress that *constant sorrow*, running away from, getting away from God's punishment, Mrguda goes for self-sacrifice, does not fear God, but throws herself right into his arms, fearing the judgment of the world. By decomposing her feelings, as well as her life, Mrguda built herself into a multi-dimensional character and personality, leaving no one indifferent in her place, not even old people. That brings us to a very important chronotopic statement: those who are often the carriers of the code of the masses and the social milieu, defend the purity of her soul and body, qualifying her suicide as a harmonious communication with the Almighty.

Midhat Begić wrote about Mrguda that *she is magnificent in the sense of Bora Stanković*. Branko Lazarević also compared Kočić to Stanković, pointing out the strong

lyricism they both introduced to our short story. Besides this, Lazarević (1937) wrote that “Kočić and Stanković introduced a special kind of a mysterious, passionate and lustful woman, those that inherited *sweet, overly sweet blood, cursed, impure blood, hot blood*, those that have *vigorous flesh*, those who are always *on fire* and *bubbling over*; those who have passion in their eyes, passion that has to be fulfilled, and which is so hot that it doesn't think about consequences“ (p. 93). The consequence is death: with Stanković it is quiet and heavy, melancholic; in Kočić's writings quick, almost joyful.

Mrguda fights against biological inheritance, fleeing from passion as the curse of the milieu where she lives. And the code of the social milieu is brutal, more brutal than her enjoyment. Fearing the power of love in whose *tribe bastards are born*, she gets away and flees for fear of meeting Mika alone before the wedding, in order not to get her body crushed by fire, in order not to make a mistake. (In Bora Stanković's works, even crazy Naza abstains from physical contact before the wedding, in order not to commit a sin.)

According to Isidora Sekulić (1964), Mrguda is “an individual in her own right, and the story about her is powerful, passionate, short and abrupt like a scream. (...) It is one of the paradoxes of Bosnian toughness, harshness, shyness, Highlander asceticism, maliciousness and spite“ (p. 13).

In Mrguda's death, one can see a so-called *poetic purity*, to use the words of Midhat Begić from the text *Poetic Purity of Impure Blood*. Mrguda is, thus, afraid of her biological inheritance. By turning towards herself, she chose a direction against herself, against life. Dying, Mrguda saves both herself and love. In a way, she shows that love for her is **agapi** – identification with the holy and pure. As Vera Georgijevna (1995) said in the book *The Philosophy of Isihasm*: “Love is the essence of all virtues. It is larger than prayer. Love is the same as God. (...) As love in God, man – person has his own pre-form, his original. Through love one gets to know God, and a person in love achieves a new essence“ (p. 89).

That is how some people by dying – are born. With Mrguda, the fear of making a mistake and the impossibility of returned love is turned into death, and death is identified with truth – because a perfect order can only be established in death. Also, one can say that in Mrguda's case death carries the meaning of transformation. “Nothing is more alluring than life for justice. Only death for justice can be more powerful and more alluring“ (Jevtić, 1997, 72), said Atanasije Jevtić. Kočić ennobles his whole work by such *literary death*, and modernity can arise from this most traditional of all moments: through death to confirming one's wholeness. “Psychoanalysts talk about *meetings with oneself* in order to solve the spiritual chaos and discomposure, same as spiritual guides use confession to confront man with sin in order for him *to listen to himself*. (...) By self-sacrifice, they (rare heroes) show who they are, and not only who they should be“ (Denić, 2003, p. 232). This so-called “wrestling with God“ (Vladeta Jerotić's term) is a display of boldness and courage, though it can also be an answer to a some kind of test. Who tests man? – Jerotić asks himself in his contemplation on the theme of *Jacob's ladder* in *Jung's Wrestling with God*. “He firsts tests himself, and then he is tested by other people and demons.“ By climbing the ladder leading from earth to heaven, tired from other people, we go into a battle with God or we surrender ourselves to him. This surrender can be penitence. “Blessed be the one who, after a powerful wrestling with the deep sea of his death, suffering and sorrow, wakes up with a blessing“, with this Jerotić ended his aforementioned thesis, always with the question: **individuation or (and) deification**. Believing that Mrguda's “wrestling“ is with a blessing, we realize the real Kočić's attitude towards people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and towards God.

Where does the modernity of Kocić's expression lie?

In one part, he painted images more than he did storytelling, he observed more than he experienced. Radovan Vučković (1989) said that Kočić, instead of "depicting outer world, gave a reflex of the soul in sharp, (...) naturalistic rough strokes" (p. 95). Predrag Palavestra (1995) characterized Kočić's literary method as *rebellious realism*, and Mrguda as a rare Kočić's character under development. He categorized Kočić as one of the writers who carried a *true literary renewal*.

"His works are rightfully full of elements which make him a writer belonging to modern school of literature, and a man of a new cultural epoch. (...) Behind what can be seen on the outside there is a hidden spiritual space, another and a different world is glowing, a different reality. This is the reality of the human soul, and its overflowing tragic power, which is on the brink of exploding, and by this either creating something new or disappearing into nothingness." (Ibid, p. 375)

The case of Mrguda, a victim or a real heroine, reminds us of or directs us to the autobiographic image given by Kočić (1968) in *The Song of Youth*: "My youth was slowly dying away on my lap, its full blossoming breasts emanating a strong scent of scattered, withered flowers and spilt funeral wine" (p. 414).

Mrguda is a modern realistic-psychological short story in which the moralistic, patriarchal and traditional is transformed into psychopathological, and that certainly is a contemporary space and a modern creative act of Petar Kočić.

REFERENCES

- Cvijić, J. (1921). *Govori i članci, I*. Beograd: Napredak.
- Denić, S. (2003). *Književno delo Manojla Đorđevića Prizrenca*. Priština – Leposavić: Institut za srpsku kulturu.
- Filipović, V. (1980). *Umetnost Veljka Petrovića*. Priština: ANUKIM.
- Georgijevna, V. (1995). *Filozofija isihazma*. Niš: Gradina.
- Jevtić, A. (1997). *Kosovska misao i opredeljenje episkopa Nikolaja*. Srbinje: Vladika Nikolaj u svom i našem vremenu.
- Kočić, P. (1968). *Pripovetke*. Beograd: Prosveta.
- Korać, S. (1972). *Svijet, ljudi i realizam Vladana Desnice*. Beograd: SKZ.
- Lazarević, B. (1937). *Ogledi*. Beograd: SKZ.
- Palavestra, P. (1995). *Istorija moderne srpske književnosti*. Beograd: SKZ.
- Mikić, R. (2006). *Stari dani. Pogovor u knjizi Stari dani*. Vranje: KZ Borisav Stanković.
- Sekulić, I. (1964). *Iz domaćih književnosti II*. Novi Sad: Matica Srpska.
- Vučković, R. (1989). *Od Ćorovića do Ćopića*. Sarajevo: Oslobođenje.
- Stanković, B. (1970). *Stari dani/Božji ljudi*. Beograd: Prosveta.

MRGUDA PETRA KOČIĆA – ŽRTVA ILI ISTINSKI JUNAK

Kod Mrgude se strah od greške i nemogućnost uzvraćene ljubavi pretvara u smrt, a smrt se poistovećuje sa istinom – jer se, samo u smrti uspostavlja savršen red. Poetska čistota njene smrti pomera granice shvatanja samoubijanja, pretvarajući biološkim otporom slikovnu, čak zvučnu vasionu čistote. Po tome bi njen čin bio deo inicijacije koji je dolazio sa blagoslovom.

Ključne reči: *Petar Kočić, Mrguda, snažna ljubav i patnja, neuzvraćena ljubav, tradicionalni okvir, samoubistvo*