

EROS AS A CONSTANT IN NIKOLIC'S POETICS

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Abstract- The depth of the problems that Nikolic procedures in his movies arise from the specific subject matter that was unlike some other arts, above all literature, in this field of aesthetic expression in the unique cultural and conceptual framework of former Yugoslavia, less prevalent. Although it is difficult to talk about their polyphonic or polymorphic characteristics, the clear and dramatic functional narratological structure of his movie stories should be pointed out, so much more since Nikolic never dealt with esoteric subjects and vain speculations, but he tried to rise the narrative statement to a level of absolute recognition, especially when he the anthropological discourse embodied in traditional norms, mystical and theological dogmas were involved. In such an approach, abstracting straight guided plot lines and extensive exposures, we can undoubtedly speak of full compliance and *permeation* of all the expressive constituents of the diegetic structure in Nikolic's movies. A strongly emphasised demystification of ultra-traditional interpretation of eros and simultaneously its relationship with ethos, the constant confrontation with extreme ethical views and distorted visions, as well as his persistence in debunking the dominant and burdensome taboos, are particularly important in Nikolic's narrative. Thus *comprehended* Eros together with so-called "forbidden topics" and their hidden and often ambivalent meanings, including possible deviations from their essence, often take precedence over other thematic elements in the dramaturgical structure of Nikolic's movies.

Key words: Eros, Tanathos, Libido Sexualis, tradition, idiosyncrasy, transcendency, homosexuality.

1.Introduction

Montenegrin director Zivko Nikolic was a unique personality of former Yugoslav cinematography. With his distinctive geo aesthetic approach filled with numerous paradoxes, although not directly related to the paradox of his contingent pseudocentricity, which a low level criticism often stressed as an argument against him, and as well a rare gift for observing details, Nikolic manages both cinematically convincing and vivid to pass onto the screen the customs of the people in the area he originates from and at the same time to transform them into strong poetic metaphors. It is possible to talk about Nikolic's poetics as a specific and, in many ways, unique aesthetic synthesis, in which intertextual intertwining makes one of its essential qualities. Nikolic never dealt with superficial factography. As a matter of fact, he kept trying to raise the issue he interpreted to the level of an aesthetic fact, i.e. that from the manner in which it appears its universality breaks out. Nikolic's movies are mostly different from the ones of the Yugoslav authors known as "The Belgrade Circle" and "The Czech School". In fact, more than a decade Nikolic was a true counterbalance to all dominant styles and currents in Yugoslav cinematography. He also did not belong to any film school, style or movement, as if he did not belong to the chronotope in which he created, but the one he himself created in his movies.¹

¹ Nikolic was born in Ozrinici, a village near Niksic, Montenegro, in 1941, where he died and was buried in 2001. Although he won a few national awards for his outstanding artistic achievements and more than a hundred prominent international awards for his movies, Nikolic died in poverty, frustrated, forgotten, and almost starving, like a beggar. When in former Yugoslavia in the early nineties broke the savagely brutal Civil War and bloodthirsty nationalists took their positions, the themes Nikolic offered to producers were not acceptable. Nikolic is the author of seven feature movies, twelve documentaries and two television series. His feature movies, which we analyze in this paper, were made from 1977 to 1989: THE BEASTS, 35mm, color, 2700m. Production Co: Avala film, Belgrade / Zeta film, Budva / Dunav film, Belgrade / Filmski studio, Titograd. Country: Yugoslavia. Year of release: 1977; JOVANA, LUKE'S WIFE, 35mm, color, 2700m. Production Co: Avala film, Belgrade. Country: Yugoslavia. Year of release: 1979; THE DEATH OF MR.GOLUZA, 35mm, color, 2423m. Production Co: Avala film, Belgrade / Avala pro film, Belgrade /Slovenska filmowa tvorba Koliba, Bratislava / Kemal i partner, Salzburg. Country: Yugoslavia. Year of release: 1982; THE UNSEEN MIRACLE, 35mm, color, 2516m. Production Co: Zeta film, Budva / Centar film, Belgrade. Country: Yugoslavia. Year of release: 1984; THE BEAUTY OF VICE, 35mm, color, 3050m. Production Co: Centar film, Belgrade. Country: Yugoslavia. Year of release: 1986; IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE, 35mm, color, 2517m. Production Co: Zeta film, Budva / Avala pro film, Belgrade / Centar film, Belgrade / Montex, Nikšić. Country: Yugoslavia. Year of release: 1987; TEMPTTING THE DEVIL, 35mm, color, 3530m. Production Co: Zeta film, Budva / Beograd Film, Belgrade / Aria films, Paris. Country: Yugoslavia. Year of release: 1989.

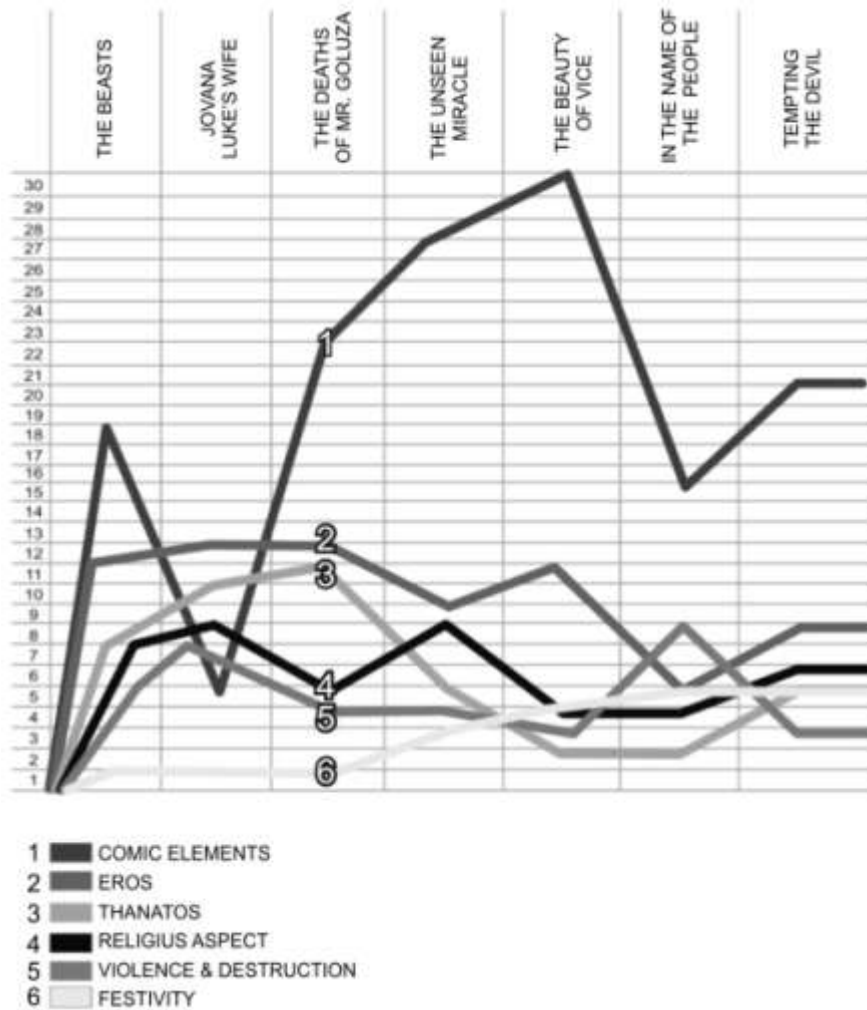


Figure 1: The basic structural constituents in Nikolic's diegetic discourse

The upper graph which includes the key segments of the diegetic structure of Nikolic's feature movies is the result of exact duration measure of each individual frame. By their simple summing up in relation to the proportional graphical values, we have come to the result shown in this table, which unambiguously and clearly points to the fact that the elements of erotic narrative compared to others in all Nikolic's movies are constant, and, for the most part, evenly represented, excluding the movie *In the Name of the People*, in which the focus is on the political violence of the communist oligarchy which, consequently, includes the sexual one.

2.Eros

2.1.The conceptual definition of Eros and Thanatos

In defining the notion of Eros we bear in mind the one from the ancient mythology of Eros as a symbol of love, or a motion that leads to the convergence of beings, and as well Sigmund Freud's interpretation of Eros as the preservation of the species. (Freud, 2010.) We have also taken the term Thanatos from the ancient mythology, in which it refers to death and is, in fact, its incarnation. ² But, our

² Eros (Ancient Greek: Ἔρως, "desire"), in Greek mythology was the god of love. Some myths make him a primordial god, while in others he is the son of Aphrodite. Thanatos (Ancient Greek: Θάνατος, "death"), in Greek mythology was the god of death.

main intention is to point out the comic and tragicomic aspects of Eros, as one of the most dominant features in Nikolic's poetics, taking into account the other thematic frameworks closely related to this issue. As an example in this sense we could extract the sequence from Nikolic's movie *The Beasts* in which old dying captain entreats the young, mysterious girl, who had come quite unexpectedly to the island, to reveal her naked body. In fact, Nikolić rises Eros to a much higher level than traditionally acceptable one, usually given in distant hints through motion or allusion, and at the same time resolutely and transparently copes with false darkness, symbolically represented by the blindfold, in the movies: *Jovana*, *Luke's Wife*, *The Beauty of Vice*, *Tempting the Devil*, opening the door of his diegetic universe to the emanation of released erotic energy. At this point, we want to indicate the endeavor of an artist who in a comprehensive and aesthetically compelling way underline the misconceptions that persist under the veil of ignorance. He actually wants to reveal the "secret" of *homo eroticus* under external circumstances where each action is exposed to the court of public opinion. That's why we pay so much attention to this aspect, which is together with thanatos and the structural elements of comic discourse, the key thematic constituent of Nikolic's entire *oeuvre*.

2.2. *The erotic models*

Is it also possible to say that in Nikolic's movies eroticism, as this issue on the film sees the French film theorist André Bazin, appears as the basic purpose and content? (*Bazin*, 1976.) We are apt to say *as the basic purpose*: no! The second part of Bazin's thesis, however, entirely corresponds with Nikolic's use of erotic models, where this segment, if not the unique and essential, is at least in many aspects specific. Nikolic neither experience eroticism as a kind of unmotivated, instinctive, raw passion imbued with amoral actions, one that has its own purpose and goal, nor only as a demystification of the beauty of female/s body and sexual act. Erotica, as Nikolic used to say, is no cheap clothes. Erotic being is eternal and pervasive. Eros is life itself! And why, then, it could not be transferred onto the screen in its genuine form? And finally, why it should be a bigger disgrace than killing, torture, abuse, suffering, humiliation, rapes that can be seen in most contemporary movies that official institutions, although do not openly support, yet approve. Nikolic, therefore, did not make war movies, not even those with partisan issues. The only war that he led was the war of emotions and passions. Anything outside that scope he left to the professional pyrotechnics and firework experts. The sequence from the movie *The Unseen Miracle* in which the owner of the rural pub, called Baro, throws gold coins at the navel of young American girl while she was dancing, undoubtedly confirms the this thesis. Nikolic never aspired to the obscene eroticism, sexual depravity and morbidity unless it was diegetically unavoidable. However, destructive sexual scenes, as well as those arising from raw instincts and low passions, in Nikolic's movies are evident, but not to the level that they could jeopardize the initial structure of the story and substantially modify its original idea. These extremely cruel and disturbing sequences, particularly in the movie *Jovana*, *Luke's Wife*, in that sense could be compared to those from Ingmar Bergman's *Jungfrukällan (The Virgin Spring)* from 1960. The specific national idiosyncrasies of this part of Europe can be seen as a branch of a much broader geoaesthetic space and, in the context we are talking about, bring into close relation with the prototypes of Mediterranean provenance, primarily Casanova and Don Juan. None of these eternal lovers, however, is not a real prototype in any of Nikolic's movies.³

2.3. *Critique and Eros*

Nikolic's movies had often been targeted almost equally by movie critics and the official institutions. In this regard the response of the Serbian Orthodox Church to the trailer of Nikolic's movie *The Unseen Miracle*, broadcasted by Belgrade television, will remain as one of the most curious. This problematic trailer, as prelates claimed, insulted their priesthood in an untrue, immoral and cruel manner. A few sequences in which the parish priest appears in the role of local Casanova, provoked a strong reaction and condemnation and caused plenty of controversy, so that the church declared this movie heretical, the attitude that caused its removal from the Belgrade television program schedule, although it had been earlier repeatedly broadcasted. The attack on this movie is the testimony of the social and political situation in the ex-Yugoslav region in the early nineties. Nikolic's movie *The Unseen Miracle* was made in 1984, and remained in cinema network until the communists were in power. No one had been bothered by this anathematized, "scandalous" scenes at that time, especially not the communists. However, when the position of the official communist ideology, which often included harsh repression, had begun to wane, such a reaction inevitably followed. All this, on the other hand, suggests

³ Perhaps the closest to that definition is Goluza, whom some unusual and unbelievable circumstances had made their surrogate. In a way this could be said for the "martyr" Andjelko from *The Beasts*, con artist Georges from *The Beauty of Vice*, but also for Father Macarius from *The Unseen Miracle*, who his art of lovemaking brings in a close liaison with the pseudo-dogmatic and religious beliefs. But, on the other hand, as in the case of *The Beauty of Vice* and *The Unseen Miracle*, if his heroes are not Casanovas or Don Juans, they are either funny voyeurs or frustrated commentators.

that the art and culture had never been entirely independent in former Yugoslavia. They were fully controlled by different institutions and there was always a danger hanging over them like the sword of Damocles.

3. The Freudian theoretical assumptions

In almost all Nikolic's feature movies, if not explicitly, then in key segments as a hint, Freud's theoretical assumptions of eros and thanatos are present. It is obvious that these psychological conceptualizations were not unknown to Nikolic, although, unlike some other Yugoslav directors, for example Dusan Makavejev, he did not meticulously deal with Freud's psychoanalytic postulates. In the erotic expression Nikolic primarily sees both the beauty and life extension, but also its end as presented in Freud's scientific doctrine. Eros and thanatos as two antithetical poles, passion and sexual gratification on one, and death on the other hand, were raised to the level of a global metaphor and make only one, albeit important part of the overall diegetic expression of Nikolic's movie stories. Furthermore, we must as well bear in mind that important fact that Freud marked *libido sexualis* as psychic energy much larger than the sex drive, and accordingly Eros is not one-dimensional entity, as it is usually misinterpreted, but the urge of life itself in contrast to the antipodal thanatos that is the death instinct. A typical example of this Freud's thesis can be found in Nikolic's movie *The Beasts* in the guise of old captain, who is difficult to determine whether he is more a victim of eros or thanatos. Nevertheless, Nikolic's characters have no particular relationship to death. More specifically this relationship in Nikolic's movie have all the elements of a grotesque with the unconcealed ironic overtones, iconographic and symbolic attributes that are constant, but also with *mise-en-scène* emphases in order to indicate its irrelevance (the irrelevance of death!) and its inevitable defeat in confrontation with eternally young and rebellious eros. As an obvious example in this regard we could single out the sequence of a grotesque "game" of eros and thanatos with the tragic epilogue in *The Beasts*, and a comical verbal communication in *The Unseen Miracle* between the main character Zeljo and a lascivious woman named Grana at the funeral of his grandfather.

3.1. *Libido Sexualis*

Starting from Freud's anticipation of the erotic nature of subconscious, the Russian philosopher Boris Višeslavcev argues that eros involves much more than *libido sexualis*, even more than the erotic infatuation.⁴ We venture to say that almost every Nikolic's movie absolutely confirms this Višeslavcev's thesis. Eros as the sublimation of life, or "love of life", its all-pervading energy and driving force, as well as avoiding its reduction only to the sexual intercourse, seems to make the basic guideline of Nikolic's understanding of its essence. Although in Nikolic's movies sexual urges are strongly underlined, it is not possible to talk about some fully refined emotions of a pure erotic love, which would be dominantly present. Moreover, it happens that such emotions, for some obscure reason, are sometimes distorted and made ridiculous. In fact, human evil tends to relativise them. Any free attitude towards them, in one way or another is sanctioned /the example of Andjelko and the beasts, Caruso and the American girl, Jaglika and nudists/. Nikolic also relentlessly breaks down this prejudice referring to man's erotic being, and, at the same time, removes the anathema from the free and unfettered love. He actually doesn't want to hide the love from life, and *vice versa*. Love and life are the two poles of an indivisible being. Their causal relationship and mutual interlacing are viewed as an ontological fact, material evidence of man's existence. Andjelko, the hero of *The Beasts*, tries to convince his friends, the beasts, that together with the *licentious Eros*, true love is possible. The response of the beast to this ontological fact in the final sequences of this movie is savagely cruel. Is Nikolic's faith in love faced toward the transcendental? It is the question that he leaves open, or for some reason refuses to respond directly.

4. Eros and transcendence

Is Nikolic's faith in love faced towards the transcendental? It is the question that he leaves open, or for some reason refuses to respond directly. Although Nikolic implicitly hinted the unboundedness and infiniteness of transcendence in his movies, he primarily interpreted the world, which is, according to Hungarian writer, philosopher, and social critic Béla Hamvas, "an open and unified whole; cosmos in *aletheia*⁵ - an unabashed universe.⁶ This orientation towards the transcendental and the longing for the invisible,

⁴ Boris Višeslavcev, *The Ethics of Transformed Eros*. Logos. Belgrade, 1996, p. 40.

⁵ *Aletheia* (ἀλήθεια) is a Greek word variously translated as *unclosedness*, *unconcealedness*, *disclosure* or *truth*. The literal meaning of the word ἀλήθεια is *the state of not being hidden; the state of being evident*.

"the metaphysical desire", as the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas determined it, which "strives for *something completely different, the absolute otherness*",⁷ [italics added] even though it is in the core of Nikolic's poetics, does not make its essential constituent. This attitude, in other words, epitomizes the pursuit of invisible focused on the detection of otherness, one that "does not indicate the lack of relationship",⁸ the understanding of the immaterial world only as a hypothetical, but not at all one that means the absolute detachment in relation to the sensory impressions. In this context, Nikolic perceives eros primarily as a phenomenon of immanence, for love, let's cite Levinas again "is not the way in which the metaphysical case of transcendence occurs."⁹ Or, more exactly, Nikolic sees love as an absolute immanence, which, on the other hand, does not free eros the need for transcendental "touch", the desire for unsaid, which, according to Levinas, confirms not only the originality of eros, but also its duality.¹⁰ This second, let's tentatively call it *the dual face of eros*, in case of Nikolic's approach to this problem, unlike Levinas' theoretical reflections, is neither the essential ambiguity nor duality. It is more the lust for discovering *unknown*, which is, according to Nikolic, sometimes unjustifiably marked as *secret*.

5. Eros and thanatos

Love in Nikolic's movies, as we have already seen, appears as an absolute immanence, and its numerous paradoxes as inevitable epiphenomena /*The Death of Mr. Goluzza, The Unseen Miracle, Tempting the Devil*/. Searching for love fulfillment, according to Nikolic, can not be hindered, and in this process he recognizes not only the driving force of life, but also its entire meaning. Yet, love, as well as death, is rarely wise and prudent. This fact for Nikolic's heroes often means mental disorder /Bulut, Jovana, Goluzza, to some extent also Zeljo/, even when thanatos inexorably approaches, as in the case of the dying Captain from *The Beasts*. The presence of thanatos is evident in almost all Nikolic's movies. There is no great passion in them, consequently the passion of erotic love, that is not targeted by thanatos. Its biggest enemy reason, however, has no influence over it. Nikolic also observes thanatos within the other, completely opposite, festive context, with obvious presence of irony and grotesque: "Concerning death our life gains some relevance, but loses as much and becomes devalued. It is interesting to see that theatrical funeral solemnity, repentance, ceremony in which everything gets a grotesque form. Death is always a celebration in Montenegro, an expression of love, strange, cruel and beautiful."¹¹ And that is one of the dominant motifs of Nikolic's "metaphysics of consternation". Death, therefore, is not so much associated with the fear of the deceased faced with the unknown as far as his fulfilled or unfulfilled deontological orders and, consequently, the eschatological uncertainty. Between light and darkness, Nikolic inevitably chooses light. To the destructive power of death he confronts love and life. Plunging into the eschatological secrets he leaves to the preachers. Hence the so emphasized suggestive power of eros, which is supposed to annihilate all that stands in the way of its eternal incarnation. Hence furthermore the so insatiable Nikolic's thirst for the naked female body, i.e. eros which is the only fundamental negation of thanatos. Pointing to the meaning and significance of eros in his movies, Nikolic also says: "It is probably a unique moment when a man really overcomes death."¹² And more: "In my movies erotica is sometimes a part of love, sometimes the impossibility of love, sometimes love itself. In any case, we know, this world would vanish without eros."¹³ But eros in Nikolic's movies is never alone. It is accompanied by its eternal retainer thanatos, as in the case of the movies: *The Beasts, Jovana, Luke's Wife, The Death of Mr. Goluzza, The Unseen Miracle* and *The Beauty of Vice*.

6. Eros, religion and homosexuality

⁶ Béla Hamvas, *Magyar Hüperion (Hungarian Hyperion)*. Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 1992, p.184. According to Hamvas something similar can be said of a work of art, which also coincides with Nikolic's reflections on the relationship between life and art: "The artwork is to the man as the world itself, open to all opinions, even indifferent to all of them." /ibid., p.184./

⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Duquesne Univ Pr, 1969. [Levinas, Emmanuel Levinas: *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Veselin Maslesa, Sarajevo, 1976, p.17.]

⁸ Ibid., p.18.

⁹ Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 239.

¹¹ Intervju, 16.08.1985.

¹² Sineast 57, 1982/1983

¹³ Ekspres, 26.08.1990.

Boris Višeslavcev goes so far as to define the overall creativity, culture and religion as a sublimation conducted towards revelation as the highest value, because "where is your highest value, there is also your Eros."¹⁴ From the above we can conclude that eros itself is a true *nexus causalis* that leads to the revelation, which in Nikolic's movies is recognized as one of the key predilections. The connection between eroticism and religion is symbolically indicated in all Nikolic's feature movies, but never by their predominant presence nor open banality that would disregard their aesthetic dignity. The erotic symbol represented in such a way, on the other hand, can be brought to a close relationship with the archetype, i.e. its deeper layer, the collective unconscious, as it is defined by Carl Gustav Jung. (*Jung*, 1981.) Contact with the archetype is also apparent in this aspect of Nikolic's poetics and completely permeates the religious feelings of his characters. In this case, however, it is the phenomenon which is not inherent to objects in sensual reality, but the one which implies the transcendental relationship. Nikolic doesn't only revive myth and archetype in his movies, but in the most consistent interpretation of the collective unconscious "translates" them into the language understandable to contemporary audience. Perhaps one of the deficiencies of Nikolic's poetics can be found just in his attempt to simplify these motifs in order to achieve their absolute believability, or an effect that will be infused with not consistently fully motivated anecdotal humor.

6.1. *The ethical code*

The Montenegrin psychoanalyst Todor Bakovic supports one in a series of interesting, but also dubious theses of religious discrimination of women, whose eros is always younger and stronger, unlike man who is closer to thanatos. "Eternally young, alert, creative and productive Eros is really powerful. It escapes from one so authoritative power – God itself. ... Religion disposed of Thanatos easier, no matter how mature, vicious and destructive it is. It offered the afterlife."¹⁵ Considering Nikolic's movies, and not only his when we are talking about idiosyncrasy, customary norms and moral norms in Montenegro, Bakovic's interpretation of eros and thanatos, pulled through the prism of a thoroughly dominant patriarchal ethical code, is a strong impression which strongly imposes. (*Bakovic*, 1985.) The eros of Nikolic's heroines is not only younger and stronger, but as well more enigmatic than the eros of his heroes. As an example we can take Jovana, Luke's wife, i.e. the transformation of her repressed sensuality from a genuine love to inconceivable and unmotivated murder of her husband, committed as a result of absolute unmasking the repressed libidinal *energy* that she could neither restrain nor resist to.¹⁶

6.2. *The Montenegrin customary law*

The powerful weapon of Christian theology with the aim of suppressing eros and imposing the feelings of sin, in Nikolic's movies gets a special importance. If for the sin committed by a woman, primarily the infidelity or murder of husband, as in the above case, we say that it is unforgivable, bearing in mind the provisions of Article 72 of Danilo's Code, derived from the Montenegrin customary law, the plot of this Nikolic's movie that has no explicit spacetime and even not iconographic coordinates, could be located in this chronotope.¹⁷ But Nikolic does not apply this harsh sanction from Danilo's Code. Instead, since everything in this movie is *thrust* towards the *absurd*, Nikolic, following changes that are reflected on the face of his heroine, "pulls" the clatter of horses' hooves from the *acousmatic* zone, whose sharp sound, accompanied with the apparent fear due to committed sin, in her body, paradoxically inflames the "unpredictable" and "eternally young" eros. It is clear that the invisible horsemen remain a distinct threat, but not the one for the committed sin, because Nikolic is not concerned with it in the final sequence. Hence the emphasized antithesis of theological given in the form of anathema as a response to the committed sin in this Nikolic's movie, whose agent in this case is strong, unpredictable and destructive eros, i.e. the unbridled emanation of passions and sexual energy of the heroine. The victim in this movie story was chosen by eros.

6.3. *Homosexuality*

Nikolic was the first Yugoslav director who openly, without fear and contingent shame, in his movie *The Beauty of Vice* broached the topic of homosexuality. One of his heroes Gonce is an incarnation of homosexuality and the first character in former Yugoslav cinematography who was recognized as a gay whose role was not an incidental and ancillary one. We must also bear in mind the fact that customary and traditional laws, written and unwritten ethical rules as well as socio-political circumstances were not benevolent in

¹⁴ Boris Višeslavcev, *The Ethics of Transformed Eros*. Logos. Beograd, 1996, p.41.

¹⁵ Todor Baković, *The Depressive optimism of Christianity*. Nikšić, 1991, p.97.

¹⁶ The ethnologist Vukasin Pestic in his meticulous research on the patriarchal morality of Montenegrins has come to very similar results.

¹⁷ In 1855. on the initiative of the Montenegrin sovereign Prince Danilo I, the Code was enacted with the provision of Article 72 for serious crimes. This Code, inter alia, predicted harsh punishments for infidelity, including the so-called *osakata*, i.e. tearing off nose.

a country that was about to collapse and didn't provide enough opportunities to such a research. Nevertheless, Nikolic has launched many forbidden topics in his movies, including this one.

7. The poetic initiation of eros

7.1. *The beauty of woman*

The strength and power of woman's beauty in Nikolic's movies inevitably initiates the strength and power of destruction and desolation. "Maybe there is a certain truth in the assertion of some critics that I was purposely looking for nice, gentle and refined women that would more clearly emphasize the contrast with the harsh, yet beautiful in its own way, Montenegrin environment in which I was shooting."¹⁸ No one in the former Yugoslav cinematography, as noted by movie critics both contemporary and noncontemporary, had been so much devoted to the beauty of woman and pointed out her tragic fate and the right to rebel.¹⁹ Although Nikolic regards the beauty as "the most powerful" and "strongest", in *The Beasts* it brings evil, in *The Death of Mr. Goluz* is trying to confront evil, while in *Jovana, Luke's Wife* evil destroys it. These, according to Nikolic, are three completely different relationships. With beauty, hence the female beauty, Nikolic deals as a provocation of life, and searches for "the demonic it carries within itself."²⁰ The nudity of female body in Nikolic's movies is not only a symbol of erotic sensuality, but also the universal beauty, as it had been experienced by the great painters, his ideals, particularly Titian. One-dimensional deflection of the erotic discourse and its reduction solely on physical affection would be, according to Nikolic, simultaneous destruction of values that the story on the beauty of naked female body involves /we should only recall Zeljo's and Djoko's erotic fantasies from *The Unseen Miracle*.

7.2. *The sublimation of erotic energy*

The narrative graduality in uncovering the female beauty, the sensuality and erotic passions that are making their way through one of the story layers, was as important to Nikolic as the very act of the erotic fulfillment. Even in movies with Thanatos as a dominant core around which other events dispersively spread, Nikolic retains the hints of erotic expression – an unobtrusive but powerful diegetic juxtaposition of lament and passion, which regardless of circumstances indicates the unpredictability and the power of eros. However, unlike his feature movies in Nikolic's documentaries there is no obvious presence of erotic elements. In these movies eros is mostly present in metaphorical indications, the reason why its diegetic recognition is completely turned in that direction. The phenomenological aspect of eros came into the focus of Nikolic's concern more comprehensively starting from *The Beasts*, his first feature movie. The predominant presence of erotic motifs and symbols, the aesthetic sublimation which implies the exemption from "the forbidden topics" and simultaneously points to the necessity of presence of the emotional gamus of relations, on one hand, but not the banal erotica devoid of the aesthetic distinctiveness, a meaningless divinization of sexual fetishes, the reduction of an erotic act solely on the bodily pleasure, on the other hand, are the basis on which Nikolic develops ideas related to this aspect of his poetics. The mere desire for eroticizing and immoderate digressions are not Nikolic's *causa essentialis*, but they are, in most cases, the catalysts of dramatic events.

8. Conclusion

In Nikolic's movies eros is never reduced only to *libido sexualis*. It is always in the function of initial idea, one of many functional ingredients of their complex diegetic and narrative structure. The polarity of eros and thanatos, i.e. the permeation of two exclusionary relations, Nikolic rises to the level of a conceptual metaphor, not at all simplistic and incomplete, as it was in the Yugoslav movie criticism occasionally presented. Eroticism is much more to Nikolic than it is the one-sided, limited and conservative pseudo-traditional comprehension of its essence, and often open fear of what will happen if the screen uncovers the naked female body and shows its natural beauty, and together with the complete expressive scale of visual and sound effects enhance its plasticity and fullness? Or *more precisely*, it is one's concrete body, someone who is on the cinema screen a virtual being. And is it, finally, a presentation of

¹⁸ Vijesti, 28.08.2001.

¹⁹ Therefore, it is no wonder that the well-meaning critique called him "Montenegrin Bergman", though Nikolic "loudly" resisted any labeling, even though it put him in touch with the greatest movie directors.

²⁰ Danas, 04.07.1986.

something that should be hidden for some irrational, never fully perceived and clear reasons – the intuitive preservation of the secrecy of physical beauty, especially female, due to some inconceivable moral beliefs and vague fears governing the "controlled area" of human psyche and its untouchable and inviolable prejudice? Erotica is both beauty and life, the natural and essential emotional inherence, and in such a form, unchanged and purified, should be transferred on the screen. Luke, the hero of *The Beauty of Vice* puts a black binding across Jaglika's eyes. Although she is his wife, their sexual pleasure, however, is reduced to almost instinctive need with no magic that a free and unfettered erotic act can provide. But the story of an unexpected and complete Jaglika's erotic emancipation begins just here, in a Montenegrin nudist camp. The very demystification of that "secret", eros as a fundamental ontological fact, together with contingent metaphysical implications, is evident in almost all Nikolic's feature movies. This is the crucial reason we attach in our analytical proceedings a special importance to this segment of research as one of the key aspects of Nikolic's overall poetics.

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