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## ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF NEWER SERBIAN POETRY

**Abstract:** This paper critically and polemically examines and interprets poetic and culturological features of the newer Serbian poetry (belonging to the second and third decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) and possible causes and incentives for their emergence. Within the current output of the younger generation of poets, one might observe a new poetic paradigm which is based on the abandonment of poetic devices (above all the metaphor), declarative rhetoric, an ideological, i.e., engaged component, a tendency towards shocking the reader and so on, all of which contributes more or less to the flattening of the aesthetic plane. Additionally, it is important to consider the way these developments are affected and exacerbated by the ever more popular creative writing courses and workshops, as well as the way both authors and certain newer publishing houses use this new paradigm to profile their presence on the literary market (which nevertheless often exceeds the literary).

**Keywords:** newer Serbian poetry, poetic features, ideology, the Internet, social media, creative writing workshops, literary market.

Although efforts have been made to historicize and systematize Serbian poetry written after the year 2000, and evidenced by numerous anthologies,<sup>1</sup> round tables, scholarly conferences, as public debates, organized both within the academic community and apart from it, the results

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Stojnić, *Prostori i figure* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2012), Goran Lazičić, *Restart: panorama nove poezije u Srbiji* (Beograd: Dom kulture Studentski grad, 2014), Saša Radojčić, *Senke i njihovi predmeti: antologija novijeg srpskog pesništva: 1991-2020* (Kraljevo: Narodna biblioteka "Stefan Prvovenčani," 2021) Stevan Bradić, *Logične pobune: antologija savremene srpske poezije* (Beograd: Laguna, 2022), to name a few.

of such efforts are still not conclusive. Certainly, as some critics have pointed out, a greater temporal distance is needed, the notorious *test of time* that filters out the entire existing output like a kind of a literary “natural selection” and shows which books of poetry, and consequently which authors with their entire opuses, still seem fresh, aesthetically convincing, exciting, *universal* in some way, and which, thanks to certain qualities, transcend the moment and the conditions of their creation. In this context, the term *aesthetic* can convey several equally significant aspects of a poetic text, but it is above all related to the imaginary, linguistic and stylistic levels. In the context of what currently appears to be a tumult of poetical paradigms and tendencies, which constitute the dominant body of contemporary Serbian poetry written by young authors, the poetic imagination and linguistic and stylistic means have seemingly withdrawn in favor of some other poetological mechanisms.

Keeping that plurality in mind, it must, however, be noted at the very beginning that this paper deals with a single phenomenon, represented by a single current of contemporary poetry at this moment in time, and should in no way be understood as a simplification or a generalization of the entirety of the newer poetic scene and its capabilities, nor as a reduction of its entire poetic output to the lyrical model that we examine and interpret in this text. Instead, our goal is to point out a certain poetic current and tendency and, perhaps, a fad, which has become desirable, lucrative (both symbolically and economically) and pertinent in the age of the dominance of social media, consumption of disposable content, commercial viability, market profitability and pop-culture (which often poses as high culture). Finally, we believe it is impossible to talk of poetry without using, at least operationally, terms like originality (which is the most relevant one for criticism and axiology), inventiveness, innovation, authenticity, associativity or pertinence, which are all relationally connected to tradition and the given context (cf. Радојчић 2022: 22).

## I

During the previous two or three decades, literary life in Serbia went through a dramatic transformation, in terms of the “social order” and the dynamics of the literary public life, as well as in terms of the many

and various poetic paradigms which have emerged during that time and which are still in the process of formation. In spite of that, it is still unclear which exact point on the scale of the postsocialist transition our contemporary poetry has reached (are we somewhere around the middle or near the end of that road, and how will we even know the transition has ended?). Due to those circumstances, there is a strong sense, especially among the wider readership of poetry which is tiny compared to the readership of the novel and, at a purely statistical level, practically negligible) that our contemporary poetry has ended together with the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, considering the fact that poetry from that era is still given a privileged position as the last object of admiration and deeper academic analysis. We may also ask ourselves how much trust, if any at all, do contemporary readers have regarding the newly written poetry, particularly those who do not possess a deep formal literary education, but, simply put, enjoy literature and *consume it* as a hobby. Their relationship to such poetry is likely characterized by skepticism regarding its *quality* and artistic aspirations.

During the previous several decades, our literature had moved away from the state-sponsored bureaucratic-enlightening model of cultural policy, which included state supervision and control over culture, but also ensured its status as an industry of special social significance and interest (cf. Resanović, 2023), and, in the eyes of the readership, provided a certain exclusivity, a sense of selectness and refinement of everything that reached what was then the literary market. The current, transitional, model of cultural policy has progressed in such a way that the influence the market wields over culture and art has become much greater. The coupling of the market and social media now constantly produces newer and more desirable cultural patterns, if we understand new cultural patterns as content that commands the greatest *reach* on social media and the greatest enthusiasm among its user community:

Social media may be viewed as a space that made presenting poems possible without the intermediation of a publisher, thus establishing a faster, easier and more direct contact between poets and the readership. At the same time, the space of social media is such that the users are more comfortable with freely commenting on content, poems included, so they provide poets with feedback without reluctance. This, in turn, may serve as a point of reference for the poets: for example, one may

decide to publish a book if their poems are met with a large number of likes and positive comments. (Resanović, 2023)

In other words, the development of technology and social media, which has in a large part transformed the ways of articulation and communication, has as a consequence influenced the aesthetic form and the dominant taste of the readership.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the Internet as

an immeasurable and chaotic form of the library of Babel, a twisted space of mankind's encyclopedic aspirations and a hypertrophied epistemological system, occupies both an opposing and a complementary position in regard to the classic system of education and the traditional model of literary exchange and influence mediated by it (Гавриловић 2023: 132-133).

On the collective level, this phenomenon results in the divergence of the institutional education system, often in a way that sunders and weakens it. On the level of individual young authors, the result is the recognition, designation and adoption of certain values (models) that are then transferred to the literary field, which might be problematized. In any case, value understood in the ethical sense as a universal, hypothetical and socially conditioned, which is to say arbitrary category is, or has become, entirely permeable and flexible; literary and, after all, any other tradition is nothing if not constant affirmation, but also questioning of the established order of values in a kind of ecosystem composed of literary works by themselves, but also writers, critics, scholars and editors.

However, here we are dealing with some patterns and practices from the social—actual and social—virtual life that have been transferred to the

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<sup>2</sup> "Therefore, it is no wonder that... publishers assert that they would be more willing to publish poetry collections by authors that had already gained audience through social media, because that would make them more confident in the commercial viability of such a project. In the intertwining of high culture and pop-culture, the literary and the quotidian, the poetic and the digital that characterizes poets of the younger generation, small and middle-sized publishers see an opportunity to increase their own symbolic capital, while at the same time ensuring that such a venture does not become an economic loss instead of a certain profit, which is in any case expected to be much smaller than the profit brought by publishing mainstream novels" (Resanović, 2023).

field of poetry completely literally, without any kind of artistic transposition (or with a rather small amount of it). These patterns and practices are highly valorized among the younger poets belonging to the current literary community. At this point, it is important to mention one of the side effects of the supremacy of the Internet, as well as the literary hyperproduction we are witnessing: a gradual disabling and even complete shut-down of the “critical apparatus” and individual critical awareness with which one is to approach checking the aforementioned aesthetic values in literature. If we follow the opinion that “there can be no significant poet without the accompanying poetic and critical self-articulation” (Пантић 2023: 19), we may conclude that this reservoir of a kind, containing a new poetic *modernity* (or perhaps, again, a fad), rarely succeeds in generating an authentic poetic voice.

## II

The poetry of young (and the youngest) authors on the current Serbian literary scene might be, on one hand, judged as dispersive, diverse and tending towards an absolute individualization of expression (not declaratively and openly, but as an implicit suggestion). Occasionally, they truly do achieve such individuality, but their poetry is at the same time unified to an extent, similar in its themes and motives and the general atmosphere and tone of the poems. As observed by Milomir Gavrilović, it could have been

expected that the newer Serbian poetry would achieve poetic diversity of the greatest order, but that has not been proven correct, especially when compared with the exploits of some previous generations. Paradoxically, a poetic unification was almost achieved. It is different on the thematic level, which is more permeable, but its direction shows unificatory tendencies, too (Гавриловић 2023: 135).

In other words, there arose a contradictory tendency towards uniformity of expression together with an aspiration to abandon it, which resulted in the situation in which one needs to parse through a lot of books in order to discover true poetic individuality, because they all seem alike at first reading.

One of the causes for this might be the fact that younger Millennials, immediately followed by the so-called Generation Z,<sup>3</sup> who represent the foremost exponents and advocates of the poetic model we are examining here, have a very recognizable iconography and shared experience: urban everyday life, existential precariousness or discontent with a financially profitable but spiritually robotizing corporate environment, traumatic memory of the war years, problematic geopolitical or local situation, vulnerable psychological conditions, sexual exploration, excessive consumption of alcohol, pills or narcotics in order to numb the mind and body, as well as a careless, resigned, cynical or, at least, melancholic attitude towards reality.<sup>4</sup> However, what is problematic and uninventive about this kind of poetry is not its content, which is to say the thematic frame from which many poets undoubtedly cannot, do not want to, and should not move, because it is simply their *Zeitgeist* and their own skin, and not some other. The point of contention lies in the literary and linguistic *way* in which the content is shaped into a poem and in which it is communicated in the formal, graphic, structural, lexical, stylistic, narrative, melodic and aesthetic sense. That way, that *modus* has become so common and so recognizable that it has practically become possible to call it a manner.

It would not be incorrect to deem figures such as Bukowski, Carver and the American Beatniks as progenitors of this poetic model for modern poetry as a whole, while in the local Serbian context it found its first expression in the poetry of Zvonko Karanović, Milena Marković, Ognjenka Lakićević and Marko Tomaš (who, strictly speaking, does not belong to the Serbian literary culture and tradition, but nevertheless commands great respect and influence among the readers, journalists and publishers). Another line of influence that is not negligible came from Srđan Valjarević's collection *Joe Frazier and 49 + 24 Poems* [*Džo Frejzer i 49 + 24 pesama*]. Within the literary (and not just literary) public, they have

<sup>3</sup> Those born between 1980 and 1996 belong to the Millennial generation. Millennials are the pioneers of the digital age and the first to use then revolutionary social media, the witnesses of the birth of smartphones, SMS messages and search engines. Those born after 1996 belong to the Generation Z. They hardly even remember the world before mobile phones and the Internet. See <https://www.rts.rs/lat/magazin/nauka/3402301/koliko-poznajemo-generaciju-zed.html>, accessed 30 June 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Those themes are very frequent in contemporary Serbian novels, too.

built a unique image, media publicity, popularity on the literary market and gained a large number of readers (who are at the same time their followers and fans).

A very indicative fact common to all of these poets, especially as it pertains to the problems that are to be tackled later on in this paper, is that all of them have published at least one book under the auspices of the Belgrade publishing house LOM, which is also the most significant publisher to print Serbian editions of Bukowski and Carver (*sic!*) and which has built its stylistic profile on the poetics of these authors. In 2019, Ognjenka Lakićević published her collection *A Guide through Fires* [*Vodič kroz požare*], so far her only LOM book, while Milena Marković, Zvonko Karanović, Srđan Valjarević and Marko Tomaš have already established a veritable tradition and continuity of publishing with this house. Opuses of these authors do have certain common denominators when it comes to the thematic horizon, but much more important is the aforementioned way, or the set of poetic mechanisms through which the poems are actualized.

The poems in question are written in free verse, using quotidian language, with a high degree of communicativeness and transparency, while the rhetorical function is activated and tropes disregarded. The lyrical subject often assumes an autobiographical position, to which testify the descriptions of specific, highly realistic and experiential details and life fragments. The meaning of the poem is always presented clearly and communicatively, made bare to the greatest extent (Гавриловић 2023: 137) and colored by a confessional, diary-like tone, wherein pathos is often dominant. Regardless of the possibilities offered by the aforementioned thematic range, these poems often contain no emotional, intuitive or spiritual engagement; on the contrary, the declarative sentence, which simply describes the object of the poem, becomes self-sufficing and (self-) expedient, with the only step towards conveying truly poetic information being most often an (anti-)point, or punch line, which can signify something unexpected, or be ironic or melancholic in tone.

However, what we are dealing with here is a poetic paradigm which has become dominant and tried-and-tested due to its commercial success, which young poets, often encouraged by some of the aforementioned authors playing the role of mentors, have adopted in order to write

what had already been written, using already mastered poetic models that had realized their merit and innovation, but were exhausted in the process, during the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first fifteen years of the 21<sup>st</sup>. That model has been additionally strengthened by the emergence of new publishing houses that profile themselves on the market as exponents of a very specific poetics (which, certainly, by default includes social, ideological and cultural predispositions), so young authors automatically know where to offer their manuscript and which publisher might accept it, but also which publisher could guarantee them immediate visibility and popularity. This is usually due to aggressive social media marketing, a well-developed logistics and organization of many promotional events, as well as the fact that other authors who publish at the same house exhibit a high degree of solidarity and unconditional support.

### III

As we already know, during the recent years literary or creative writing poetry workshops have been extremely popular among young poets. Included in the names of instructors at these workshops are, among others, Zvonko Karanović and Ognjenka Lakićević. The workshops are conceived as periodic in-person group meetings (they were also held online during the COVID-19 pandemic) to discuss poetry and assign certain tasks to students, the results of which are to be commented on, corrected and molded in the upcoming class. In 2018, Zvonko Karanović established the publishing house Enklava, which has since published many of the first books written by poets who attended his workshops, some of whom have in the meantime become popular in the bourgeois, commercial and even “showbiz” sense of the word. Creative writing workshops in no way represent a new development; they have existed for a long time in some way, including as university courses on creative writing of poetry and prose taught by professors.

A lesser known fact is that during the seventies and eighties of the previous century, workshops were held at the Belgrade Youth Center by Miodrag Pavlović, Ivan V. Lalić, Alek Vukadinović, Miodrag Bulatović



and Brana Petrović. Setting aside all comparisons of the poetic heights achieved by the poets of the previous century and those who are our contemporaries, it is necessary to examine a phenomenon noticeable in the poetry manuscripts originating from these workshops, edited by the mentors themselves. It may be concluded that the workshops usually produce poetry books and poetic voices that are quite akin, almost as if their students write according to a more or less identical assigned model, in a similar manner, using similar language and similar linguistic and stylistic devices. This is what pushes inexperienced young poets into the same mold, the same poetic model, thereby creating a certain poetic vacuum, a poetic claustrophobia, instead of developing and affirming a multitude of poetics and poetic concepts in accordance with different sensibilities, preferences, capabilities, and so on.

This phenomenon of reproducing and, in a way, recycling the material recommended or even written by mentors themselves is natural and understandable to a degree. The aforementioned poetry workshops in Belgrade were frequented by Saša Jelenković during the eighties, but we should not forget all the other poets who profiled themselves in that period: Vojislav Karanović, Saša Radojčić, Dragan Jovanović Danilov etc. It is possible to ascertain a common guiding line in the initial phase of their poetry, which was dubbed *transsymbolism* by Tihomir Brajović. However, there emerged a significant difference between that poetic output and the current one, which might be best explained and described as a humanistic and culturological breadth typical of the poet by the standards of Eliot. This breadth includes an extensive reading experience and the knowledge of the national, regional and global poetic canon, as well as mythology, religion, anthropology, history, philosophy, art history and other disciplines and sciences. In the poetry of the authors belonging to the older and middle generations, such knowledge was able to meander through rich inner worlds, lucid poetic imagination, innovative poetic language and defamiliarized poetic imagery.

Nonetheless, not only does the poetry of the younger generation lack such humanistic educational breadth (which, frankly, might have become, to them and to *us*, very hard to achieve due to the constant onslaught of multitudes of unselected, crude and essentially banal information from the digital world), but it may also be concluded that “they do not even find their poetic grounding in the work of academically established

poets, neither recent, nor those who have long been a part of the cultural heritage” (cf. Гавриловић 2023: 139). Instead, it seems as if their reading matter is limited to the opuses of the several aforementioned influential poets, who have achieved a cult following among the youth, not only because of their poetry, but also because of their entire appearance and persona presented in public and through the media, which may simply be described as *cool* in its so-called alternativeness and subversion.

No less important is the influence of *popular culture*, including the *Americana* specifically as the romanticizing and aestheticizing of the American lifestyle and its signifiers (“we got ourselves a convertible / and left traces in the sand / to confuse the daily routine / we watched palm trees / and drank coconut milk” [Milosavljević 2019: 18;] “I watched her / as she tore out the palm trees / of Californian avenues / and got her feet wet” [Stanišić 2020: 42]), as well as music and film, especially the cinematography of David Lynch, Wim Wenders and Stanley Kubrick (“the car accelerates / hypnotized / by the broken line / of the highway // if we were in *Mulholland Drive* / we would be the gang / that crashed into a limousine // you yell at me / I’m not following the map / we’re headed in the wrong direction” [Živković 2020: 35] or “the girl behind me / understands me / she likes the design of my wallet / - a clockwork orange / the cashier doesn’t get / what we’re talking about” [Milosavljević 2019: 38] or Vladan Krečković’s collection *Paris, Texas* [“Pariz, Teksas”], which is in its entirety a kind of an homage and an intertextual dialogue with the eponymous movie). This phenomenon often appears like an attempt to present a feigned humanistic breadth in the place of authentic poetic imagination: “I enjoy exploring / her long bookshelf / where one can find: / Carver / Fante / Bužarovska / Houellebecq / Kerouac / Prilepin/ we talk about them / smoking a joint” (Mitrović 2020: 93); “I look for Hendrix / and Nietzsche within the nothingness / from the apartment echoes / Brecht’s poetry” (Kanazir 2019: 44).

Let us not forget that the poets who published their first poetry collections during the eighties and nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century later developed voices of altogether different sensibility and aspirations. Moreover, the aforementioned *LOM poets*, to call them that, offered (and explored the boundaries of) what was at that point in time a different poetics of verism, which is now, from the standpoint of the development of Serbian poetry, impossible to skip and discard as insignificant or uninfluential

in the literary, social, ideological, and every other sense.<sup>5</sup> But, there remains a worrying sense that these young authors reduced the poetics of their role models to an even more drastic extent, practically abolishing the artistic transposition that the poetry of, for example, Zvonko Karanović and Milena Marković still did have and which represented its singular quality.

## IV

The elementary shortcomings of the current poetic output of young authors could be defined as follows. Firstly, the pronounced insistence on communicativeness and easy comprehension of expression in order to mediate the content of a poem to the reader's mind as quickly and easily as possible, at the detriment of the strength of expression: "it's cold / I don't know if you love me / but you pull at my sleeve every time / I carelessly try / to cross the street / when the light is red" (Milosavljević 2019: 53); "the plate of fish / was small but tasty / the sun was shining / summer in full swing / *la vita e bella* / isn't it?" (Kuzmanović 2020: 47); "she's alone / I see it by the zipper of her dress / not fully zipped on her back" (Petrović 2020: 48). This practice characterizes disposable content on the Internet, whose goal is the simplest and most efficient possible consumption and cognitive processing of data, without using too much focus and intellectual, imaginative power for investing in the comprehension and analysis of the *layers* of meaning in data.

It is interesting to note that in those cases, the emotional and affective way of processing information is intensified, giving rise to strong emotional reactions to the reading matter, which can also be linked to the "neosentimental" poetic discourse. On the other hand, communicativeness in poetry might also be the result of the author's wish to make the poem correspond more easily with different assumed addressees, the reading audience, regardless of the degree of their literary education. Although noble in essence, this strategy can sometimes be wrong or redundant,

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<sup>5</sup> We should not forget the somewhat older generation of Serbian veristic poets either, such as Milovan Danojlić, Duško Novaković, Živorad Nedeljković, Slobodan Zubanović, Miroslav Maksimović and even Radmila Lazić to an extent.

because clarity is not a virtue by itself and because it is wrong to underestimate the inner aesthetic feeling which all kinds of people might possess, regardless of their educational or class status.

Additionally, the hypostasis of communicativeness in the poetry of young authors is also found in the reduction of poetic devices, above all the metaphor and figures of speech more broadly, while polysemic, layered poetic imagery is almost nonexistent. Linguistic invention itself, which could be embodied in the departure from everyday speech or drawing from and using traditionally “non-poetical” lexis, is rare. Poetic speech has assumed the form of statements, purely narrative, prosaic sentences broken into verses in a dactylographic, automatic way, which can result in banal high-school-like solutions, poorly executed comparisons and even pseudo-points. Even if a poem or a collection contains individual successful elements or creative swings, the text as a whole seems to be only partially successful, or completely unsuccessful. Examples are numerous: “I remember you / quite rarely / but you are there // when I light a cigarette / get the fourth beer / when even the first was too much // or two hours after insignificant sex / if I’m awake” (Kuzmanović 2020: 7); “it’s fall and what do I care about your girlfriend / I know the one you’ll marry / she’s bold and her name is Radmila” (Petrović 2020: 27); “the last parting with a woman happened / at the station of the trolleybus 29 / and on a rooftop of a high-rise / and in front of a cinema / cops / I’m high / all of that makes me want to die // I have no ambitions / I can’t do anything specific / I write a little / but that’s slipshod, too” (Kanazir 2019: 40); “I like your Bambi eyes / I don’t like when you’re angry / I faint / when you get excited / over a flower ... // I could tell you all sorts of things / about your little habits / love termites / but why would I do that / when I can / kiss you kiss you kiss you” (Perlić 2020: 44). Then, there are attempts to surprise or “shock” the bourgeois community by using naturalistic and (neo)veristic representations and images, sometimes even vulgarity for its own sake, often lacking in originality and humor, with no aesthetic value: “and when he falls asleep, if he’s not whole / tell him to call me / I would take him the fuck away and kiss him there” (Petrović 2020: 23); “concerning the question of Kosovo / general // there are peonies growing // in my panties” (Petrović 2020: 51); “city, / you feeble cock / you frustrate me / and make me go mad ... / my city / you hypocrite piece of shit schizo/ I wouldn’t trade you for any other city in the world” (Perlić 2020: 13).

It is also very stimulating to contemplate the titles of these books, which are formulated as utterances with bombastic effect, quite like titles of pop or rock songs or albums: *My Mom Knows What Happens in Cities* [*Moja mama zna šta se dešava u gradovima*], *How I Became a Flamenco Dancer* [*Kako sam postala flamenko plesačica*], *All Day Breakfast* [*Doručak se služi čitavog dana*], *Some Houses Have No Yards* [*Nemaju sve kuće dvorište*], *Nothing Happens on Tuesday Evenings* [*Ništa se ne dešava utorkom uveče*], *People Jumping on Car Hoods* [*Ljudi koji skaču na haube*], *Karma Is a Bigger Bitch than I* [*Karma je veća kučka nego ja*], and so on.

It is noticeable that some authors attempt to include an element of activism, as well as some sort of ideological permeability which provides the universality of poetic expression. However, it is problematic that this quasi-revolutionary rhetoric does not seem to originate from an organic, authentic connection with class issues. On the contrary, it may be interpreted as just another strategy used to convince the reader of the author's intellectual or moral exceptionality. That is neither Sartre's engagement of the poet (Sartre 184: 35), nor Rancière's engaged intellectual who creates under the imperative that "literature 'does' politics as literature" (Rancière 2008: 7). Instead, there is an impression that this is a "calculated and affective activation of the social thematic plan, without any deeper critical questioning or stronger authorial subversion" (Аћимовић Ивков 2023: 58), which would be the only possible successful (po)et(h)ical or even political strategy in this case: "I'm here to defend / cripples weirdoes madmen faggots / failed abortions and bastards / I'm here to kiss the leprous and the wounded / outcasts and freaks / I'm here to embrace myself / in everyone" (Perlić 2020: 9).

There is yet another notable thing, in an almost phenomenological way: the line of poetry this text examines does not only draw very little influence, or none at all, from the academic circles and canonical poets; it is usually poorly received when it comes to institutional appraisal, too. Among these books of poetry, rare are the ones that have been awarded any significant literary prizes, although many of them have had many editions published, often numbering in thousands of copies (which is exceptional for the current condition of poetry),<sup>6</sup> their authors' social

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<sup>6</sup> For curiosity's sake, according to the most recent (unofficial, but hopefully credible) information around 20,000 copies of Radmila Petrović's collection "My Mom Knows

media posts are followed by hundreds, if not thousands of people, while their promotional events are among the most visited. However, as Milomir Gavrilović noted, it is interesting that precisely this generation of young poets “enjoys certain other bourgeois accolades, such as foreign literary residencies or various scholarships and projects funded by Serbian as well as foreign non-governmental organizations” (Гавриловић 2023: 144).

Could this discrepancy tell us something about the relationship between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art and their eternal struggle; does it testify about the belief that commercial and commercially extremely successful products are not worthy (enough) from the aesthetic and artistic perspective? Does the bourgeois, elitist idea about the fundamental divide between “artistic” and “commercial” literature (their readerships being educated and clever, or superficial and shallow, respectively) affirm rigid distinctive practices (see Bourdieu, 2003)? The law of supply and demand in neo-liberal capitalism and its hypostases presupposes a component in stark contrast with the ontological purpose of literature: the moment of dehumanization. In other words, we must pose the same question that has pre-occupied literary theorists and sociologists for many decades: can poetry that is *consumed* like a literary commodity count on the authenticity and value of the poetic text?

## V

Vis-à-vis this poetical paradigm exists another current of newer poetry which represents its anti-image. In terms of its sensibility, linguistic feeling and imagination, it relies more on the poetry of some earlier (but not very old) poetic tendencies, such as those represented by the poetry of, for example, Vasko Popa, Ivan V. Lalić, Jovan Hristić, Aleksandar Ristiović, Borislav Radović, Novica Tadić, Milosav Tešić, Slobodan Zubanović,

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What Happens in Cities” have been sold, which would set a precedent of sorts when it comes to any reasonably recent Serbian book of poetry. It is a truly fascinating fact, bearing promise for the return (even if significantly reduced) of the status poetry used to hold, for example, in the years following the Second World War, when editions of Tadeusz Różewicz’s poetry books numbered a million copies.

Radmila Lazić, Marija Šimoković, Tanja Kragujević, Judita Šalgo, Mirjana Stefanović, Ana Ristović and others. It could be said that, in principle, this poetry is not profitable in the economic sense and is less well placed in the virtual space, but often possesses a certain symbolic capital (a high scholarly and critical evaluation). Precisely this bifurcation reflects the dispersion of the contemporary poetry of young authors mentioned at the beginning, but also its potential.

Newer Serbian poetry that was the object of examination of this paper nevertheless did bring some great innovations: radicalization and spotlighting of certain themes which were not so present in poetry up until now, such as violence against women and resistance against the culture of patriarchy. In that sense, feminist and LGBT poetry, no matter the way of its aesthetic realization, got in full swing and is becoming more important with this new generation, which is without a doubt one of its fundamental achievements of broader societal significance. From the viewpoint of literary history, there is a chance that this poetry will be remembered as a reflection and building material of a culture and its time, rather than as nothing more than the meager artistic and expressive potential that the aforementioned generation could create and present. Keeping in mind their youth, the small number of published books and the short time they spent on the poetic scene, the *test of time* mentioned at the beginning of this text will show which ones of them will be able to overcome and reimagine this formulative poetics and branch out their poetic discourse and imagination in new directions.

*Translated by Vladimir Jović*

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