

Naume Radicheski

Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, Macedonia

Between the Traditional and the Modern Macedonian Prose

Abstract: This essay is an attempt at an affirmative (re)actualization of the analytical reading/s of Racin's artistic (short-story and novelist) prose. The author focuses mainly on the inspirational and social particularities which coincide with the creation of Racin's prose works, henceforth mostly focusing on the individual idea-based and narratological characteristics Racin possesses. Based on said characteristics, this essay positions Racin as the author of the rather narrow time gap between the traditional and the modern Macedonian prose. The end result of this kind of an approach is to detect how Racin as a narrator and novelist is in fact an author of a respectable but subtly selective relationship towards the specificities that the national prose tradition holds; moreover, as an author who is inventively positioned towards the new creative processes and a harbinger of values which have come to pass only in the unhindered period of the mature development of the Macedonian narrative and novelistic prose.

Key words: *Racin, Racin's prose, socially-engaged literature, literary (dis)continuity, contemporary Macedonian prose*

Due to a fascination with the splendor of the collection *White Dawns* (in the Macedonian original Бели мурги) – ever since their publication – we tend to forget, somewhat leisurely by-pass, the other segments and values of Racin’s work, clearly, those set within a national context, as an exceptionally significant literary work. These other segments, in fact, were rarely adequately affirmed when presented to the public and critical readerships, bearing in mind the developmental specificities of Macedonian literature in the interim World War period, and later on also due to the additionally difficult conditions during which Racin had to create his work. Particularly, due to the premature and violent interruption of the creation process of his work. Apart from the poetry he wrote in Serbo-Croatian, apart from his critically-essayistic and philosophically aesthetic segments of his creative and analytically active prose, a rather special place, if not a place of true significance within the framework of Racin’s entire literary production, is held by his short stories, as well as by the preserved fragments of the published format and (as a whole) incomplete novel *Opium* (in the original Macedonian Афион). Henceforth, the present discussion¹¹ is not just an apt impetus,

¹ The symposium “Racin’s Prose”, which took place as part of the 48th Racin Meetings, on June 9th, 2011, in Veles (Macedonia).

but also a realistically befitting opportunity to take a closer look at the said pieces, namely, to re-actualize one somewhat, subordinately viewed and neglected part of the work produced by one of the most significant founders and creators in the development of Macedonian literature in general.

The intentions of my present analytical approach to this part of Racin’s creative work are clearly given by the title of this essay – namely, they are focused on determining Racin’s place as a prose author, i.e., as a storyteller and novelist, in the development of Macedonian prose on the whole. At the same time, bearing in mind the importance of understanding the signs and directions of the analysis itself, and their contributions to the crafting of a well-conceived analysis, I’d like to begin with some already well-known and already elaborated facts and renditions by the Macedonian literary sciences, thus it’s important to point out, from the get-go, that despite the quantitatively more modest contributions made by Racin in the area of prose, through ten or more kept and verified prose contributions, Racin’s prose otherwise holds an exceptionally interesting place at the very end of the discontinuous development of the Macedonian prose in the first half of the 20th century. However, this realization does not come due to the quantity or for that matter the thematic pull of his stories, at

least of those that had survived him. Rather, it is supported by the stories' immanent values – the idea-based, stylistic, and particularly individualistic narratological qualities of Racin's storytelling. Both understandable and acceptable, these characteristics afford the wider position of Racin's narrative prose. These values and positions, in fact, are also, if not more so, interesting when we take into account the surviving fragments of Racin's 1930s (in)complete novel, *Opium*, as an exceptionally significant novel representative in/of Macedonian literature, which at that time exists primarily through publications conceived of in foreign languages. Even though I am at present alluding to and thinking of the novel in its entirety, it has been most definitely lost as a whole. For this kind of an analytical approach, of/towards more than obvious, and in certain cases only anticipated value detections, we could not but, although indirectly, look also at Racin's essayistic prose. However, on that topic, in a different essay, further on.

Examining first and foremost the genre variety of Racin's entire prose output, my present analytic intentions are focused solely on, from tactical analytical reasons, primarily interesting narrative prose. Henceforth, I'd like to examine his narrative pieces through several levels of their production value and wider value positioning, while independently

from the language/s of their creation. The approach I take has to follow the set course, particularly because the use of language in this case has been made due to non-literary and non-aesthetically related reasons. The eight known short stories by Racin, written during the 1920s and the 1930s, confirm, firstly his continuous and long-lasting commitment not just to poetry, but also to prose. They, together with other lost texts, through the power of the intensity of their inception and publication affirmatively correspond, as Racin researchers would attest, to his idea to publish a short-story collection. Through their optimal mutual correlation, not only through shared ideas and stylistics, but also thematically speaking, they are in effect one small volume of narrative contributions. Had he managed to get them published as a separate volume, like he did with *White Dawns*, had he created them, re-created them and presented them in the medium of the Macedonian language, Racin would have undertaken a truly magnanimous step towards the development of Macedonian prose, hence propelling an entirely different debate and stance amidst its researchers. His intentions during the second half of the 1930s, namely to craft his prose also through the medium of the Macedonian language, can be detected in the short stories "Golden Craft" (in the Macedonian original "Златен занает"), "One Life" (in

the Macedonian original “Еден живот”), and through the preserved fragments of an unfinished story.(see, Kliman, 1987:171) Later on, in 1952, namely almost ten years after Racin’s death, quite belatedly, such a coveted edition of Racin’s stories is published. (Racin, 1952)

Quite understandably, this analytical re-reading of Racin’s narrative texts, no matter its original intentions of employing a different approach, cannot go without the addressing of all of the previously employed (still applicative) analytical finds on the topic. Thus, during the early post-war years, although writing about Racin the poet, Dimitar Mitrev (Димитар Митрев), quite categorically came to the realization that “although not quite free from the attributes of social verbalism and a declaration of idea presentation (the prose texts by Racin) are not without the attributes of a psychological perspective”.(Mitrev, 1970: 184-185) The subject matter of Racin’s as the master of the short yet suggestively created rich psychological environment would later be the focus of Aleksandar Spasov’s (Александар Спасов) research, who particularly points out the conclusion of the story “Father” (“Татко”). (Spasov, 1994:29) Racin’s prose has been the subject of several analytical reads and studies, as the ones by Jovan Boshkovski (Јован Бошковски), Milan Gjurchinov (Милан Ѓурчинов), Blazhe Ristovski (Блаже Ристовски), Dimitar Solev

(Димитар Солев) and others. An attempt of an integrated and thoroughly analytical read in recent times has been undertaken by Iskra Nikolovska (Искра Николовска).²

Against the background of the more or less acceptable rather ambivalent conclusions of several of the critics, my own present analytical (re)readings of Racin’s short stories, focus on the early piece “Result” (“Резултат”), the later pieces, almost a decade later, “One Life” and “Golden Craft”, which affirm Racin first of all as an author of encyclopedically intellectual horizons. Notwithstanding, of course, his position as an author who creates within the framework of his own contemporaneous realities, such as that of revolutionary acts and feelings, which in turn, without a doubt points to the presence of a truly socially engaged prose. Still, however, most of all, my attention as a researcher is focused on the possibility of how these elements affirm Racin also as an author with an authentic ability to create artistic prose in its truest sense. This view allows us to reflect at least on his capability of creating a subtle lyricism out of the otherwise joyless daily activities, as for example when at the onset of the story “Noon” (“Пладне”), written at the same time as the poems in the collection

² See Iskra Nikolovska, “The Typological Characteristics of Racin’s Prose” (“Типолошки карактеристики на прозата на Рацин”, “Strema”, XXX, Prilep, March 1986, 167-181.

White Dawns. When casting a wider net, we cannot but notice that stories like “Father” and “Novak”, afford us the opportunity to ascertain, even conclude, that through the act of creating his prose, Racin proves that he knows all too well how to handle the many challenges in a creative manner, to wrestle with the risks of his own time, the trials, which are equally of aesthetic and non-aesthetic nature. Mostly due to the fact that, as Miodrag Drugovac (Миодраг Дрyговaц) had once pointed out, his narration “does not rely on circumspection; there is no verbosity; rather, a great deal of verisimilitude and a fierce emphasis on certain idea traits in his characters”. (Drugovac, 1975:165)

Equally inspired and thwarted in his creative work, Kocho Racin, through a masterfully driven creative synthesis and a subtlety in narration, reaches a middle ground for his revolutionary themes and his artistic legacy. Henceforth, it certainly does not come as a surprise that some of the researchers, past and present, had focused on the autobiographical component of/in his stories (in some quite present), which is indeed easily detectable but not always accepted/incorporated in an analytical read. If we exclude the earliest example, one following the spirit of Marxist philosophy, that is an example of a highly aesthetized revolutionary piece entitled “Result”, the detection of the autobiographical component mostly

corresponds to the prison theme in Racin’s prose. Let’s look firstly at the story “One Life”, where at the onset the specificity of the prison ambiance is depicted, while the single protagonist, Jovo, steeps deep into his dream-like reminiscences about the past stages of his life. But what is exceptionally experiential and comes to pass, at the level of creativity, and isn’t quite addressed here, resurfaces in the story “The Joy is Great” (“Радоста е голема”), whence we discover some of the most accomplished segments of Racin’s prose in general – here realized at the level of ambiance, even at the level of a psychological determining of action, particularly in regards to the depiction of conditions and a suggestive portrayal of the protagonists in the world of the prison. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Nikolovska in her text discloses “the most complete and most wholesome narrative whole” we can find with Racin. (Nikolovska, 1986:177) These are places which afford Racin a place inside the pantheon of authors of his time who had also created around the prison theme – to name a few, Ivo Andrić, August Cesarec, but also authors like Kosmač, and Juš Kozak. Similar, but singular in his own way, certainly. The singular aspect, however, the one true staple of Racin’s work in all if this, is the fact that when it comes to autobiographical elements, he tends to introduce them gradually and subtly so that they may

merge with the common and the universal. Based on his own individual life experiences, he creates, quite the visionary that he is, the character of the universal worker and revolutionary. Otherwise, Racin would not stand as one of the most riveting representatives not only of the Macedonian, but also the then present Yugoslav socially engaged literature. And not just as a poet, but also as a storyteller. As a writer who first and foremost saw himself as a poet, this kind of a self-actualization through the possibilities of the visionary, allowed Racin all and everything, in his development and growth. Particularly in his early years. In the days of "Result". In spite of the inevitable and direct thematically-obsessive compatibility of his time, which he, as an engaged writer and intellectual cannot quite forsake, and in spite of the autobiographical, primarily expressed through the position of the author as narrator, in his short stories, no matter how compatible to his poetry, in the 1930s, Racin brings to the forefront his authentic and high capabilities to create a truly unique and individually marked – within Macedonian literature and wider – narrative model, a model which has already been several times now upgraded, varied and re-modeled so that it can be practiced and expressed further on, i.e., applied in the early post-war years. Hence, it is a pity that Racin's stories were not sooner published in a special

edition volume, were not re-created in the medium of the Macedonian language, and with that were not made available to the first generation of Macedonian post-war storytellers.

Therefore, here and now, quite expectedly, we come to the realization that Kocho Racin, also as a storyteller, holds a special place among all of the writers in the decade prior to the Second World War. Hindered and stifled, both at the home front, and abroad, in the plethora of the Macedonian emigrant destinations throughout the neighboring countries, they manifest a number of common traits, but also a good deal of differences. As many others, Racin too, on the one hand, expressed a subtle awareness for the traditional values found in Macedonian prose and their manifestation, which in turn does not, in the least bit, diminish or obstruct the presence of specific possibilities in his prose, possibilities to become an incorrigible and inimitable future visionary. That which is already there, and which at that time cannot be found in a highly realized storyteller, such as A. Krstić. With this, Racin, in fact, is the most authentic anticipator of the later speedy processes towards a qualitative development not only of contemporary Macedonian poetry, but also of contemporary Macedonian prose. The aforementioned detection, thus, of at least some of the particular traits of his prose work, particularly his short stories, cannot fail to af-

firm these said values and possibilities. Apart from what has been said, we can thus add here that through their idea-based horizons, and particularly in the psychological development presented in them, they correspond more directly not only with our early post-war storytellers, but also with some common intentions with the later generation of storytellers, certainly the more mature development of our nationally-centered prose.

Racin's stories, namely, confirm his exceptionally significant position on the map of the spatial and linguistically shattered development of Macedonian prose, of Macedonian literature in general. If we attempt a more precise definition of said position, we'll see that Racin, when it comes to the leading ideas and existential values of his time, manages to carve out a space between the traditional and the modern development of the Macedonian prose production. Particularly, if we add to what has previously been surmised about his short stories, certain possible reflections come to mind, especially those tied to his novel. A keener analytical read or reflection on Racin's *Opium* cannot escape addressing the process of its creation. In its first version, for it was complete, we are told, at the onset of the 1930s, in 1931. About Racin's early and singular experience as a novelist, perhaps largely due to his youthful spirit and poetic predispositions,

or mostly due to his selfless acceptance of socially-relevant revolutionary ideas, we ought to remind ourselves of the reflections which stem from the critical analysis of the novel by the then progressive Zagreb-based literary magazine "Literatura". Quite telling for us are the remarks made about the young novelist, namely the insistence on his revision of "the too pronounced journalistic attempt and the absence of a fibula". (See: Racin, 1987:192) Since we are dealing with utilitarian requests made at the expense of socially engaged literature, the novel, as it was in its first version, prior to the re-write, with the pointed out failings, we can also trace here Racin's allegiances already at that time, with a truly modern, and as made evident by his early prose work, dominantly expressionistic, novelistic undertaking.

However, at present we cannot but reflect on the second, the doctored version of Racin's novel, although mostly at the level of pure speculation. What could be expected of it? We cannot at long last ignore the sentiment that the published and with that preserved fragments from the novel, as well as those published by Racin himself in 1933 in the magazine "Literatura", as well as the fragments published by Radivoje Pešić in the literary magazine "Kulturen Zhivot" in 1970, speak to his true nature and to the character of him as an author who creates larger scale prose projects. Yet we are

still left with reflections, ponderings, and possibly impossible fantasies about a reconstruction of the novel based on the preserved fragments. Finally, to what extent and how so, as a whole, the lost novel by Racin may correspond in normal circumstances with the published novel of his younger neighbor Jordan Leov, who exhibited a wider authorial interest in the personage and work of Racin.

It would be wrongful, nonetheless, to believe that Racin was alone in his position at the crossroads between the traditional and the modern development of Macedonian prose. With a noticeable journalistic approach to a modern topic, some of his stories are compatible to, for example, the reportages by Gjorgji Abadjiev (Ѓорѓи Абаџиев) in the book "Labor and People" ("Труд и луѓе") (1936). Incomparable, in that sense, is Racin's prose text "The Tobacco Pickers" ("Тутуноберачите"), partially a short story, partially reportage in a genre sense, to Abadjiev's short story "The Tobacco Woman Picker" ("Тутуноберачката"), although thematically similar. And not only that story, and not just Abadjiev. Racin, with his stories, perhaps equally so with his prose, is compatible with many other authors who took on the socially-engaged revolutionary position, even in a wider temporal frame. However, here and now, taking all of this into account, we should be looking for his potential and his

international values. And they are quite interesting and quite high. At the level of facts and their incorporation, Racin, with a good deal of skillfulness, positions himself on the map of the post-war socially engaged literature and not just within Macedonian literature, but also within the larger Yugoslav literary field.

Seen from the viewpoint of his potential, Kocho Racin is, in fact, incomplete both as a storyteller and as a novelist. This mostly comes as a result of his individually high ethos, which insists on a commitment for and a responsibility towards the revolutionary idea as his guiding motif and ideal. Incomplete, certainly, due to the fact that he never had the chance to experience a period of unhindered and continuous development and creation. Hence, he remains also incomplete in a quality sense, and if compared to his contemporaries, such as the anthological names in the literary spheres, such as Krstić or Talev. However, had he been afforded the chance, had he continued with his writing, we cannot fail to notice that he would have become a highly accomplished modernist, equally within the context of the Macedonian literary values, but also those outside of this context, and not just for the time period of the first half of the 20th century. Here and now, namely, we cannot hide the sentiment that Racin, more so at the level of prose rather than poetry, was primarily focused on the future,

on the modern development of the Macedonian artistic literature. This is so since his experiences with traditional prose are far looser than when dealing with the relationship his poetry has with traditional Macedonian singing. Such remains the case as he is a rather gifted re-creator of folklore, from a young age, and quite speedily and with great force he grows into not so much of its disciple, or just another re-creator but its analyst.

As a conclusion, I cannot fail to point out the following – a hope that my analytical reading of Racin's prose, manages to shift the beginnings of modern artistic prose in Macedonian literature, and thus position them, by having them set on the wider frame of the interwar period. What needs to happen next is an attempt at a more precise study of this exact newly positioned developmental delineation which affords Racin a place of a prose writer, storyteller, while dealing with a rather loose and at times aloof, rather fluid frame. Due to this exact notion, namely that Racin as well as our entire literature at that period of time are determined by the socio-political and linguistic limitations. Their developmental specificities at that time are even providential, in a collective sense, limited and rerouted by a number of preconditions and restrictions. We cannot and should not thus forget the many multiplied instances when this literary corpus

contributed and added to other national matrices and developments. We are in fact dealing with a rather long developmental phase in Macedonian prose, a phase which is frightfully stretched due to the fragmented prose experience of our renaissance reformers, hence through the plethora of authors – which unfortunately we knew little of, storytellers we came to know later, in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century – who created exclusively in another language, up until the early post-war storytellers and novelists such as Jovan Boshkovski (Јован Бошковски), Vlado Maleski (Владо Малески), Stale Popov (Стале Попов). Even if not up until an entire line of younger storytellers and novelists. Due to the fact that in the preceding decades the natural developmental course of the Macedonian artistic prose had been derailed, the latter, i.e., the post-war Macedonian prose authors, namely the difficulties they had faced due to a virtually non-existent bond with the Macedonian writers who had come prior and their inability to story-tell in their mother tongue.

The Macedonian prose of the interim World War period, in particular the 1930s, when Racin himself becomes a storyteller and a novelist, with the preceding experience of the likes of Krstić and Talev – for instance, Talev's early storytelling and novelistic pursuits,

as well as those by Hristov (Христов) or Belev (Белев) or Попов (Попов), despite the choice of languages, and of course the early prose of Abadjiev, etc. – represents a mosaic or one exceptionally spacious, but linguistically inconsistent, nationally scattered literary map. For the known reason, it lacks Racin's presence with the planned collection of short stories – something perhaps we do covet even today – written in the medium of the Macedonian language.

The same way we miss the complete version of his novel. Had these two projects happened, not at present time, but rather earlier one, we would have been addressing the development and the values of the Macedonian prose in a different light, in fact, would have been addressing the development of Macedonian literature from an entirely different stance.

(прегледен труд)

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Науме Радичевски

Меѓу традиционалната и модерната македонска проза

Резиме: Афирмативниот и преоценувачки пристап кон како поголема целина недооформените раскажувачки остварувања на Коста Рацин ја потврдуваат најпрво неговата долгорочна и континуирана преокупација со прозата. Дотолку повеќе што мошне рано, на почетокот од 30-тите години на XX век, тој резултатно се посвети и на романот – неговиот бесповратно исчезнат „Афион“. Неговите објавени, односно во ракопис сочувани раскази или фрагменти од романот, како и неговата поезија, примарно го позиционираа во круговите на тогаш актуелната социјална литература. Повеќе од тоа, позадлабоченото аналитичко читање ги открива извонредно интересните индивидуални специфичности и потенцијални можности на Рацина како раскажувач или како прозаист пошироко. Тие се детектирани пред сè по линијата на уметничката транспозиција на неговите идеи на револуционер и на прогресивен мислител, како и можностите за суптилно психолошко продлабочување. Поседувајќи изострени сензори за природата и за вредностите на македонската традиционална проза, со погорните квалификации, Рацин се наоѓа на меѓата меѓу традиционалната и модерната македонска проза. Уште повеќе, пак, на позицијата на антиципатор на вредностите што ќе се предметат во зрелата развојност на македонската проза.

Клучни зборови: *Рацин, прозата на Рацин, социјално ангажирана литература, литературен (дис)континуитет, современа македонска литература*