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Riddle and Secret: Laza Kostić and Branko Miljković around Heraclitus' Fire

In memory of Dušan Bataković (1957–2017)

εἰς ἑξήμιόμυριοι, ἐάν ᾖριστος ᾦ

“One is ten thousand to me, if he be the best.”

Heraclitus, fragment 49

Abstract: The culture of ancient Greece, and particularly its philosophy, contains paradigms that are predetermining, binding and eternally valid for the entire body of European culture. European culture and, in its distinctive way, Serbian culture, as an important dynamic motif has the need to constantly revisit Hellenic culture. This is in fact a productive (re) interpretation as a way of acquiring cultural self-awareness and self-knowledge. The entire cosmos and human fate in it are revealed in Hellenic thought as both a *riddle* and a *secret*. Both of these relationships to reality, in the model form found already in the work of Heraclitus, still characterize human thought and creation. The world seen as a riddle to be solved is the subject of many a discipline, and the secret that reveals itself to us provides the basis of faith and all arts. Two Serbian poets (although there are more) acquired their creative self-awareness around Heraclitus' concept of fire. In his scholarly and philosophical treatises Laza Kostić (1841–1910) turned to Heraclitus in a bid to solve the riddle of reality. In his contemplative-poetic works Branko Miljković (1934–1961) turned to Heraclitus seeking to uncover the secret of nothingness in the latter's fire and to learn from the Ephesian's foretoking that poetry is hermetic and loves to hide. Is there a deeper logic linking riddle and secret? Do science, philosophy, art and faith have a deeper unity? The answers are to be sought in Laza's and Branko's understanding of Heraclitus' fire.

Keywords: Heraclitus, Laza Kostić, Branko Miljković, riddle, secret, poetry

The model role and importance of Hellenic culture

The Hellenic culture still remains formative for all European nations and a determining paradigm of their own respective cultures. Thus, when revisiting Hellenic sources, we are also returning to ourselves. This return to the Hellenes keeps reoccurring in the cultural history of European nations. The European culture, and in its distinctive way the Serbian culture, as an important dy-

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dynamic motif has the need to constantly revisit the Hellenic culture. This is in fact a productive (re)interpretation as a way of acquiring cultural self-awareness and self-knowledge. Thus we have Renaissance humanism; neo-humanism (Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin, Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt); and the third humanism of Werner Jaeger, rooted in classical and Christian antiquity. Characterized by ahistoricism, classicism formed our perception of antiquity as a timeless ideal. Drawing on this, the complacent classical scholar sees the Hellenic culture as self-contained. In contrast, seeing everything through the prism of the endlessness and aimlessness of historical developments, *historicism* has distanced us from this ideal. Neither the absolutization nor the relativization of ancient Greek values could help a lost wanderer find the path in the world of life. These values need to be allowed to participate in the dynamics of life. And today? Jacob Burckhardt said that we would never rid ourselves of classical antiquity unless we became barbarians again.¹ And indeed, nowadays humankind seems to be headed straight into barbarity.

However, we have become Christians! The meeting of Greek philosophy and Christian faith does not have just the single meaning of an unrepeatable and edifying historical event, but rather an eternally binding sense for European culture, because it was precisely *this* meeting that led to the emergence of *this* culture. The Christian “reception” of the Hellenic world is the reason behind our fundamental interest in the culture of ancient Greece, which is understood as “our own” and still authoritative. Christianity did not reject either Socrates or the Truth. More specifically, the Christian faith in itself involves the activity of the mind, an arduous quest to discover the truth, to understand the world and humankind in it, to expand the field of knowledge and broaden the mind (which is nowadays dangerously limited to instrumental rationality). The Socratic wondering mind and the *érōs* of seeking the truth, as the founding moments of academic and philosophical knowledge and exploration, are by no means alien to Christianity. And indeed, what would be our perception of Socrates without Christ, whose sacrifice imbued the sacrifice of Socrates with a new meaning in later culture.

The meeting of Christianity and the Hellenic world is also illustrated by the great idea of *logos* (λόγος), with which the Greeks laid the foundation of philosophical and scientific rationality. In *theoretical philosophy* it is the *logical mind* that accepts the existence and validity only of that for which proof can be provided (λόγον διδόναι). And the *logos* is present not only in our epistemological capacities (with epistemology drawing on this), but also in the very structure of reality (ontology aims to demonstrate this), and thus the agent of learning

¹ J. Burckhardt, *Historische Fragmente*, Aus dem Nachlass (Basel: Schwabe, 1942).

and the subject of learning are seen in unity (already in Heraclitus). In *practical philosophy* it is the *logos mind* that is capable of *differentiating between good and evil*. And not only is the *logos* an individual feature (ζῶον λόγον ἔχον) owing to which we have a sense of morality (which is the basis of ethics), but it is also a requisite for the emergence of the polis (in itself necessary for the emergence of politics) – the precondition for a community based on moral and legal norms, as admirably elaborated by Aristotle.² Christianity accepts both key aspects of the Hellenic idea of *logos* – the theoretical and the practical. However, *Logos* is Christ who “became flesh” (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, John 1:14). Christianity brings an unprecedented, completely fresh and ennobling meaning: the *logos of love and sacrifice* for another – in contrast to instrumental rationality as the *logos of violence*, which threatens to plunge us back into barbarity, where the only universal language is force.

Hellenic antiquity in Serbian culture

Hellenic antiquity as an educational and cultural ideal has always been a paradigmatic requisite for the emergence and existence of the Serbian culture, either due to its direct formative influence or through its indirect Christian reception. Among many examples, primarily from the field of literature, the following are particularly noteworthy: St. Sava (1174–1235), Constantine of Kostenets (1380?–1439?), Zaharije Orfelin (1726–1785), Dositej Obradović (1739–1811), Jovan Sterija Popović (1806–1856), Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1813–1851), Laza Kostić (1841–1910), Vojislav Ilić (1862–1894), Dimitrije Mitrinović (1887–1953), Miodrag Pavlović (1928–2014), Borislav Pekić (1930–1992), Ivan V. Lalić (1931–1996), Jovan Hristić (1933–2002), Branko Miljković (1934–1961). This is by no means an exhaustive list of all notable Serbian Hellenists who had a deep impact on the Serbian culture. The Serbian self-awareness and self-comprehension include Hellenic antiquity as a constitutive element.

The entire cosmos and human fate in it are revealed in Hellenic thought as both a riddle and a secret. Both of these types of relationships towards reality, in a model form found already in the work of Heraclitus, still characterize human thought and creation. The world seen as a riddle to be solved is the subject of many a discipline, and the secret that reveals itself to us provides the basis of faith and all arts. Two Serbian poets (there are more) acquired their creative self-awareness around Heraclitus’ concept of fire. In his scholarly and philosophical treatises *Laza Kostić* (1841–1910) turned to Heraclitus in a bid to solve the riddle of reality. In his contemplative-poetic works *Branko Miljković* (1934–1961) turned to Heraclitus hoping that his fire might reveal the secret of poetry.

² *Politica* I 2. 1252^b–1253^a.

Convergence loves to hide: Laza Kostić and Heraclitus before the riddle of reality

Both the poetry of Laza Kostić and the scholarly oeuvre of this remarkably learned jurist, politician and prisoner, poet and literary critic, philosopher and essayist, professor and academician, journalist and translator, actor and bon vivant – can be seen as a fertile refuge of Hellenic antiquity.³ Here I will focus on two of his academic studies (he signed them with his academic title of “Dr.” to indicate his scholarly aspirations): *The Fundamentals of Beauty in the World, with Particular Regard to Serbian Folk Poetry* (1880)⁴ and *The Basic Principle: A Critical Introduction to General Philosophy* (1884).⁵

At the very beginning of *The Fundamentals of Beauty* Laza Kostić expressly defines his task as a quest for the fundamental law of everything in existence, a task that had already been taken up by early Greek philosophers (as interpreted by Aristotle): “Ever since the dawn of time, thinkers have always tried to discern the way of the emergence and survival of this world, to find and learn the laws that cause, generate, develop and destroy all various phenomena. In this struggle, in its proudest endeavor, the human spirit will never falter until it discovers the very last and first law that was the source of everything, everything in the world; until it uncovers the last secret of creation” (121:1). The sought “fundamental line of the first law of all life and all creatures” (121:2) was grasped already by Empedocles, Anaxagoras and Heraclitus:⁶

“But that same principle of the world, which is recognized by Empedocles and Anaxagoras, is most decisively, most powerfully and most clearly propagated by the youngest member of this trio of Hellenic sages – Heraclitus, who could only be seen as obscure (dark, cryptic) by the obscure, supposedly because his daring had clouded their spiritual eye.

³ This has been thoroughly explored by Miron Flašar, “Helenstvo Laze Kostića”, in *Zbornik istorije književnosti. историје књижевности*, Odeljenje literature i jezika, vol. 6: Laza Kostić (Belgrade: SANU, 1968), 169–231; see also Miodrag Radović, “Heleni”, *Laza Kostić i svetska književnost* (Belgrade: Delta Press, 1983), 27–51.

⁴ Dr. Laza Kostić, “Osnova lepote u svetu s osobitim obzirom na srpske narodne pesme” [The Fundamentals of Beauty in the World, with Particular Regard to Serbian Folk Poetry], *Letopis matice srpske* (Novi Sad 1880), Ch. 121, 1–40; Ch. 122, 1–40; Ch. 123, 1–24; Ch. 124, 1–44 (published as a separate publication in Novi Sad by Srpska narodna zadružna štamparija, 1880), 144 p. – This text quotes the first edition.

⁵ Dr. Laza Kostić, “Osnovno načelo. Kritički uvod u opštu filosofiju” [The Basic Principle: A Critical Introduction to General Philosophy], *Letopis Matice srpske* (Novi Sad 1884), Ch. 138, 1–39; Ch. 139, 1–53 (published separately in Novi Sad by Srpska štamparija dra Svetozara Miletića, 1884, 91 p.) – This text quotes the first edition. An English translation (by Predrag Čičovački) has been published recently: *The Basic Principle: A Critical Introduction to General Philosophy* (Sombor: City Library “Karlo Bjelicki”, 2016).

⁶ On this see Siniša Jelušić, “Laza Kostić i predsokratovci”, in *Antičke studije kod Srba*, ed. M. Stojanović and R. Samardžić (Belgrade: Bikanološki institut SANU, 1989), 207–218.

In the fragments that are left of Heraclitus' thought, the sage says in the 30th: Διαφερόμενον γὰρ αἰεὶ ξυμφέρεται, and in the 37th: καὶ Ἡράκλειτος τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον, καὶ ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἁρμονίαν, καὶ πάντα κατ' ἔριν γίνεσθαι.

(And Heraclitus says that the opposite is useful, and that the diverse produces the most beautiful harmony, and that everything comes from strife. The Parisian publisher Mullachius translates the last phrase as: et eo Discordia nasci omnia statuit. But the Latin word *discordia* has none of the liveliness, the scintillating freshness, the true Hellenic drama that comes with the word ἔρις, fury, grudge, strife).⁷ (I21:3-4)

At this point Laza Kostić introduces the key term of his interpretation – “convergence”, which here suggests a harmonic and symmetrical relationship between opposing forces as the fundamental cosmic law; however, for Kostić the term has a complex and comprehensive meaning, as the methodological convergence of deduction and induction⁸ and, much more importantly, as the epistemological and creative convergence of imagination and reason, heart and mind, poetry and philosophy.⁹ He defines the principle of convergence as follows:

The word convergence warns us that it is time to decipher what was the truth that the three Hellenic sages discerned, learned and intimated. They were the first to discover that the principle of duality, the principle of opposition, more specifically in the proportion, in antithesis, the principle in the physical world, is most clearly manifested in the parallelogram of power and in organic life in the law of symmetry and convergence. All of this is one single principle. This is best illustrated by comparing those manifestations of this principle that are seemingly so divergent that they do not seem alike at all. That is the law of symmetry and the law of proportion and convergence. (I21:5-6)

Symmetry is the realization of the principle of “proportion” and “convergence”, two halves of a whole or two phenomena, whether in the body, image, thought, in a force, in space or in time. (I21:8)

Symmetry is the appearance of the same fundamental law of the world which Empedocles found in “the separation of unity” and “the unity of duality”, Anaxagoras in cosmic “opposition”, and which Heraclitus most succinctly formulated

⁷ The accent in the word ἔρις was originally incorrectly printed as ἐρις.

⁸ On the convergence of induction and deduction he says (I21:5): “The only hope for success, in life as well as in scholarship, is the harmony (concord) of these two great foreign scientific methods, more specifically the convergence of these two directions.”

⁹ Cf. Anica Savic Rebac, “O jednoj pesmi Laze Kostića: Povodom četrdesete godišnjice njegove smrti”, *Univerzitetski glasnik* III/40–41 (1950), 5 = A. Savic Rebac, *Duh helenstva*, eds. M. Lompar and I. Deretić (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2015), 720–724, 724: “The philosophical essays of Laza Kostić in themselves place him among the relevant representatives of the concept of the convergence of diverging forces; but his full stature is achieved in the convergence and harmony of his philosophical concept with his works of poetry.”

as follows: “Out of discord comes the fairest harmony and struggle is the father of all things.” (121:9)

Symmetry is really nothing but contrast in harmony, in Greek ἀρμονία τῶν διαφερόντων, in a word: “dis-cord”. (121:9)

Laza Kostić proceeds to explain that in ancient times the word ἀρμονία used to mean “rift, groove, joint” (121:9) and points out: “The joint is the simplest, most graphic embodiment of the principle of convergence” (121:10). The Hellenic people suspected and Heraclitus formulated that “everything comes from assembling the disjointed and dismantling the joined, or from the concord of discord or discord of concord, in a word – from convergence” (121:10). Then he goes on to universalize the concept of convergence and thematize the convergence of space and time and the convergence in anorganic nature, specifically in crystals, and in organic nature (flora and fauna), and particularly in humankind.¹⁰

These ideas are elaborated in *The Basic Principle*, a text documenting his knowledge of natural science, particularly physiology, as well as of classical authors and modern philosophers (e.g. Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer, Mill).¹¹ It is wrong, he argues, to seek the basic principle of organic life in matter, because such a principle could not be applied to spiritual life; rather, the answer to this problem can be revealed by the theory of movement (waves) in the phenomena of light and heat:

And when this theory, the theory of movement – confirmed with mathematical precision by almost every physical phenomenon from the simplest movement of bodies and molecules to the phenomenon of electromagnetism – when this theory is applied to the question of life, we must strictly logically come to the conclusion that the primordial cause of all things, both physical and spiritual, cannot be found in any kind of matter but rather needs to be sought in a principle of proportion that governs matter and movement, older and superior to both matter and movement.

We believe that this is the principle of convergence. (138:12)

Convergence, proportion,¹² harmony, symmetry – these are all modalities of a single principle and Laza Kostić sees the discovery of this principle in the works of early Greek philosophers: “Proclaiming a concept of proportion, a law of relation, a principle of ratio, as the only foundation of all phenomena in the world, I do not for a moment believe that I have discovered anything original or

¹⁰ E.g.: “Human bones are arranged not only in the most perfect symmetry, but also in total harmony. Every bone is joined to another” (123:1).

¹¹ For more detail see Dusan Nedeljković, “Srpski dijalektički pankalizam u XIX veku” [1960], in Zoran Glušević, ed., *Epoha romantizma* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1966), 388–402; Siniša Jelušić, “Uvod u značenje filozofskih rasprava Laze Kostića”, *Književna istorija XVIII/69–70* (1985), 65–106.

¹² In the Serbian original Laza Kostić uses a neologism derived from the word “bridge, to bridge” (Sr. premost, премоост) as a synonym for proportion, ratio, ἀνά λόγον (e.g. 138:13).

that God has not revealed the secret of his creation of humankind and the world to anyone but me. This is an ancient concept and is found as early as Pythagoras” (138:13). To clarify his basic principle, Kostić offers some more specific terminological and conceptual explanations: “Symmetry is the joining or melding of opposites of two parts” (138:20/21). “Symmetry is a composite of convergences, direct or indirect” (138:22). In addition, he points out that symmetry is a *manifestation* rather than an idea, as well as harmony: “Harmony is a very distinctive manifestation of the basic principle of convergence or convergence in a specific centripetal form, an assembled cross” (138:35). “This proves that harmony is nothing but inverted or rather assembled symmetry; the reverse is also true: symmetry is inverted or rather disassembled harmony. (...) Harmony is the synthesis of symmetry. Symmetry is the analysis of harmony” (138:36). Of course, the basic principle has a universal meaning:

But there is one form of the principle of convergence that has ruled the world ever since the creation of crystals to all organic phenomena to the workings of the loftiest capacities of the mind and its creations. That is symmetry. (138:14)

From the creation of some crystals to the noblest products of the human mind to the exemplary works of art and poetry, always and everywhere there is symmetry and harmony in fruitful, blessed fellowship. (138:37)

Symmetry, harmony and convergence make humans the most perfect organism (139:1), and the basic principle brings us to the question of the internal limitations of knowing the human mind (139:9).

Laza Kostić seeks to solve the riddle that he has asked himself (cf. 138:38). He approaches Heraclitus driven by his aspiration to uncover the nature of things, the basic principle of everything in existence – more specifically the principle of convergence, first understood by the ancient Greeks, originally by Empedocles and most perfectly by Heraclitus (139:13, 17), who formulated it as Διαφερόμενον γὰρ αἰὲν ξυμφέρεται (the detached is always united, translates Kostić – 139:17). “After Heraclitus it is all over, the end comes to everything in antiquity. In classical antiquity he was both the apex and the conclusion in the history of our fundamental thought” (139:18). This return to the Presocratics was neither isolated nor unusual. It had been done, in the interest of their own thought, by Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. Even Karl Popper, who was concerned with logic, methodology and philosophy of science rather than with metaphysics, argues that we need to revisit the Presocratics and their “simple straightforward rationality” which lies in the “simplicity” and “boldness” of their primarily cosmological and epistemological questions; in other words, Popper believes that philosophy must return to cosmology and a simple theory of knowledge.¹³

¹³ Karl R. Popper, “Back to the Presocratics”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* n. s. 59 (1958–59), 1–24; also published in Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Sci-*

A particular interpretative challenge would be to explore the reverse course of influence, i.e. how could Heraclitus' fragments on harmony, logos and fire be reinterpreted from Kostić's point of view and, of course, what would the riddle and the secret be for Heraclitus. Well-educated, competent and driven by a passion for research, Kostić read Heraclitus' fragments in Greek in the then-authoritative collection of Pre-Socratic texts in the first volume (*Poeseos philosophicæ cæterorumque ante Socratem philosophorum quæ supersunt*, 1860) of Greek fragments (*Fragmenta philosophorum græcorum*) edited by the German classical scholar and Hellenist Friedrich Wilhelm August Mullach, (1807–1882),¹⁴ who included his own Latin translations of 96 Greek fragments by Heraclitus (pp. 315–329). Mullach's translations are critically viewed by Kostić.

Kostić did not focus on Heraclitus' concept of eternal and ever-living (ἀείζωον) fire as the only cosmic force untouched by creation and decline (22 B 30, 31, 90 Diels/Kranz), because he believed that the basic principle is to be sought not in the material but in the spiritual – in *harmony*. And for Heraclitus harmony is in the unity of opposites: “What opposes unites, and the finest attunement stems from things bearing in opposite directions, and all things come about by strife” (τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον καὶ ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἁρμονίαν καὶ πάντα κατ' ἔριν γίνεσθαι – B 8 D/K).¹⁵ In fact, Heraclitus offers variations of this thought in several fragments: “things whole and not whole, what is drawn together and what is drawn asunder, the harmonious and the discordant. The one is made up of all things, and all things issue from the one” (συλλάψεις· ὄλα

entific Knowledge (1963), 4th ed. (revised) (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 136–153: 136. (Serbian translation by D. Lakićević, Novi Sad 2002, 212–235: 212).

¹⁴ *Fragmenta philosophorum græcorum*, collegit, recensuit, vertit, annotationibus et prolegomenis illustravit, indicibus instruxit Fr. Guil. Aug. Mullachius, in III voluminibus, I: *Poeseos philosophicæ cæterorumque ante Socratem philosophorum quæ supersunt*, II: *Pythagoreos, Sophistas, Cynicos et Chalcidii in Priorem Timæi platonici partem commentarios continens*, III: *Platonicos et Peripateticos continens*, Parisiis: Editore Ambrosio Firmin Didot, I 1860, II 1867, III 1881 (reprinted in Aalen: Scientia-Verlag, 1968). Comprehensive and easily readable, Mullach's seminal work remained in use for a long time. The first volume on the Presocratics did not become obsolete until 1903, which saw the publication of the first edition of the authoritative collection by Hermann Diels (1848–1922): H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, griechisch und deutsch* (Berlin: Weidmann 1903) [Heraclitus is quoted here according to the last, sixth edition (I–III, 1951–1952), edited by Walther Kranz (1884–1960)]. Kostić did not use the latest available edition by the Oxford classical scholar Ingram Bywater (1840–1914) *Heracliti Ephesii Reliquiæ*, recensuit I. Bywater, Appendicis loco additæ sunt Diogenis Laertii vita Heracliti, particulae Hippocratei de diaeta libri primi, epistolæ Heracliteæ cum indice duplici scriptorum et verborum (Oxonii: e typographeo Clarendoniano, 1877; reprint: Amsterdam 1969, London: Argonaut/Zeno 1970).

¹⁵ Cf. B 80 D/K: “We must know that war is common to all and strife is justice, and that all things come into being and pass away through strife” (εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἔοντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεών).

καὶ οὐχ ὄλα, συμφερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συνᾶδον διᾶδον καὶ ἐκ πάντων ἓν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα – B 10 D/K); “The way up and the way down is one and the same” (ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὡντή – B 60 D/K); “Concerning the circumference of a circle the beginning and end are common” (ξυνὸν γὰρ ἀρχὴ καὶ πέρασ ἐπὶ κύκλου περιφερείας – B 103 D/K). For the purposes of this text, however, the following fragment is particularly significant: “The *hidden harmony* is better than the obvious” (ἄρμονιῆ ἀφανῆς φανερῆς κρείττων – B 54 D/K) – the essence of things as their invisible composition of being is superior to anything visible in terms of fundamentality. Heraclitus was the first to expressly suggest the invisible as the subject of philosophy, a point later cogently formulated by Anaxagoras: “Appearances are a glimpse of the unseen” (ὄψις τῶν ἀδήλων τὰ φαινόμενα – 59 B 21A D/K); even Herodotus (II 33) discusses the methodological principle, which allows us to infer the unknown from the visible (τοῖς ἐμφανέσι τὰ μὴ γιγνωσκόμενα τεκμαιρόμενος). The visible reflects the invisible, and the invisible (which is hidden and therefore invisible) is revealed through the visible as the true subject of our understanding of reality. This brings us to Heraclitus’ famous statement that “nature” (fundamental conception, the workings of reality) “loves to hide” (φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ – B 123 D/K). The fundamental structure of reality is not hidden in the sense that it is unintelligible; it “loves to hide” in the sense that we uncover it as a *riddle* to be solved. The riddle allows finding a solution as a discovery of meaning. The riddle of the world (*Welträtsel*) allows us to uncover the meaning of the world (which is not readily given to us) through the effort of learning and interpretation by deciphering it, and to thereby understand the world. The requisite for solving the riddle of reality is *logos*, the rationality of both reality and our knowledge: “all things come to be in accordance with this *logos*” (γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε), but “humans always prove unable to ever understand it, both before hearing it and when they have first heard it” (τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ’ ἐόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον – B 1 D/K); however: “To the soul, belongs the self-multiplying *Logos*” (ψυχῆς ἐστι λόγος ἑαυτὸν αὖξων – B 115 D/K). Hence for Heraclitus *logos* means both the principle of the defining structure of the cosmos (as such it is omnipresent in manifest diversity) and the ability of the soul to discover the *logos* structure of things (as such it is universally valid for understanding things as well as self-multiplying). Hence, it is that mysteriously hidden harmony that as the guarantee of rationality lies in both the structure of reality and the logic of discovering reality, and together with Heraclitus Laza Kostić seeks to uncover the basic principle of everything – of objectivity and subjectivity.

Every riddle has an answer. According to Ludwig Wittgenstein, “the world is the totality of facts, not of things” (1.1: Die Welt ist die Gesamtheit der Tatsachen, nicht der Dinge), and “the facts in logical space are the world” (1.13: Die Tatsachen im logischen Raum sind die Welt), and therefore it follows that there

is no riddle without and answer: "For an answer which cannot be expressed, the question too cannot be expressed. The *riddle* does not exist. If a question can be put at all, then it can also be answered" (6.5: Zu einer Antwort, die man nicht aussprechen kann, kann man auch die Frage nicht aussprechen. Das Rätsel gibt es nicht. Wenn sich eine Frage überhaupt stellen lässt, so kann sie auch beantwortet werden).¹⁶ Unlike myth, which offers absolute and unequivocal answers about the holy reality of beginnings, the riddle insists on questioning: the riddle is used by one who knows the answer to put a question to the one who does not in order to stimulate learning and knowledge; and thus the riddle-giver tests the deservedness and worthiness of the one who needs to solve the riddle and to whom finding the answer will allow access into the circle of the learned, those initiated into wisdom.¹⁷ The riddle both encourages and obscures knowledge, using ambiguity to make the true meaning difficult to discern; therefore, it is like Heraclitus' "nature" which "loves to hide" and it is revealed to the logos in the omens of harmony.

Poetry loves to hide: Branko Miljković and Heraclitus before the Secret of Fire

Branko Miljković – for whom the symbolization of language is an expression of neo-symbolist poetics and the symbol is an intimation of the secret hidden and revealed by poetry, which is hermetical in nature – wrote a short essay on Laza Kostić, who "still carries the fate of our modern poetry on his back" and hence continues to "to live on our debt of gratitude to him", above all his "verbal fearlessness, the breaking of the wall between dream and reality": "his true power lies in the fact that he boldly drank from the spring of language."¹⁸ The literary critic Jovan Hristić also describes Kostić as a "poet of unusual language and verse, whimsical and fragmentary, incomplete and in many aspects only partially communicated": "Laza wanted his words to sound like their meaning and to convey meaning in their sound."¹⁹ Miljković and Hristić could have as well been describing Heraclitus. This is apparent in Kostić's original wording, his tendency to etymologize (explicitly present in his philosophical treatises: 124:1, 13-32; and particularly in the word ἀρμυρία – 121:9 and 138:26), but above all in his blending of philosophy and poetry: "Generally every poet should have a bit of philosophy, just as every philosopher... should be a bit of a poet" (139:40). Laza

¹⁶ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London 1922).

¹⁷ Cf. André Jolles, "Rätsel", *Einfache Formen* (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer, 41968 [1930]), 126–149.

¹⁸ B. Miljković, "Laza Kostić i mi", *Branko Miljković*, vol. 91 of *Deset vekova srpske kniževnosti*, ed. P. Mikić (Novi Sad: Izdavački centar Matice srpske, 2016), 150–151.

¹⁹ Jovan Hristić, "Skica o Lazi Kostiću" *Letopis Matice srpske* (Nov. 1962), also in Zoran Gluščević, ed., *Epoha romantizma* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1966), 365–387: 366 and 379.

Kostić took great care to highlight that he himself practiced a “convergence of poetry and philosophy”, a “weave of reason and imagination”, the reciprocity of the senses and reason, mind and heart, which he finds in various opuses, particularly those of the ancient Greeks (139:40-41). Heraclitus was the role model for all of this: he uses strange wordings, symbols and etymologies; employs polyphony and multiple meanings; his philosophical and poetical style is embodied in aphorisms and apophthegms as units of thought in fragments; his thought both reveals and obscures; it is the riddle and the secret. For all of these reasons, poets have their own Heraclitus.²⁰

Convinced, not unlike Kostić, that the ancient Greeks at the very least intimated everything that we know today,²¹ Miljković discovered Heraclitus as a philosophy student, attending the lectures of Miloš Djurić and Bogdan Šešić²² and reading the available translations of Heraclitus’ fragments²³. The presence of Heraclitus in Miljković’s poetry and poetics is very apparent and underlying. Although it was not the poet’s intention to offer his own interpretation of Heraclitus, Miljković’s verses on fire could be used to interpret Heraclitus’ concept of fire, while the poet’s view of poetry as the revelation of the incomprehensible could be read as the Ephesian’s intimation of the secret.

²⁰ See Branko Aleksić, “Saobraćanje poezije i filozofije: Heraklit i moderna poezija”, *Filozofska istraživanja* 23 (1987), 1211–1222 = “L’alliance poésie-philosophie: Héraclite et la poésie moderne”, *Synthesis Philosophica* 3/6 (1988), 603–617 (T. S. Eliot, J. L. Borges, M. Dedinač, M. Ristić, René Char, O. Paz, Nranko Miljković); previously published in serialized form: V. Aleksić in the journal *Gradina* XVI, vols. 4–7 (1981). – The poem Heraclitus by J. L. Borges (1968) was published in translation in the journal *Gradac* 6 (1975) 7; Char’s short essay “Heraclitus of Ephesus” (published as the foreword in: Yves Battistini, *Héraclite d’Éphèse*, traduction nouvelle et intégrale avec une introduction et des notes, Avant-propos de René Char, Paris: Cahiers d’art, 1948) was translated and published in the journal *Gradina* XVI/5 (1981), 109–110; cf. Y. Battistini, “René Char et l’aurore de la pensée grecque”, *Liberte* 10 (1968) 81–85; M. Séguin, “René Char poète héraclitéen”, *Bulletin de l’Association Guillaume Budé* 28 (1969) 327–341; B. Tomašević, “Šarovo pismo Heraklitu”, *Odjek* XLI/19 (1–15. Oct. 1988), 8–9.

²¹ Cf. B. Miljković, “Poezija i oblik”, in *Branko Miljković*, ed. R. Mikić, 164–165; 165.

²² Cf. Bogdan Šešić, “Filozofski smisao poezije Branka Miljkovića”, *Gradina* 4 (1981), 7–27; 9. Miljković discussed Djurić’s book *Iz helenskih riznica: Studije i ogledi* [From Hellenic Treasures: Studies and Essays] (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1959) in his review “The Essays of Miloš Djurić” (*Branko Miljković*, ed. R. Mikić, 145–147).

²³ Along with the author’s study *The Philosophy of Heraclitus* (pp. 39–86), Dušan Nedeljković’s brochure *Heraklit* (Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1924) included a Serbian translation of Heraclitus’ fragments “On Nature” from Greek. The translation was the work of Adrienne Maurion Marquesi, a Frenchwoman who went on to become Nedeljković’s wife. This was followed by two other editions: Heraklit, *Svjedočanstva i fragmenti*, tr. Niko Majnarić (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1951; Heraklit, *O prirodi*, tr. Miroslav Marković (Belgrade: Kultura, 1954).

Asked which word he would choose to keep if he had to relinquish all other words, Branko Miljković replied: *fire*. In his collection of poetry titled *Vatra i ništa* (*Fire and Nothing*, originally published in Serbian in 1960),²⁴ he uses a Heraclitean understanding of fire as the dynamic foundation of everything, the being of everything, that which encompasses all things, either in actuality or as potential. His poem *An Ode to Fire* (1957) reads:

*Nothing is lost in fire
It is only condensed.*

Condensed – this means that fire consumes and condenses everything, just like Heraclitus says: “All things are an exchange for Fire, and Fire for all things, even as wares for gold and gold for wares” (πυρός τε ἀνταμοιβή τὰ πάντα καὶ πῦρ πάντων ὄκωσπερ χρυσοῦ χρήματα καὶ χρημάτων χρυσός – B 90 D/K). All cosmic elements are “transformations of Fire” (πυρός τροπαί – B 31 D/K) and the entire cosmos (or world) “was ever” (ἦνᾶει) and “is now” (ἔστιν) and “ever shall be” (ἔσται) an “ever-living Fire” (πῦρ ἀείζων) (B 30 D/K). In terms of its ontological rank fire is superior not only to all existing things but also to all other elements (air, water, earth) which are involved in the cosmic process of creation and decline; unlike them, fire is eternal (αἰώνιον) and ever-living (ἀείζων), and as such possesses the divine fullness of being. Therefore fire endures in all existing as well as destroyed (annihilated) things (*An Ode to Fire*):

*Take a handful of ashes
or anything that has passed
and you'll see that it still is fire
or that it could be*

(Translated by Aleksandra Milanović)

“Words have their own nature which the poet must know”²⁵ and “in a poem words must reach their own reality”,²⁶ Miljković says. The words of a poet are characterized by their ontic power of validity and therefore poetical language wields true power, which is in its distinctive, life-giving way present in the word *fire* (*Consciousness of the Poem*):

*The word fire! I have thanked this word for being alive
This word whose power I harness to utter it.*

²⁴ The Serbian original of this text uses the following edition: Branko Miljković, *Pesme I*, ed. M. Aleksić, vol. I of his *Collected Works* (Niš: Niški kulturni centar, 2015), 217–290: *Vatra i ništa* [Fire and Nothing]. An English translation of the collection *Fire and Nothing* has recently been published as a bilingual edition, including three essays on the art of poetry, tr. by Milo Yelesiyevich (The Serbian Classics Press, 2010).

²⁵ B. Miljković, “Pesnik i reč”, in B. Miljković, ed. R. Mikić, 121–123: 123.

²⁶ B. Miljković, “Poezija i ontologija”, *ibid.* 168.

The power of the poetic usage of words, which in a divine way transforms words into things and the verbal into the real, is the revelation of the secret of language, which resides in the power of naming and in irreducible ambiguity.²⁷ If the “word is robbed of the multiplicity of its meanings and its right to reasonable fluctuation, it no longer means anything at all. A poem is either incomprehensible or bereft of all meaning and content.”²⁸ The poetic word must be semantically rich, secretive and ancient: “precise words are always inadequate and it is not from them that poetry is made.”²⁹ The poet’s world is made up of vague foreboding:³⁰

*And clarity has nothing more to say
The world is indecipherable*

In his essay “The Incomprehensibility of Poetry” Miljković concludes in true Heraclitean fashion: “Poetry loves to hide, and it would do so even if it were free of linguistic conditionality, which is of course impossible.”³¹ His Ephesian role model said that “nature loves to hide” (φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ – B 123 D/K), and therefore we sense the essence of things before we uncover it. Poetry is the sensing of a secret and the poem is a hermetical creation: “It knows the secret but never says it.”³² And this is precisely the nature of the secret: a secret remains a secret even when it is revealed. This is character of the holy, the mysterious, the poetic. Poetics comes from the prophetic. Poetry transforms the meaning of words into signs suggesting a secret, just like Heraclitus’ Apollo: “The lord whose is the oracle at Delphoi neither utters nor hides his meaning, but shows it by a sign” (ὁ ἀναξ οὗ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει – B 93 D/K). The purpose of oracles and of poetry is in divinely inspired signs or omens (for Plato, poets are those who are inspired by god – ἐνθουσιάζοντες),³³ whose meaning echoes through all time: according to Heraclitus, “the Sibyl, with raving lips uttering things mirthless, unbedizened, and unperfumed, reaches over a thousand years with her voice, thanks to the god in her” (Σίβυλλα δὲ μαινομένῳ στόματι καθ’ Ἡράκλειτον ἀγέλαστα καὶ ἀκαλλώπιστα καὶ ἀμύριστα φθεγγομένη χιλίων ἐτῶν ἐξικνεῖται τῇ φωνῇ διὰ τὸν θεόν – B 92 D/K).

Poetical sensing and hiding paradoxically wants to free itself in language from the limitations of that very language, to express the inexpressible and to

²⁷ Cf. my essay “Paradigmatičnost i tautegoričnost pjesništva”, *Prisutnost transcencije: helenstvo, hrišćanstvo, filozofija istorije* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, PBF, 2013), 248–253.

²⁸ B. Miljković, “Pesma i smrt”, in *Brano Miljković*, ed. R. Mikić, 148–149: 149.

²⁹ B. Miljković, “Pesnik i reč”, *ibid.* 122.

³⁰ B. Miljković, “Zajednička pesma”, *ibid.* 118.

³¹ *Ibid.* 171–174: 173.

³² B. Miljković, “Hermetička pesma”, *ibid.* 166–167: 166.

³³ Plato, *Apologia Sokratous* 22b/c.

show signs. Wittgenstein said in his *Tractatus*: “There is to be sure the unspeakable [unutterable, ineffable]. This shows itself, it is the mystical” (6.522: Es gibt allerdings Unausprechliches. Dies zeigt sich, es ist das Mystische). And although all that can be verbalized is determined by logically structured language, we should know that “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” (7: Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.). It is in silence that Miljković’s poetry and his life came to an end (“To sing and to die is one and the same” – tr. by Gavriilo Stanojević).³⁴ His radical renunciation of his own poetry is a poetical stand in its own right: poetry springs from silence and flows into silence. Of course, the poet knows that “we must know what it is that we are silent about. Silence must be said”.³⁵

Outcome

Searching for the basic principle of everything, Laza Kostić – following in the footsteps of Heraclitus – finds it in *harmony*. When we seek to decipher the world as a riddle in various disciplines in a bid to explain the fundamental structure, the deepest hidden structure of reality (φύσις), then through the effort of interpretation and comprehension we uncover the purpose and the very assumption of reason (λόγος), knowledge and verbalization. Harmony allows us to use the logos within us to decipher rationality (logos-ity) of all existing things, which loves to hide. In Heraclitean fashion Branko Miljković in the word *fire* finds his fundamental poetic word which condenses everything and which gives the poet the power of verbalization, of poetry, which is essentially hermetic. Poetry suggests a secret which remains a secret even when it is revealed. These two Serbian poets find in Heraclitus’ fire two approaches to reality and two types of purpose: deciphering the riddle of reality in various disciplines and the revelation of the secret in art and religious devotion.

The riddle and the secret suggest that we need to expand the concept of rationality, which the concept of logos already entails. Logos is rationality which includes all forms of knowledge and experience and cannot be reduced to narrow scientific reasoning. The idea of logos (which expresses the complex rationality contained in language, thought and reality) is a sublimated meeting of philosophical and scholarly rationality (which contains the assumption of immanent logos-ity, i.e. the meaningfulness of the entire creation and the complementary logos-ity of human knowledge, artistic production and moral action) and the Christian faith in the transcendent Logos of love and sacrifice, a meeting that continues to offer – beyond the limitations of the utilitarian and instrumental mind – the possibility of a responsible rationality (logos-ity) dedicated

³⁴ Brano Miljković, *Pesme I*, 288 (“Balada”).

³⁵ B. Miljković, “Pesma i smrt”, in B. Miljković, ed. R. Mikić, 149.

to goodness and justice. What we need is rationality which would not only be point-zero but a deepened instinct of self-preservation, which would not only be interested in usefulness but also in goodness, not only lawfulness but also justice. The problem of modern culture is that it is forgetting both Socrates and Christ. It is forgetting that truth and knowledge are tied to virtue (and therefore have a shared ethical element and not just a utilitarian one) and that the only community that can endure is the one that has holiness at its roots. This does not mean that a civilization which has supposedly not forgotten Socrates (albeit reduced to scientific knowledge) can use this to justify the fact that it is forgetting Christ (salvation as the purpose of knowledge).

Drinking from Hellenic springs and warming their hands on Heraclitus' fire, Laza Kostić and Branko Miljković could remind us of this over-arching nature of the logos and the need to rehabilitate all aspects of the logos and reject its reduction to reason (*ratio*). They also suggest that our academic topics discussed at the conference 'Serbia and Greece in the 19th and 20th Century: History, Politics, Culture' represent solving riddles faced in our research and that the Serbo-Greek friendship is a secret which, as its initiates, we must reveal to posterity.

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