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Mitologija i ja

Ili odakle Slovenska mitologija i Bajka nad bajkama – od ideje do ostvarenja

**English version is starting on page 4*

Kada sam dobio poziv da za prvi broj visokoškolskog časopisa, koji nažalost nikada nije objavljen, priprelim kratki rad na temu uticaja mitologije na moja dela, dobro sam se zamislio. Moja prva reakcija bila je da sve o tome mogu reći u jednoj rečenici. Moja dela *jesu* mitologija i epika, koreni sveg mog neakademskog stvaralaštva duboko su u mitovima, bajkama i epskim pesama moga naroda. Šta još reći o tome? Navesti da moje tri dosadašnje knjige imaju već 18 izdanja za najvećeg izdavača u Srbiji, govoriti o četvrtoj koja će zaokružiti tu fazu mog rada? A onda, onda sam shvatio da imam jedinstvenu priliku da objasnim razvoj te ideje koja je toliko dugo sa mnom, da dam pravi odgovor, predug za bilo koji intervju.

Deluje nestvarno da se, u trenutku dok ovo pišem, bližim zaokruživanju ideje stare možda i osamnaest godina. Punoletne ideje. Kada je ta zamisao nastala, bio sam drugi čovek. Sa završenim fakultetom i bez ambicije da nastavim obrazovanje. Uveren da će žena koju volim hodati uz mene do kraja mojih dana. Preduzetnik koji radi stvari koje voli, i voli stvari koje radi. Te stvari su počele avanturom u internet sferi. Iz toga sam izašao prodavši posao koji je od osnivanja narastao koliko i broj računara: od 6 na 18. Novi izazov već je čekao: prošao sam testiranje za menadžera filijale i dobio zaposlenje u mladoj banci u razvoju. Lep posao... ali za nekog drugog. Nisam spojio ni godinu dana na njemu, ophrvan moralnim dilemama – moj glavni zadatak bio je privlačenje novih klijenata, u čemu sam bio uspešan, ali nisam bio zadovoljan svojom ulogom u uvlačenju pojedinaca i mikro-firmi u ono što neki nazivaju dužničkim ropstvom. Dao sam ostavku i u roku od nekoliko dana pokrenuo novi posao: nakon uslužnog i bankarskog sektora, na red je došla proizvodnja. Tri godine materijalnog stvaranja, sa svim problemima koje svaka proizvodnja nosi – izrada specifičnih alata, plasman proizvoda, ali i nabavka sirovina, koja je postajala sve teža i teža. Upravo sam pripremao veliki prelazak sa izrade luksuznih računarskih periferija na nešto sasvim drugačije – na stvaranje društvene igre. I to je trenutak u kome ova priča zaista počinje.

Vreme gde se mešaju počeci i krajevi... Da li je prvo došla ideja o stvaranju kartične igre bazirane na slovenskoj mitologiji, koja će na svakoj karti imati njen delić? Ili ideja o romanu koji će čitaoca provesti kroz našu mitologiju kao što ga Tolkin provodi kroz nordijsku – neprimetno, ali prilično temeljno? Čudno je sada da je ideja slovenske mitologije bila toliko egzotična tada, da se nisam usudio da igru, kao komercijalni proizvod, zasnujem potpuno na „našim“ temama – dodavao sam i delove drugih, poznatijih fantazijskih svetova. Teško je shvatiti i moje prvobitno čuđenje povodom komentara igrača, mahom studenata, kada je igra konačno izašla – većinski oduševljeni citatima iz nepostojeće knjige potpisane kao „Slovenska mitologija“, tražili su što više toga nauštrb onih poznatijih, previše puta korišćenih stvari.

I tako su nastajale nove edicije te kartične igre, koja je uspešno započela sopstveni život kroz organizovana takmičenja u Beogradu, Nišu, Kragujevcu, Novom Sadu... Preko 1200 unikatnih karata, svaka ilustrovana od strane nekoga od brojnih umetnika sa kojima sam ostvarivao saradnju, većinski sa ovih prostora. I sve više tih karata nosilo je citate iz nepostojeće „Slovenske mitologije“ – male zanimljive deliće koje sam pripremao za roman koji sam želeo da napišem, knjigu čija će se radnja bazirati na srpskoj epici, a svet na dubinama slovenske mitologije. Ta knjiga je od samog početka trebalo da se zove *Bajka nad bajkama*, inspirisana nazivom *Pesme nad pesmama*. Moja *Bajka* biće sastavljena od mnogih narodnih pesama i priča, a mnogi misle da je to slučaj i sa čuvenom biblijskom pesmom, koja je možda zbir ljubavnih i svatovskih pesama...

Kao što će pažljivi čitalac uočiti, dosad nema ni reči o mojoj prvoj knjizi, nazvanoj *Slovenska mitologija*, jer ideje o toj knjizi tada – nije bilo. Postojao je roman u nastajanju i igra sa citatima nepoznatog autora, a zapravo moja sumiranja i zaključci na osnovu radova generacija istraživača i hroničara koji su se bavili mitologijom naših predaka. Da sam pisao naučni rad, mogao sam navesti mnoštvo imena, ali je, u igri i književnosti, misterija izvor magije. Nigde u okviru igre nisam bio potpisan ni ja. Iz takve međugre, nakon četiri godine proističe ona čuvena jabuka koja pada Njutnu na glavu – jednostavna ideja koja povezuje sve. Ideja da, pre *Bajke*, napišem knjigu koja nije roman, već rezultat višegodišnjih istraživanja. Da sve to što sam već godinama pedantno beležio uobličim u jednu zasebnu knjigu, koja će na neki način biti objašnjenje svih stvari koje onda neću morati toliko detaljno da objašnjavam u romanima. I tek tada sam počeo da navodim imena istraživača od kojih sam saznavao najzanimljivije detalje. Ali sam ipak, poučen godinama iskustva pre toga, ubedio i svog urednika i svog izdavača da ta knjiga, toliko magična, nikako ne sme postati još jedna od suvoparnih naučnih knjiga. Na sopstvenu odgovornost, tražio sam da ona sadrži brojne ilustracije, a da *ne* sadrži ni literaturu ni standardne citate, već da se „omaž“ autorima daje samo navođenjem njihovih imena uz citirane rečenice; gdegdje je i naslov dela, ali kao deo teksta. Standardni zahtevi za naučni rad, o čemu sam već znao ponešto jer sam upravo započinjao svoje doktorske studije, nisu bili pravi izbor za ovakvu knjigu. Sve te godine, naslovi i fusnote učinili bi je suvoparnom – baš ono što naučno-popularni naslovi namenjeni najširoj publici teže da izbegnu, kako bi uspešno preneli znanja.

Na početku sam bio potpuno prestrašen idejom da objavim „ozbiljnu“ knjigu, što mi je predlagalo sve više ljudi oko mene, nezavisno jedni od drugih. Bio sam ubeđen da takve knjige pišu neki profesori sedih brada, a ne relativno mladi ljudi koji se još bave „trivijalnim“ stvarima poput rokenrola (moj bend tada još svira, ali sam već prekinuo da uređujem TV emisiju u kojoj na putovanjima snimamo druge bendove). A onda, „Slovo na početku“ knjige *Slovenska mitologija* kaže da ona: „ne pokušava da bude ni naučna, ni istorijska, ni kompletna studija, već samo jednostavno i svima prijemljivo delo, nastalo iz ljubavi.“ Kada sam napisao te reči, shvatio sam, napokon, da smem objaviti tu knjigu, i da ću je objaviti za najboljeg izdavača koji je prihvati. I u filmskoj sceni koja mi je izmenila život, najbolji izdavač koga sam mogao zamisliti prepoznaje u knjizi isto što i ja, i nakon još tri godine i uredničkog doprinosa, ona izlazi još bolja no što sam je inicijalno osmislio. Dosadašnjih deset izdanja, bar jedno godišnje, govore da su i mnogi drugi videli isto što i mi.

Bliži se vreme da stavim tačku na ovu priču... *Slovenska mitologija* izlazi, a izdavač je naziva tako hrabro uprkos mojoj napomeni da je vek ranije Francuz Luj Leže objavio prvu knjigu pod istim imenom. Svi donosimo neke hrabre odluke povodom te knjige, uključujući i umetnike koji su je ilustrovali ponekad u

neskladu sa onima pre njih. Knjiga je, na kraju, neobičan spoj tradicionalnog i savremenog, što je verovatno i tajna njenog uspeha. Ali to zapravo ne znam, jer *Slovenska mitologija* ima svoj jedinstveni put koji i ja posmatram začuđeno kao i bilo ko drugi. U međuvremenu pišem i prvu *Bajku nad bajkama*, onaj roman od koga je počelo. Zatim i drugu *Bajku*, a sada i treću, završnu. Pišem dugo i sporo, sa mukom, jer često nisam zadovoljan onim što napišem i često se vraćam da menjam i brišem, ali su, srećom, moje knjige dovoljno zanimljive i uspešne da me ljudi i dalje smatraju piscem. Kada pogledam iza sebe na ovih devet godina od objavljivanja moje prve knjige, i još skoro toliko pre toga, čudim se kako je sve počelo. Da li sam, zaista, tu ideju osmislio jedne jedine lenje i lepljive letnje večeri, u dugom razgovoru sa ženom koju sam smatrao svojom sudbinom? Ili je to samo još jedna od naknadnih uspomena, romantičnih konstrukcija koje naš um stvara kasnije, lažući i sebe i druge... Jer je, dragi moji prijatelji, književnost mukotrpan rad – ideja ponekad zaista dođe lako, ali je od ideja do objavljene knjige dug, dug put. Ali se ne dajte obeshrabriti, budući pisci i stvaraoci bilo koje vrste, jer je sasvim istinita stara izreka da i najduže putovanje počinje jednim korakom.

Zaključak posvećujem komunikacijama i svima sa kojim ih delim. Najpažljiviji među vama već su primetili da sam sve ovo napisao poput knjige o kojoj najviše pričam – uvek sam vam govorio *šta*, ali skoro nikada *gde* i *kada*. Nedostatak ovih informacija nije obesmislio priču, naprotiv – vi je sada znate suštinski, bez ometanja detaljima koji bi vam je učinili dosadnom, suvoparnom, ili vam, čak, stvorili predubedenje koje je kasnije teško izmeniti. Kod predstavljanja stvari, najvažnije je, mislim, predstaviti ideju, koju izbacivanje viškova samo osnažuje. O tome govorim u uvodu prve Bajke, kako „nisam morao opisivati ni tumačiti više nego što je potrebno“, već sam ceo mitski svet mogao „doživeti očima junakâ priče“. O istoj stvari je i veliki Hemingvej rekao: „Ako pisac proze zna dovoljno o onome šta piše, može izostaviti stvari koje zna... Dostojanstvo kretanja sante leda potiče od toga što je samo jedna osmina iznad vode.“

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Nenad Gajić

Mythology and me

Or from whence Slavic Mythology and Tale of Tales – from idea to realization

Upon receiving an invitation to prepare a short paper on the topic of the influence of mythology on my works for the first issue of a higher education magazine, which unfortunately was never published, it really sent me thinking. My first reaction was that I could say it all in just one sentence: my works *are* mythology and epics, the roots of all my non-academic work are steeped in the myths, fairy tales, and epic songs of my people. What else was there to say about it? To again state that my three books have already reached 18 editions issued by the largest publisher in Serbia? To talk about the fourth one that will complete that phase of my work? But it was then that I realized that here was a unique opportunity to explain the development of this concept that has been part of me for so long, to actually provide the real answer, too long for any interview!

It seems unreal that, as I write this, I am approaching the completion of an idea that may be eighteen years old. An adult idea. When that concept came along, I was a different person. With just a college degree and no ambition to continue my education. Convinced that the woman I loved would walk beside me till the end of my days. An entrepreneur who does the things he loves, and loves the things he does. Those things started with an adventure in the internet sphere. I came out of this venture by selling my once small business, which had grown just as the number of computers had since its founding: from 6 to 18. A new challenge was waiting; I passed the test for a branch manager and got a job in a young developing bank. A nice job... for someone else. I did not last even a year – I was overwhelmed by moral dilemmas - my main task was to attract new clients. Yes, I was successful in this, but I was not satisfied with my role in drawing individuals and micro-firms into what some call debt slavery. I resigned and within a few days started a new business: after runs in the service and banking sectors, it was time to give it a go in production. Three years of creating real material things, with all the problems that come along with each particular production - the production of specific tools, the product placement, the procurement of raw materials, all of which became more and more difficult. But all the while I was really just preparing for a big transition... from making luxury computer peripherals to creating something completely different – a card game. And that is the moment when this story really begins.

Yet this is a time in which beginnings and endings mix for me... What came first? The idea of creating a card game based on Slavic mythology – a game which will have part of a myth on each card? Or was this predated by my idea for a novel? One that would lead readers through the mythology of my ancestors in a similar way to how Tolkien has immersed his readers in Nordic myths – imperceptibly, but quite thoroughly... It is strange now that the idea of Slavic mythology seemed so exotic, so risky then, that I did not dare base the game, as a commercial product, entirely on “my” topics – here and there I added parts

of other, more famous fantasy worlds. It might be hard for readers now to grasp my initial surprise at the comments of the players, mostly students, when the game finally came out – mostly enthusiastic reactions to and about quotes from the then non-existent book identified as “Slavic Mythology” – the players sought this out again and again – in direct contrast to those well-known, over-used elements!

And so new editions of that card game were created, which successfully started its own life through organized competitions in Serbia: Belgrade, Nis, Kragujevac, Novi Sad... Over 1200 unique cards, each illustrated by the many talented artists with whom I collaborated, mostly within Slavic domains. And more and more of these cards carried quotes from the still non-existent “Slavic mythology” – yet these all represented interesting bits and pieces that I was preparing for the novel I wanted to write, a book whose plot would be based on Serbian epics, and the world in which they were set built on the vast, deep roots of Slavic mythology. From the very beginning, it was my intention that this book be called *Tale of Tales*, inspired by the title of *Song of Songs*. My fairy tale would be composed of many folk songs and stories, something many think is also true for this famous biblical song, which may very well be the summation of ancient love and wedding songs...

As the careful reader might have noticed, at this point there has been no word about my first book, called *Slavic Mythology*, because the idea of that book was not even yet conceived. There were only an emerging novel and a game with quotes by an unknown author, in fact my summaries and interpretations based on the works of generations of explorers and chroniclers who dealt with the mythology of our primal elders. If I had gone about writing a scientific paper, I could have mentioned many names, but in a game and in literature, mystery is a source of magic. Nowhere in the game was I referenced either. Yet from such an interplay, after four years, sprouts the famous apple that falls on Newton’s head – a simple idea that connects everything: the idea to write a book that would not be a novel, but the result of many years of research, and to write it before my fairy Tale. To shape everything that I had meticulously recorded for years into one standalone book, which would, in a way, be an explanation of all the things that I would not have to explain in such detail in the novels. And only then did I start listing the names of the researchers from whom I had learned the most amazing details. But still, informed from the years of experience before that, I convinced both my editor and my publisher that this book, so magical, must never become yet another dry scientific book. At my own risk, I asked that it contain numerous illustrations, without containing either references or standard quotations, and that “homage” should be given to the mostly long forgotten authors only by quoting their names along with the quoted sentences, sometimes including the title of the work, but only as an integral part of the text. The standard requirements for scientific papers, of which I already knew something since I had at that time just undertaken my doctoral studies, were just not the right choice for a book like this. All those years, titles, and footnotes would spoil the book – the same reason why popular science titles aimed at the widest audiences have tended to avoid such a practice, in order to successfully transfer the eons of knowledge.

At first, I was completely frightened by the idea of publishing a “serious” book, which had been suggested to me more and more by people all around me, independently of each other. I was convinced that such books were written by some grey-bearded professors, and not by relatively young people still dealing with “trivial” things like rock & roll (my band was still playing at that time, but I had already

stopped directing a TV show in which we recorded other bands while touring). But then, in “A Word at the Beginning” of the soon-to-be the *Slavic Mythology* book, it is written that it: “does not try to be a scientific, historical, or complete study, but only a simple and all-approachable work, created out of love.” And when I wrote those words, I understood, finally, that I could truly publish this book, and that I would publish it with the best publisher possible. And in the movie scene that changed my life, the best publisher I could imagine sees in the book the same vision as my own, and after another three years and an editorial contribution, this book comes out even better than I had originally conceived it. So far, ten editions, at least one per year, say that many others have seen exactly the same thing we did.

The time is approaching to put an end to this story... *Slavic Mythology* comes out, and the publisher chooses to name it so, boldly, despite my remark that a century earlier the Frenchman Louis Leger published a book under the exact same name. We all made some bold decisions about the book, including the artists who illustrated it – sometimes at odds with those who came before them. The book is, in the end, an unusual combination of traditional and modern, yet this is probably the very secret of its success. But I’m not really sure, because *Slavic Mythology* has its own unique path, which I observe with astonishment just like anyone else, having a hard time believing I am the author of it. All the while, I got busy writing the first *Tale of Tales*, the novel from which it all began. Then came the second *Tale*, and now the third, final one. I write long and slowly, with difficulty, because I am often unsatisfied with what I write and often return to change or delete something, but, fortunately, my books are interesting enough and successful enough that people still consider me a writer. When I look back on these nine years since the publication of my first book, and almost as long before that, I wonder how it all started. Did I really come up with that idea in a single lazy, sticky, endless summer night, in a long conversation with a woman I considered my destiny? Or is it just another of the subsequent memories, romantic constructions that our mind creates later, lying to ourselves and to others... Because, my dear readers, literature is hard work – the idea sometimes really does come easy, but from the idea to the published book is a long, long way. Yet don’t be discouraged, my fellow future writers and creators of any kind, because there is undeniable truth in the old saying that even the longest journey begins with a single step.

I dedicate my conclusion to the many authors of communications sent my way. The most careful among you have already noticed that I have written this piece exactly like the book I have talked about most – I have always told you what, but almost never when or where. The lack of this information has not made the story meaningless, but the opposite – you now know it in its essence, without the superfluous details that would make it boring, dry, or even push you towards a preconception that would be difficult to change later. When presenting things, the most important matter, I believe, is to present an idea, which the elimination of redundancies only strengthens. I talk about that in the introduction to my first *Tale of Tales*, that “I did not have to describe or interpret more than necessary,” so I could experience the whole mythical world “through the eyes of the heroes of the story.” The great Hemingway said a similar thing with his Iceberg theory: “If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows... The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water.”

(English translation by the Author, dated 6 August 2020)
