

**Edward Dennis Goy**

**The Sabre and the Song**

**Njegoš: *The Mountain Wreath***

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## Edward Dennis Goy

Edward Dennis Goy, born 1926 was a University Lecturer in Slavonic Languages and Literatures at Cambridge University from 1954 to 1990, author of articles on Russian, Serbian and Croatian literatures published in the UK, USA, Italy and former Yugoslavia. In 1995 he published *The Sabre and the Song: Njegoš the Mountain Wreath* and in 1996 *Excursions*, a book of essays on Russian and Serbian literature. At the same time he completed the book on the Dubrovnik poets Menčetić and Držić to be published soon. He also translated a number of novels, stories and poetry including Bulatović's *The Red Cockerel* (*Crveni petao leti prema nebu*), *A Hero on a Donkey* (*Heroj na magarcu*), Radomir Konstantinović's *Exitus* (*Izlazak*), together with his wife Jasna Levinger-Goy Selimović's *The Fortress* (*Tvrđava*) as well as Krleža's *The Banquet in Blitva* (*Banket u Blitvi*) which will appear in Autumn 2001, and, together with Dennis Ward, a selection of the poetry of Dragutin Tadijanović. He also translated Petar Hektorović's *Fishermen and Fishermen's Conversation* (*Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje*) and Marin Držić's *The Dream of Stanac* (*Novela od Stanca*), both of which were published in the *British Croatian Review* and Gundulić's *Osman*, published by the *Jugoslovenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti*. Recently he published *A Green Pine* (*Zelen bor*), an anthology of love poems from the oral poetry of Serbia, Bosnia and Hercegovina with the aid of *Vukova zadužbina* in Beograd. He published translations of Momčilo Nastasijević's "*Pet lirskih krugova*" as well as a number of articles on Nastasijević's poetry. In 1988 he was awarded a prize for his translations and work on literature by the Serbian PEN. In 1999 he was recommended for election to both the Serbian and the Croatian Academies of Arts and Sciences, but did not live to be elected. He suddenly died in Cambridge in March 2000.

## **What is Our Life?**

What is our life? A play of passion,  
And what our mind, but music and division?  
Our mothers' womb the tiring houses be  
Where we are drest for this short comedy.  
Heaven the judicious, sharp spectator is  
Who sits and marks what 'ere we do amiss.  
The graves that hide us from the searching sun  
Are like drawn curtains when the play is done.  
Thus playing post we to our latest rest,  
And then we die in earnest, not in jest.

*Sir Walter Raleigh*

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## Introduction

This short book consists of eight essays on different themes, largely regarding *The Mountain Wreath*. The book is in English for English readers and, being to some extent introductory, it concentrates on Njegoš's one outstanding work, to the point of ignoring others. This is on purpose, since, internationally, it is *The Mountain Wreath* that makes Njegoš an important writer. One essay does deal with some aspects of *The Ray of the Microcosm*, but only in so far as it is apposite to a discussion of *The Mountain Wreath*.

Due to the vicissitudes of politics, Milovan Đilas's book *Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop* was first published in English translation. This means that the English-speaking world possesses an introduction to Njegoš and all his work that I certainly could not possibly hope to better, despite some reservations as to its detailed criticism. The following essays may well appear to some to be provocative. So be it! Three are, perhaps, my own view of Njegoš's theme and may well not please everybody. They may lead to controversy. If so, then at least they will be a step towards adopting Njegoš as part of our literary heritage. For Njegoš belongs to our culture, to its tragic frontiers, frontiers we may be closer to today than many of us think.

Some of the essays are devoted to an examination of device and structure. This, apart from the obvious practical value of any objective attention, is mainly an effort to show that the poem which is *The Mountain Wreath* is not just a work of animated ideas, but rather a poetic expression of man in the general system of nature through the portrayal of an event and the attendant suffering and contradiction which it entails. If it were nothing but a political affirmation of nationalist fervour, then nobody, not even a Serb, would be interested in reading it today! If, however, one ignores the specific, historical background, then it belongs very much to our present time and the modern view of man and his existence that still represents the latest attempt to examine our real position in life, before the pseudo-scientific evasions and crass jargon of some later schools.

In looking back at these eight essays, I feel it necessary to apologise for what may seem to some readers to be repetitious. My excuse is that always I am dealing with similar or identical material from a different point of view and that this naturally makes repetition difficult to avoid entirely. I am well aware that I have used the same quotations in quite different senses. It is to be hoped that this may show that *The Mountain Wreath* is complex and polyphonic. If it fails to do this, then I am the sole culprit.

This book is for English-speaking readers. For this reason, although, since to discuss poetry other than in its original language is a barren enterprise, I have quoted the original text, I have translated every quotation and every title in brackets. For those readers who do not know the language this will enable them, hopefully, to read without worrying too much about the original. I have made two exceptions to this. After having quoted their titles several times in the text, I have simply used the English title *The Mountain Wreath* (*Gorski vijenac*) and the shortened title *The Ray* for *The Ray of the Microcosm* (*Luča mikrokozma*) in the hope that mere familiarity will avoid confusion.

In general I would have to say that most of the translation is my own, but this has to be modified by the fact that, where *The Mountain Wreath* is concerned, I constantly read the translation of my dear friend Vasa D. Mihailovich and relied on it for its accuracy, which is undoubted. The fact that I have frequently slightly altered lines is simply a matter of my own taste, but most frequently I have shamelessly purloined his lines where I could not conceivably have done better, in the hope and, indeed, certainty, that he will forgive me! In any case I wish to thank him for making my task so much easier.

All criticism, in the end, comes down to a reference to its reader: "Here, I see this. Do you agree?" There is no other way. I both suspect and expect that not all readers will agree with all the assessments I have made here. I think I should be a little apprehensive if they did. Yet, for those who may not agree and for those who do, I will conclude with a quotation from Milovan Đilas in his excellent book on Njegoš (p. 372):

*"The Mountain Wreath* shall be and must be constantly rediscovered and re-experienced in ever new ways, as long as the Serbian nation and tongue exist." One might add, as for all great writers, as long as people anywhere read it, for it belongs not only to the Serbian nation, but to those who are a part of the great European culture. Njegoš is a spirit that belongs to us all and it is time we possessed him, as we do so many other "master spirits" who wrote in languages other than our own and extended our awareness of our human life and its predicaments.

Cambridge

E. D. Goy

## (I) Njegoš - A new Voice in European Poetry

Born Rade Tomov in 1813 Njegoš took the name Petrović when, in 1830 he was appointed Prince Bishop of Montenegro after his uncle, taking his uncle's name Petar. Njegoš was from the tribal district of *Njeguši* and he adopted the archaic form Njegoš, probably, when he visited Russia in 1833 in order to avoid the natural Russian acceptance of Petar Petrović as a name and patronymic, so lending himself a distinguishing surname.

Njegoš was an autodidact and an amateur writer. Appointed Prince Bishop at the tender age of seventeen, he could not be anything else. Perhaps he was less than enthusiastic at having to take holy orders with the obligation of the black clergy to be celibate. Other than this, despite his complaints at the intellectual isolation of ruling so primitive a community, nothing in his life as a ruler suggests that he had any dislike of power or hesitation in wielding it. Whether or not he found sex and love in his life it is not possible to know (save for Isidora Sekulic!). It is to be hoped that he did.

Njegoš was largely self-taught. As a boy, he was taken by his uncle to live in the monastery on Cetinje where Petar I had a library of some 500 books and where Njegoš early learned to read and apparently knew many of the chronicles and historical works, including, probably, the history of Montenegro written by his ancestor Gligorije Petrović who had published it in Moscow in 1754 in a language more Russian than Serbian. He is said to have known some of the chronicle material by heart. Thus, at an early age, he must have had some acquaintance with Church Slavonic and also with a form of Russian. Apart from this, two short periods of schooling, by the monk Josif Tropović in Topla and a further time spent in a private school in Kotor, Njegoš was forced to gain his education by his own efforts. One important opening to the world of European culture came to him indirectly when his uncle appointed the Serbian poet Sima Milutinović as his secretary and also gave him the duty of acting as tutor to the young Rade Tomov. The three years (1827-1830) which he spent as Njegoš's tutor are probably more important for introducing the young Njegoš, however indirectly, to the spirit and perhaps even the ideas of Schelling and Herder. The very Spartan nature of Milutinović's "teaching", going barefoot, shooting, riding and doubtless long conversations, must have born something of Romantic doctrine from one who had attended lectures in philosophy at Halle (1825) and who had wandered the territories of Balkan Europe, gleaning what he could of the nascent spirit of Romanticism at a time when Byron was only beginning to write and producing some of his best poetry ("*vidinska lirika*", 1816-17, vide M. Popović, *Istrorija srpske*

*književnosti. Romantizam I*, p. 167). It would be difficult to imagine that the informal education which Njegoš received from Milutinović did not impart, even unconsciously, some of the standard doctrines of the Romantic movement. Moreover Milutinović was a writer and engaged in writing while in Cetinje. As Njegoš was to do, he had to deal with the problem of language. The long hours spent together and the tutor's talking on everything under the sun must have had an influence on Rade Tomov. It was not for nothing that he was to dedicate *The Ray of the Microcosm* to his old tutor in 1845.

Njegoš appears to have read as much as he could even in early age. Apart from this, he knew the folk songs, especially the epics of his own people, and even probably composed such himself. In later life to listen to the *gusle* (the one-stringed fiddle) was regular evening entertainment together with billiards on the table he brought back from his first trip abroad. The folk epics which he was to collect and publish in *The Serbian Mirror (Ogledalo srpsko)* in Belgrade 1846 gave him an essential feeling for the language and its natural decasyllabic metre. In addition there is clear evidence that Njegoš read the poetry of Dubrovnik, some of which he knew by heart. (V. Latković and N. Banašević, eds., *Savremenici o Njegošu*, 1951, pp. 25-26).

The cultural turning-point in Njegoš's life must have been the journey he made to Moscow 1833/34 to be officially consecrated Bishop. On the way he met Vuk Karadžić in Vienna and maintained a life-long connection with him, supporting, as much as he diplomatically dared, Vuk's orthographic reforms. Though he certainly read Church Slavonic and the Serbian-Slavonic of the period, Njegoš spoke and wrote the language of his people. He returned from Russia with a small library of books, including the plays of Sophocles, the *Iliad*, probably Milton's *Paradise Lost*, all in Russian translation, as well as the works of Derzhavin, Zhukovsky and Pushkin. At that time it would appear that his only foreign language was Russian, although there are contradictory accounts concerning his fluency. The Russian writer Grech stated that Njegoš spoke perfect Russian (Latković & Banašević, *ibid.*, p. 100) whereas Njegoš himself excused his writing to Tatischev the Russian ambassador in Vienna in German, saying that he could not express himself so well in Russian. This may well have been a diplomatic ploy. Even were it not so, the difference between speaking and writing a language fluently and reading it fluently is considerable.

One result of Njegoš's experience of the world of diplomacy was the realisation that (in those days) French was the diplomatic language of Europe and, indeed, the language of cultured Western circles and that anyone ignorant of French was at some disadvantage. On his return to Cetinje in 1834 Njegoš began seriously to study French, hiring a French tutor. His day-book (with its excerpts from the poetry of Lamartine and



Hugo) is sufficient evidence of his reading of French poetry . (*Njegoševa bilježnica*, Istoriski institut, Cetinje, 1956). Visitors to Cetinje almost all state that Njegoš spoke French with some fluency. (Latković & Banašević, op. cit.). From 1834 Njegoš began to enter into the literary culture of the West.

As a largely self-taught writer, Njegoš was in a very different position from that of other autodidacts in literary history. If we take a typical self-taught poet like John Clare, for him the poetry of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and Keats were there for the reading in his own language that had a long tradition of poetry and many contemporary poets. Despite the great difference in their respective social positions, Njegoš had none of these advantages. He had, in the main, to get his experience of poetry from languages other than his own. The only literary tradition in Njegoš's own language, with few exceptions, was the oral poetry. Thus Njegoš's literary work was also a practical struggle to form and develop the language as well as the style in which he wrote. In many ways Njegoš had a far greater task than the Russian poet Pushkin who also had to find and form the poetic language in which he wrote. Like Pushkin, he made liberal use of various layers of language, never entirely abandoning Slavonic and even Russian vocabulary where he could make it convey a shade of meaning or of emotion, while ever writing in his own Montenegrin dialect with its distinctive characteristics.

On his return from Russia Njegoš published his first book of poetry, printed in the new printing press he had brought with him and bearing the title *The Hermit of Cetinje (Pustinjak cetinjski)*. It is a *miche-mache* of different types of poems. There is an ode to the Russian Emperor Nicholas I and another to the heir to the throne, Alexander. There are also addresses to Nicholas I on the occasion of his birthday and an ode to prince Golytsyn and to the Oberprokuror of the Holy Synod, S. D. Nyechayev as well as a poem to the river Nyeva. These are written in the octosyllabic line and full of the stilted eulogies of the odesque poetry then still in vogue in Russia and typified in the works of Derzhavin. There is also a much more natural poem entitled "A Montenegrin Captivated by a Fairy" (*Zarobljen Crnogorac od vile*) written in the traditional decasyllabic line of the folk epic. Other than the vaguely erotic symbolism which some critics, notably Isidora Sekulić, have noted, there is little to recommend it. It is the first poem in the collection, "A Montenegrin to Almighty God" (*Crnogorac k svemogućem bogu*) that gives a foretaste of the Njegoš to come.

It is a poem of 160 lines and written in the octosyllabic line. This line is typical of some Dubrovnik poetry as well as being common to the lyrical folk songs. Perhaps Njegoš used it here, as in some of his later poems, in an effort to avoid the folk epic line. Again the probable influence of Derzhavin cannot be excluded. The originality of this poem

lies in its strikingly personal note. It is no mere praise to the deity, but rather what is almost a confrontation of the deity by the poet's human personality. The recognition of God by the worshipper, and in so far as such recognition is also a form of confrontation, is also a predicament, a state of being. To recognise the works of a creator in Nature is scarcely extraordinary in one who, like Njegoš, had lived his entire life close to natural phenomena. Nonetheless, the role of Nature as the source of knowledge and the intuitive fount of poetic wisdom is a common-place of the romantic movement. God is not transcendent but immanent through the works of Nature that surround the poet. Perhaps this, at this time, presents no more than a coincidence between Njegoš's own experience and the ideals of the Romantics. The poet's predicament begins with the unknowability of God, in other words with the intrinsic limitations of human thought and perception.

*Te si sjajnost svoju skrio  
Mnogostručnim pokrivalom  
Veličanstva i prostranstva,  
Te se ne daš da Te vidi  
Oko duše najumnije,  
Nit' um sebe voobrazi,  
No tek počne o teb' mislit,  
Zanese se u beskrajnost,  
Sve s višega k višem odeć,  
Leteć želno da Te vidi  
Ili sjenku barem tvoju.*

("Who dost thy radiance hidden keep Beneath thy manifold canopy, Nor let'st the wisest eye behold Nor any mind thyself reflect For, once begun, it will project Into eternity, unfold From height to height and still desire Some glimpse of thee or at least aspire To catch thy shadow...") A glance at the Serbian text will show that the translation is more stilted than the original. The inability of man mentally to grasp the universe, even with today's advances in scientific knowledge, remains the essential problem of man's existence, since it is not merely a question of extent of perception but also of its quality:

*Kada si ga ti stvorio  
Kratkovidno i slijepo...*

("When thou createst hast the mind To see thee not, myopic, blind...")  
The universality of God is confronted by the weakness and limitations of  
the human individual:

*... al' se gordim  
Što sa tobom svojstvo imam.  
No i bilo štogod malo,  
To se može upodobit,  
Spram sjajnosti tvoje velje,  
Premalojzi iskri ognja  
Koja pođe tamom lećet  
Od ognjenog okejana,  
Dok se opet k njemu vrati.  
Ti s' okejan beskonečni,  
A ja plovac bez vesalah;  
Misli su mi bura jaka;  
Sa mnom čine valovanje,  
Nagone me napr'jed plivat',  
Želeć štogod vidijeti.  
No kako ću vodom odit  
Kad u ruke vesla nejmam,  
Već sam dužan stojat tužan  
U smrtnome čamcu malom  
Na sredini okejana...*

("Yet I am proud to share with thee, However small, some common  
quality Which, if with the radiance of thy will Compared, is as a tiny  
spark Of fire that flies up through the dark Out from the fiery ocean till  
At last it flies back whence it came. Thou art an endless ocean, I an  
oarless boatman and my thoughts Like a dread storm heap waves on high  
And drive me onward to decry New land, but, oarless, I must stay Amidst  
the mighty ocean's swell Trapped in my small and mortal barque...") The

oarless boatman, the sense of his isolation and helplessness will return in the Dedication to *The Ray of the Microcosm* and in the opening speech of Danilo in *The Mountain Wreath*. The confrontation is thus based upon the complete inequality of the two forces, God and the individual. Yet Njegoš does not abandon his sense of his own being:

*Ja se zemlje car nazivam,  
Ja se gordim i ponosim  
Jer vrh svega zemnog vladam;  
Ja s prirodom često ratim,  
Pobjeđavam tresk gromovah,  
Pobjeđavam zuk vjetrovah  
I sinjega ljutost mora.*

("I who on earth am called a king Am proud and glory in my pride, Who rule on earth o'er everything Who oft in war with nature vied, Who conquered the thunder's rattle, yea Have overcome the winds' furore And the blue anger of the sea...") Man is supreme upon earth, though placed in the predicament of mortality and of doubtful perception and thought. God the creator appears to the poet through Nature:

*Najmanji te cv'jetak slavi  
Ka najvišeg sv'jetlost sunca...*

("The brightness of the highest sun Doth sing thy praises, the smallest flower Doth praise thee...") The poem, unlike the majority of the poems of the book, is close to Romanticism. Yet, perhaps more important, is the sense that the poet is confronting the deity almost on a level of equality, despite the protests of impotence and the glorification of the creator. It is an expression of a living relationship, not without its sense of frustration. As a religious poem, it does not strike one as typically Christian. God is a power to be grasped or at least realised. The first signs of *The Ray* are present.

*Ti, koja si premudročću  
U prostranstvu vazdušnome  
Sozda sv'jetah milione*

*I sve jednog s drugim sveza*

*Tvojim lancem nevidivim.*

("Thou with thy wisdom did'st create In the vast ethereal plain The myriad worlds and each to each Bound with thy invisible chain.") The poem has no relation either to the ode or to the folk epic. It is written in direct, untrammelled style with a certain naive roughness. Comparing it with the rest of *The Hermit of Cetinje*, it is something very different and underlying its tones of eulogy there is a tension between the concepts of God and man. It is, in itself, a fine poem, despite its tendency to repetition and, as yet, its link with the Romantics is no more than fortuitous.

The importance of "A Montenigrin to Almighty God" for Njegoš's main work cannot be denied. His further work up to 1835 suggests a period of considerable experimentation. Not least of this is his epic in ten cantos, *The Epic of Freedom (Slobodijada)* which, with its octosyllabics, suggests that Njegoš may well have read Gundulić's *Osman*, possibly in the 1826 edition. Equally possible is some influence of the *Iliad* which Njegoš had in Russian translation. The date of his translation of the first book is not known, but its existence is proof of his respect for it and also of his experimentation by translating it into his own language. The fact that the translation is in decasyllabics may point to a rather later than earlier date.

The pause in Njegoš's writing from 1835 to 1845 when, with few exceptions, he appears to have written nothing, has been explained by some critics as due to his being taken up with matters of state both external and internal. Certainly the history of Njegoš's career as ruler would justify such an explanation. Yet, also, one may see it as a period in which some reading and much thought may have taken place. *The Epic of Freedom* is an epic in the classical style telling of the Montenegrin battles with the Turks. With it the main early work of Njegoš ends and it is the resumption in 1845 that leads to works that prompt one to venture calling him a new voice in European poetry.

In 1845 in Belgrade Njegoš published *The Ray of the Microcosm*. The attempt to realise poetically the creation of the earth and the fall of man was scarcely a modest one. It has lead many to speak of the influence of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, not impossible though not greatly enlightening. It consists of six cantos and a dedication to Njegoš's old tutor Sima Milutinović. The essential approach of the poem is that only poetry and the poet have the ability to gain a glimpse of the mystery of creation and the universe. Poetry is the divine clue to all universal knowledge. God himself is portrayed as the supreme poet. The ideology of the Romantics had clearly reached Njegoš by this time. In general the poem is a failure, but it is a failure with much in it that is good.

Particularly this is true of the Dedication to Sima Milutinović. Apart from this, however, *The Ray* remains, in a sense, inseparable from *The Mountain Wreath*. God condemns man to an existence in which he totally forgets his past immortality, yet he allows him a tiny spark of heavenly love.

*Samo teke jednu iskru malu  
Vdohnut će mu nebesne ljubavi.*

("Only just one tiny spark of heavenly love shall I breathe into him..."). Njegoš hesitated before, finally, deciding on the title *The Mountain Wreath*. Firstly he thought of giving it the title *Izvi-iskra*, *Izvijanje iskre* or *Izvita iskra* (all versions of "The Rising Spark"), thus clearly referring to the spark of the human soul from *The Ray* and, still further back, to the spark mentioned in "A Montenegrin to Almighty God". The image was obviously central to Njegoš's view of existence. Published in 1847, *The Mountain Wreath* is the final achievement of his poetic expression.

In both *The Ray* and *The Mountain Wreath* Njegoš reverted to the decasyllabic line. This line is as natural to Serbian as the iambic pentameter is to English and in the *Mountain Wreath* Njegoš developed it as far as it would go in its original form. In this sense he was (and is) a classic since he could not be developed, but only imitated. His work was, thus, both a beginning and an end of an era. The central aim of *The Mountain Wreath* was to develop the poetic view of creation in *The Ray* to an expression of its application to the reality of life and to the everyday living and the historical fate of the Montenegrin people and, through this incidentally, to human existence generally.

That Njegoš chose as his theme the killing of Moslem renegades in Montenegro, an event of doubtful authenticity, was in itself a poetic choice. Danilo I was the first Prince Bishop of the Petrović dynasty and in his reign Njegoš saw the real beginning of Montenegro as an independent state, rather than as a band of rebellious Serbs living a tribal existence in the fastness of their mountainous territory. The theme fitted with the efforts of both Njegoš and his uncle before him to turn Montenegro into a modern state, however small. Equally the motive for such a work would appear to be to portray the existence of the people and their individuality and the traditions on which that individuality was based. At that time Montenegro was the only free area of Serbia, save for the newly liberated vassal state of Serbia which had gained its independence under, first, Karađorđe and then Miloš Obrenović. This Njegoš recognises in his dedication of *The Mountain Wreath* to Karađorđe. For the Montenegrins their very being related back to the great Serbian medieval state which

had perished, traditionally, at the battle of Kosovo in 1389 and of whose Serbian Orthodox Christian culture they were the sole free representatives. Thus the struggle they endured was one thrust upon them by history. As with most people, they had no choice. It was this or the abandonment of their individuality as a people. To accept Islam was to betray not just a faith or even a state, but to forfeit the very personality of the individual who did so. One might hazard a guess that, had Islam been adopted over all the Serbian areas, even the language would have gradually ceased to exist as a cultural medium. Such Moslem writers who have written in Serbian have depended on the work of Vuk Karadžić and not a little on the works of Njegoš. In Bosnia and Hercegovina, during the seventeenth century, a literature developed in Persian and Arabic! The modern literary culture of a Serbian Moslem is a borrowed one in so far as it is written in Serbian and with the linguistic apparatus of the Serbian language.

History is composed of a myriad of individual lives and these, taken together, form a fateful abstraction. One is born into a historical situation which bears its hazards and its sufferings. *The Mountain Wreath* expresses not the single contradiction of conscience and duty, the responsibility that causes Danilo to curse the day he was born, but also the entire diapazon of sentiments and experience of a whole people. There is portrayed a general cultural view of a society in a real situation, a situation that had to be answered in its own terms, no matter what contradictions this might involve. Danilo has to fulfil the needs of the position in which he finds himself.

What is man? - the abbot Stefan asks and replies with the assertion; he must be a man. Without going further into the existential picture of *The Mountain Wreath*, the work, together with *The Ray* and the Dedication raises a question concerning Njegoš's poetry seen in the framework of European poetry generally at the time.

The sort of questions this involves is apparent when one considers that Jovan Skerlić in his *History of the New Serbian Literature (Istorija nove srpske književnosti)* places Njegoš in the preromantic period (*Od racionalizma ka romantizmu*). Miodrag Popović, on the other hand, goes equally far in seeing Njegoš as a Romantic (M. Popović, *Istorija srpske književnosti, Romantizam I*, Nolit, Belgrade, 1968, p. 288). "*The Ray*, says Popović, "all comes from the poet, from the inner drama of his being. The theological-metaphysical categories are most often merely external forms in which Njegoš gives a poetic solution to his own intellectual and psychological contradictions." (Ibid., p. 242). Njegoš would appear, then, to be both not a Romantic and a Romantic. If we consider the poetry of Njegoš's contemporary, Branko Radičević, so generally considered the first of the Serbian Romantics, and compare, say, "The Student's Farewell" (*Đački rastanak*) with *The Ray*, one might

be tempted to say that the Njegoš of *The Ray* is far more a Romantic than Branko. Certainly, the romantic poets, especially the French, had a considerable influence on Njegoš. One might go further and say that the idea of the poet and the power of poetry expressed in the Dedication to *The Ray* reflect generally held romantic views, ideas partly, doubtless, stemming from Sima Milutinović and which bore echoes, no matter how indirectly, of the thought of Schelling and Herder. There can be little doubt that Njegoš was impressed by the romantic movement, for this was the contemporary poetry available to him. In his living quarters in the *Biljarda* ( the building he had erected to serve him as a "palace"! ) at Cetinje, one of the four portraits on the walls was of Lord Byron whose works Njegoš possessed in Russian and probably also German translation. Romantic ideology must indeed have had much in it to attract Njegoš, yet to call him a Romantic is as unsatisfactory as to call him a Pre-romantic.

The problem is really that of judging something external to the general trend of European culture in terms of that culture. Romanticism was, in fact, a poetic and philosophic trend within a long-standing tradition. It reacted against the impersonality of classical art. The Romantics were firmly in their cultural tradition and accepted its values. Thus Byron could look to Pope and Wordsworth to Milton. In France the vogue for Shakespeare in the eighteenth century as well as the influence of English sentimentalism, began an interest in the subjective experience, in the world of the chaotic as opposed to the ordered. Yet all this was contained in a highly developed tradition.

What, one may ask, was the difference between such poets of the romantic movement and Njegoš? Although brought up in a culture rooted in Christendom, Njegoš was, by his standing and cultural make-up entirely outside the culture that gave rise to Romanticism. The Prince Bishop of Montenegro was almost the personification of a romantic hero in reality. If Lord Byron was one of Njegoš's heroes, it is easily thinkable that, had he known of him, Njegoš might have been one of Byron's heroes. Despite his reading of western literature, Njegoš was heart and soul in the world of the Balkans. As so many of his perturbed visitors attest, Cetinje had its tower decorated with drying Turkish heads. The head of Smail aga Čengijić was sent to Njegoš in 1840. Only in 1850 did Njegoš suspend this custom which struck his Russian and western visitors as a barbaric habit. Njegoš was a man of his people and of his nation, living the thoughts and feelings which their situation imposed. The experiences of a Njegoš were not those of a man brought up in the so-called civilised culture of more advanced nations. Pre-eminent were personal feelings, but feelings conditioned and often contradicted by the traditions and, still more, by the duties and responsibilities of a very different form of living. For the Romantics certain ideals - the word is



important - dominated. Man is a part of nature and is thus connected to its essence by his most intimate feelings. The subjective, when inspired, is on the path to Truth. Truth is Beauty, Beauty is Truth. So, also, man is born free. The noble savage is the true man. Such untruths about man were conceived on the poetic plane (Rousseau) and on the philosophical (Schelling, Herder). The trend to support the liberation of oppressed peoples (Byron, Shelley) and the liberation of slaves was all part of the canonisation of individual existence, but it was in terms of abstraction.

For those who came late to Western European culture, as soon as they had transcended the period of mere imitation, the situation became rather different. There was no long-standing and continuous literary past against which to react, nor, for the individual poet or writer, was there a deeply rooted system of ethical customs or "clear moral issues". To find those implied a return to a medieval past that, even for the most conservative, belonged to another age and another reality. For the person in such a situation there is, inevitably, a question. The accepted truths are open to the question of the individual's experience and predicament. Traditions and customs were faced with a broader scope of Western culture with tenets that must have seemed as alien as they were attractive. The result was, in a general sense, a new poetry, a poetry that, for its authors, implied almost a fresh start, a poetry in which every moral situation was subjected to enquiry and to testing. Good and evil are obvious to nobody. They are present on various levels and demand both examination and synthesis. We may recall the works of the Russians Gogol and Dostoevsky and their impact on later western culture where they seemed close to the protest of the Dane Soren Kierkegaard against the rational philosophy of Hegel. So, apart from the great surrealistic genius of Dickens which so often surpassed the sentimental morality to which he was addicted, English nineteenth century novelists, not to mention the later poets, knew clearly the difference between right and wrong. The individual became of little importance because he fitted neither the abstractions of the Romantics nor the lower-class morality of the "local boys made good" who created capitalism. The difference between the moral and the existential experience may be grasped if one compares the two almost contemporary novels, Miss Evans's *The Mill on the Floss* and Turgenev's *Fathers and Children*. In France the poetry of Baudelaire broke away from established ideals and was followed by the poetry of the end of the century and, with Proust, the twentieth century in France moved towards Existentialism, a trend to which the influence of the Russian writers, especially Dostoevsky (A.Gide: *Dostoevsky*, Paris, 1923), played its part.

Njegoš the poet was, of course, unknown to the West. The only way in which poetry can make an inroad is through knowledge of the language. Translation is, alas, a poor vehicle. Yet, discarding works that

were little more than preparatory exercises, Njegoš was, in 1847, a new voice in European poetry. This one may hazard on the basis of a single work, *The Mountain Wreath*. *The Ray* whatever its originality, is an adaptation of the ideals of Romanticism and would perhaps have passed with little notice. It is *The Mountain Wreath* where the contradictions of the individual and history, the historical fate of a people and its meaning in terms of living and being appear in the sense of a reality that may not be denied. The synthesis of human contradiction and human suffering presents a more open view of human existence than any of the romantic poets had achieved at the time, with the exception of intimations in the poetry of Wordsworth and Lamartine. Here, however, is a single work that embraces the predicament of existence in a small and isolated community which had little to do with the standards and ideals of Europe, but a great deal to do with the being of men in general.

The poetic drama of the *Mountain Wreath* lies in the expression of a concrete situation with its demands for suffering and evil that is far removed from the freedom idealised by Shelley or Byron. It is a question of identity. Freedom, as a concept, is the immediate question of to be. The awareness of the predicament of having to be becomes the more acute when there is but one choice; fight or surrender your being, the situation emphasised by the vizir's letter in *The Mountain Wreath*. Such situations bring the question of being into sharper focus. Witness the development of Existentialism in France during the German occupation. Faced with the tribulations of his life and position on the one hand and the influence of Western culture on the other, Njegoš chose, as all great poets do, to express his own soul.

There are thus reasons for considering Njegoš an unromantic Romantic. His subject and *raison d'être* are not the ideals of the Romantics. For this and other reasons, in *The Mountain Wreath* Njegoš may strike one as a strangely modern poet. At the time of his writing he was surely a new voice, one that went unheard due to the barrier of language and one which is easier for us to understand today. This is, of course, to limit his significant work to *The Mountain Wreath* and the Dedication from *The Ray*. To this one might add the poem "A Montenegrin to Almighty God", "Thought" (*Misao*) and some other minor poems. Without *The Mountain Wreath* it is doubtful whether one would be writing about Njegoš today. Early death (in 1851) robbed the Serbian language of a great potential. All that remained was his unsuccessful attempt at more conventional drama, *The False Tsar Stefan the Small* (*Lažni car Šćepan Mali*). It is *The Mountain Wreath* that obliges one to consider *The Ray*, a consideration not without its reward, yet it is for *The Mountain Wreath* that Njegoš may be seen as a great poet.

## (II) *The Ray of the Microcosm (Luča mikrokozma)*

In the general scheme of Njegoš's work it is impossible to ignore "*The Ray*". It is not possible to ignore it in writing of *The Mountain Wreath*, not because of the known variants of its original title, but for the relation that *The Ray* bears, to some extent negatively, to the poetic development that both links and separates the two works. For this reason it is necessary to make certain observations on *The Ray* without, in any way, attempting a full analysis.

*The Ray* because of its proposition that man pre-existed creation and that this earth is the scene of his expiation of his siding with Satan's rebellion has proved attractive to those critics who were theologically disposed. The outstanding work of this type is still, probably, Nikolaj Velimirović's *Njegoš's Religion (Religija Njegoševa)*. Its main virtue is that it emphasises the individuality and daring of Njegoš's religious thinking. The theological significance of *The Ray* may well be left to the theologians. Their interest is easily comprehensible. Sources for the idea and theme of *The Ray* have been suggested as various as Origen, the Kabal, Neo-Platonism, Byron's *Cain* and, not unnaturally, Milton's *Paradise Lost*. There is some evidence that Njegoš may have possessed a copy. If so, it would have been in Russian translation. This would in no way signify that such influence did not exist. Indeed to have read Milton, even in translation, would make it difficult on such a theme to avoid some influence.

The purpose here, however, is not to discuss either the question of literary sources or the theological significance of the theme, but rather to consider *The Ray* as poetry which, after all, is what it is and as such must it finally be considered. This is not to suggest that its theme and the scheme of its ideas are irrelevant. They stand as the idea which may attract even when poetic achievement is not always complete. Certainly an original idea as that of *The Ray* is of itself sufficient to awaken an interest.

The poem is an epic in six cantos with a Dedication to Sima Milutinović. The adoption of the decasyllabic, the natural line of Serbian, marks a return from Njegoš's earlier experiments. It represents Njegoš's first use of this line in his mature poetry and in a manner free of the domination of the folk epic. If Njegoš had done nothing else, his turning the folk metre into artistic poetry would have gained him a place in the history books.

Yet such remarks inevitably base themselves upon the Dedication. This is some of the finest poetry that Njegoš ever wrote. Although the dialogue and confrontation between Satan and the archangel Michael

have an undeniable force, the poetry of the epic itself does not possess the virtues of the Dedication. It is necessary to justify this evaluation.

The Dedication is framed in the style of an ode, beginning with the invocation to Milutinović and ending with an encouragement for his future writing, but between this are lines written in a terse, aphoristic style that leads directly to *The Mountain Wreath*. The decasyllabic becomes the vehicle of complex, yet natural speech such as it never was in the folk epic nor, indeed, in Serbian poetry before it.

*Čovjek bačen na burnu brežinu  
Tajnom rukom smjeloga slučaja,  
Siromašan, bez nadziratelja,  
Pod vlijanjem tajnoga promisla -  
On se sjeća prve svoje slave,  
On snijeva presretnje blaženstvo...*  
(The Dedication, L. 8-12)

("Man, cast upon a stormy strand By the secret hand of bold Chance, Impoverished, without orientation, Under the influence of a secret providence - He recalls his first glory, He dreams of a blissful happiness...") The statement is clear and the imagery is effective without intrusion. There is also enjambment which is, rhythmically, mainly absent from the folk poetry. The tone is entirely lyrical, expressing the despair of the individual faced with mortality and the limitations of the human mind. The laconicity of this poetry may be illustrated in the following lines:

*Snom je čovjek uspavan teškijem  
U kom vidi strašna priviđenja,  
I jedva se opredjelit može  
Da mu biće u njima ne spada. (Ibid., L. 71-74)*

("Man is encumbered with a heavy sleep, In which he dreams of dread visions, And scarcely can he decide Whether his being be not part of them.") The concise use of metaphor contrasts with much of the poetry of the main text. One may go further and quote a usage of folk metaphor (the mother's milk) that is vibrant with an eroticism that contrasts excellently with its negative sense:

*No vremena pitatelnic mi, -  
Okićena cvijetnim vremenom,  
Okrunjena sunčanim zrakama,  
Ali vlase cvijetne pletući,  
Bisernom ih rosom nasipljući,  
Pri igranju svjetlokosih zv'jezdah  
Da dičnije na jutro izide  
Pred očima svoga vladaoca -  
Na sva moja žarka ljubopitstva  
Smijehom mi odgovara njenim. (Ibid., L. 41-50)*

("But my temporal mother - decked in flowering season, Crowned with the sun's rays, And braiding her floral tresses, Scattering them with pearly dew, At the dance of the bright-haired stars To emerge the more beautiful Before the eyes of her ruler, - Answered all my heated questions with a smile.") Nature's beauty and Nature's impassibility! The language can be absolutely to the point:

*Čovjek organ dosta slabi ima  
Da izrazi svoje čuvstvovanje. (Ibid., L. 121-122)*

("Man has but a weak organ To express his feelings") Imagery is well-used to express a complex state of being:

*Čovjek bačen pod oblačnu sferu,  
Prima l' ovdje oba začetija?  
Je l' ovdje dvostruka kol'jevka?  
Je l' mu zemlja tvorcem određena  
Za nakazu kakvu tainstvenu,  
Al' nagradu burnu i vremenu,  
Al' rasadnik duhovnog blaženstva? (Ibid., L. 21-27)*

("Man, cast beneath this cloudy sphere, Does he take on both origins? Is this earth for him a double cradle? Is the earth designed by its creator To

be for him some mysterious punishment, Or is it a stormy and temporal reward, Or is it a nursery for spiritual bliss?")

The Dedication is a lyrical expression of man's state in earthly existence. The human cannot grasp being. Man is the profoundest mystery to man. The entire predicament of mankind is due to the fact of the human mind which lifts man to the stars only to be pulled back by his earthly chain. If life be not merely a dream, then man must be immortal. The argument is reminiscent of Kierkegaard.

Whereas the Dedication is an expression of the state of man in general, towards the end Njegoš puts his own position in an intimate address to his old tutor:

*Sudba ti je i moja poznata;  
Mislim, nejma podobne na zemlji:  
Do vratah sam iznika tartara,  
Ad na mene sa prokletstvom riče,  
Sva mu gledam gadna pozorišta;  
Al' na sudbu vikati ne smijem -  
Nadežda mi voljom tvorca blista!* (Ibid., L. 184-190)

("My fate is known to you; I think there is none like it on earth: I have arisen at the gates of Hell That roars at me with curses, And I behold all its hateful sights. Yet I dare not cry out against fate - For hope, by the creator's will shines upon me.") The following epic is presented as an adventure of the spirit of poetry into the unknown.

Yet, if the problem expressed in the Dedication is existential, then its approach to a solution is profoundly romantic. For it is the transcendent power of poetic inspiration that is presented as the sole means of overcoming the limitations of the mind. Njegoš is fully aware of these. The wise and the rationalists of the earth are dismissed in the persons of Pythagoras and Epicurus. The solution through poetic inspiration, together with the vision of nature as God's creation, would seem to be as much romantic doctrine as Christian. The whole of *The Ray* may be seen, in the sense of its philosophy, as a romantic poem, if we except the Dedication. It is the Dedication that leads one on to read the poem as a whole. The result is a disappointment.

It is well known that in 1845 Njegoš was going through a period of extreme stress and difficulty as a ruler both in external and internal affairs. His almost passionate adoption of romantic doctrine may well have come as a reaction against a hateful reality. Be this as it may, one

may view much of this as an aberration. The spark of divine inspiration that was to be born onwards to an expression of the reality of living and of history in *The Mountain Wreath* appears there not in the form of poetic inspiration but of conflict and realism which make it yet better poetry. At the very end of his life Njegoš replied to the Austrian poet Frankl who had sent him his translation of the Serbian folk songs. On October 12th 1851 Njegoš wrote concerning poetry: "I have never been able to make out whether it be a spark of immortal fire or a stormy chimera - the child of our stormy ambience. From my early position I regard it as a passionate outpouring. - But once man rises above himself, then he sees the poverty of all things human... a poem is the cry of a mortal from this stormy strand of ours, the poet is a voice crying in the wilderness. He dreams of immortality, calls it forth, wilts for it." (V. Latković & N. Banašević, *Savremenici o Njegošu*, Letter to August Frankl von Hochwart /1810-1894/, quoted p. 208.) It is irrelevant whether these words are those of a Christian believer or not. There is sufficient evidence that Njegoš was no keen churchman. The point is that this is stating the position of the poet not in romantic, but existential terms. The question of religious faith is unimportant to an existential approach to life. Byerdyayev and Camus were believers, Heidegger and Sartre were not. Important is that here, four years after *The Mountain Wreath*, Njegoš expresses a view of poetry that professes a distinct agnosticism regarding the romantic doctrine which is the basis of *The Ray*.

The six cantos of *The Ray* do not equal the poetic quality of the Dedication. This despite the originality of their concept. Man's fall was due to his siding with Satan whom he later betrayed and due to this he received a lesser punishment, namely, to be exiled to existence on earth for the period of his mortal life, bereft of the memory of his previous immortality. At the end of life he would return to his former immortal state, having expiated his crime, unless, that is, he had again sided with Satan who has the ability constantly to tempt him.

As a philosophical proposition there is surely no need to point to the multitude of difficulties such a view of existence entails, nor the number of questions which it begs. Nor would this, necessarily, militate against its being powerful poetry. Unfortunately Njegoš succeeds only rarely. Some subtleties there are. Njegoš's Satan is more originally arrogant than Milton's, though far less poetically potent. The epic contains two accounts of creation: God's and Satan's. At first glance they would appear to be opposite. God's version is a struggle for light against chaos. Satan's is that God was a creation of blind chance - a Big Bang! Satan's hatred of God is that of one not only jealous of power, but also of one who would affirm his own being against what, if recognised, would annihilate it. In Satan there is more poetic conviction than in the rest of the poem.

*Rad česa je naš vladalac gordi  
Mene od sna budio vječnoga  
I družinu moju blagorodnu,  
Kad nam krune samodržavija  
Stavit nije na glave mislio?*

*Ja bih voli da sam vječno osta  
U sna mirnoj vladi i naručju,  
Sa svom svojom svijetlom družinom,  
Nego će sam na svijet iziša  
Da umnožim gordost ponositu  
Nesnosnoga moga protivnika. (IV, L. 56-66)*

("Why did your proud ruler awaken me from eternal sleep, Me and this my noble company, If he did not intend to crown us with the crown of autocracy? I would rather that I had remained in the peaceful realm and bosom of sleep Than that I should have come into the world To increase the arrogant pride Of this my unbearable opponent.") The poetry is, perhaps, weakened by repetition. Satan maintains that, before so-called creation the universe consisted of small spheres, each with its own ruler and creator who created as he willed. The image is surely good. Then came a cataclysm that destroyed everything save for the God who then, by chance, became the supreme power. God, then, is an usurper. The two accounts are thus opposed one to another and, seemingly, they cannot both be true. The interesting point is that the peace and tranquillity that Satan thus describes, the equality, is an exact image of the chaos and stability, the darkness against which the creator strives. It is a fair description of death. Equality and its inevitable companion uniformity are the greyness and moribundity that are ever the opposites of creation. God, for Njegoš, following his romantic theory, is the supreme poet and creation is his poem. (It is also the victory of light over darkness - yet another metaphor.) Njegoš's idea of creation is active and the opposite of equality.

Certainly the lines of dialogue between Satan and the archangels are the best of the poem. Njegoš would have been used to dialogue from the folk epics wherein dialogue is a constant form, introduced by its standard terms: *tad besedi, progovara*, etc. ("So he spoke, then he said",



etc.) Hence, perhaps, comes the dramatic form of *The Mountain Wreath*. Otherwise the decasyllabics of *The Ray* tend to be loose and discursive, often merely declamatory. The dynamism of creation Njegoš seeks to express is not there. Perhaps the best way to show this is to take a passage at random. In Canto 2, line 281 there is the following description:

*Iznad tihe nebesne ravnine  
Milioni lećahu šarovah  
Na uredna kola i redove,  
Kolik' luna na teleskop vidna,  
A lunina cv'jeta i svjetlosti. (II, L., 281-285)*

("Above the quiet heavenly plain Millions of spheres were flying In ordered circles and ranks, As many as the moons seen in a telescope And with the moon's light and colour.") This is limp poetry. But let us take an example from the climax of the poem; the moment when God intervenes in the battle between the angels and Satan:

*Svekolike borbe okeanah  
Koje čine sa krutim skalama  
U najveću njihovu bjesnoću,  
Svekolike napore vjetrovah  
Što se čuju na zemnome šaru  
Protiv svijeh gustijeh ljesovah  
Da u jedan glas mogući sliješ,  
Jek bi njihov slab veoma bio  
Da pokaže krupnu silu glasa  
Kojim oblak vitleći ječaše. (V, L. 361-370)*

("If all the battles of the oceans Which they wage with the steep cliffs In their greatest fury All the greatest efforts of their winds That are heard upon the earth's surface Against all the dense forests Were brought together into a single mighty sound, Their voice would be extremely weak To express the great force of the voice Which the cloud, whirling, echoed.") This recalls the typical extended simile of the epic, not the folk epic, but probably Gundulić. As poetry it is weak. The poet does not believe all this himself! Or one may take from Canto 1 the following:

*Odvede me u carstvo svjetovah.  
Kako kaplja rose sa cvijeta  
Ili zrnce leda prozračnoga  
Pri pogledu svijetloga sunca  
Što u nebo dignu slabe zrake... (I, L. 101-104)*

("He led me away into the realm of light. Like a drop of dew from a flower Or a grain of transparent ice At the glance of the bright sun That raises its weak rays to the sky.") Compare this with Stefan's statement in *The Mountain Wreath* which uses the same image:

*A nadežda veže dušu s nebom  
Kano luča sa suncem kapljicu. (L. 2327-2328)*

("And hope binds the soul to heaven, As a ray of light a droplet to the sun...") and the difference is enough to make the point! The whirling spheres of Njegoš's centre of heaven too much remind one of the big wheel at a fair in the dark of an autumn evening! Perhaps Njegoš was over ambitious. Even Milton did not always succeed in the same sort of task and there must be many who agree with Dr. Johnson regarding *Paradise Lost* that "No man ever wished it longer."

Leaving aside its Dedication, *The Ray* is a noble failure. It is little more than yet another romantic poem in the vast body of European poetry. Yet, if one is to consider *The Mountain Wreath*, *The Ray* cannot be ignored. The spark of divine inspiration that God allows to man takes on a new meaning and a new form, just as the poetry takes on a new freshness and originality. *The Ray* was a preparation for maturity. The spark flew away from abstraction and romantic doctrine and settled into the flesh and blood of living tissue. It became the spark that must be struck from the stone. This and the ray that links the soul with the sun takes on a new significance.

For the reader used to the poetry of the western European Romantics, Njegoš's subject and his people may appear exotic, but for Njegoš this was everyday reality. The customs which are portrayed were the background of reality. Njegoš was no amateur anthropologist, any more than he was a romantic dreamer. It is with *The Mountain Wreath* that Njegoš transcended Romanticism and moved on to express the conflict and tragedy of existence in terms of his own reality. *The Ray*, for

all the attention that has been paid it, is no more than a preparation for  
*The Mountain Wreath.*

### (III) The Ethic and the Game

In *The Mountain Wreath* Njegoš devotes a considerable part of the work to a confrontation of the two faiths of Islam and Orthodox Christianity (L. 715-1172) ending with the ultimatum of the new Vizir and Danilo's reply. The long speech of Mustaj-Kadija, in itself an ode to the beauties of Istanbul and of Islam, expressing his faith in sensual terms, is received and contrasted with the scorn and jeering of the Montenegrin chieftains. Just as the Kadija's speech is in terms not of the physical power of Islam and the Ottoman empire, but also of the houries, with their blue eyes, and of Istanbul - the cup of honey, the mound of sugar, the sweetest bath of human life - so it is opposed not merely to the trappings of Christian Orthodoxy but also to the Serbian traditions of the legendary significance of the battle of Kosovo and the fateful duty to avenge it which constituted the Serbian faith and honour. The question here is the confrontation of two faiths, of two views of existence. It is not a question of ethics, as much as it is a confrontation of two vastly differing views of being, two conflicting sets of symbols or (dare one suggest it?), two different sets of rules in two different games? The differences and also the parallels form the subject of the following scenes of the mixed wedding (L. 1755-1912) in which the two traditions vie against one another. Thus the "Turkish" wedding guest glorifies Đerzeles and the Montenegrin replies with Marko Kraljević, almost the exact counterpart. So, in a succession of verses, Ilderim is answered with Miloš Obilić, Ali with Comnenus and Novak. The main effect is to portray the intransigency and mutual exclusion of the two faiths, but does it not also suggest the affinity of such confrontations with those (somewhat trivially, if you wish) of two different, yet similar games? The virtues of soccer and rugby football come easily to mind. Of course such a comparison may well seem lacking in seriousness to those who are accustomed to thinking of such matters in terms of the suffering and heroism they involve, yet it still may be of interest to think of them in this rather different light. After all, the game is a reflection, indeed a sublimation of man's need to affirm his existence and is, therefore, not so far removed from the suffering and heroism which it often symbolises.

The Montenegrin Orthodoxy was more a symbol of national identity than it was a religious faith. Orthodoxy was the framework, the rules of Serbian existence. For Njegoš's Montenegrins Orthodoxy meant their history and their individuality. To abandon it would have been tantamount to abandoning their individuality and being absorbed in the mass of a greater and nationally amorphous Ottoman empire. Faced with the difficulties of subduing this rebellious mountainous area, the Turks often resorted to conversion, and bribery. Many Serbs, even entire

brotherhoods in Montenegro, took Islam, some, perhaps from fear, but most likely from greed. Taking Islam meant freedom from most taxes, advantages in trading, the right to carry weapons and ride horses with impunity and other privileges, to which may well have been added various other awards. The Moslem renegades in Montenegro, although apparently mixing freely with Christians, had betrayed a game into which they were born, they or their forebears, and a game that was in desperate peril. It is in such situations that a game becomes of critical importance. Its rules become paramount. This is clearly expressed in *The Mountain Wreath* by Vojvoda Batrić who puts the matter quite clearly to his "Brother Turks":

*No primajte vjeru prađedovsku,  
Da branimo obraz otačastva... (L. 854-855)*

("Accept the faith of your forefathers, That we may defend the honour of our fatherland".) and then:

*No lomite munar i džamiju,  
Pa badnjake srpske nalagajte  
I šarajte uskrsova jaja,  
Časne dvoje postah da postite;  
Za ostalo kako vam je drago! (L. 858-862)*

("Pull down your mosques and minarets, Lay the Serbian yule-logs on the fire, And paint your Easter eggs in varied colours, Observe the fasts of Christmas and of Lent; And for the rest, you may do as you will.") This would seem very close to Njegoš's own view and practice of Orthodox Christianity. The only possible ethical question here is that of defending the land of their fathers. Otherwise it is a matter of accepting a set of symbols. The more serious elements of faith are not raised, indeed, by either side of the argument. The symbols are, of course, all important. Without them the maintenance of the Fatherland is impossible, because the Fatherland is contained in the observation of its symbols. If they fade away, then the identity and the individuality of the culture will perish. Yet the same is true, on a far less essential plane, in any game. The Crescent and the Cross are two dread symbols, as Danilo says (L. 631), but they are also representative of the conflict between two different ways of playing the game of life. These are, truly, no mere games and so one may speak of them as Games. Each Game, as indeed each game, has its ethical

rules, to the exclusion of the other. Without this the Game would not exist and the individuality and the personal lives of their members would be altered or even destroyed. The larger the Game, the more destructive it is of individuality. Thus Islam in the form of the Ottoman empire threatened the individuality of small nations, just as did Russian socialism and today, America democracy, for each demands the observation of its symbols.

In the case of *The Mountain Wreath* there is no question that the loss of the Game would mean the loss of the selfhood, the individual existence of the Montenegrin people. Such a loss would mean not just the loss of nationality, itself an abstraction, but the loss, in so far as the concept of being is rooted in the Game, of the selfhood of the individual man. Thus, the ethics are, firstly and by necessity, the ethics of the Game. The lament and the suicide of the sister of Batrić (coming immediately after the confrontation of faiths and acting as a comment and emphasis of the meaning in real terms of the conflict) evokes Vuk Tomanović's evaluation of the young Batrić that at scarcely twenty he had killed some seventeen Turks (L. 1997). Here the ethical judgement is heroism, value to the Game. He could also do a standing jump of fourteen feet, hardly an ethical judgement, but closely linked with heroism; his ability to play the Game!

To use the term Game is far from an attempt to denigrate the value of what it stands for. On the contrary, while man does not live by bread alone, there will ever be the need for the Game and its rules, despite all the idiocy and suffering they entail, to lend meaning and incentive to existence. Man might perish from boredom! Against the demands of the Game, however, are the doubts and hesitations of Bishop Danilo. His doubts are both fear of causing disunity amongst the tribes and an ethical repugnance at wholesale killing; two differing ethical levels. As Milovan Đilas says, it is often necessary to do evil in order to kill evil. (M. Đilas, *Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop*, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1966, p. 343). Such an ethic would seem to belong more to the Game. Yet Danilo is also fully aware of the dangers to his people. He experiences contradiction as a person who is intellectually self aware, but this is not the ethics of the main body of the Game. For this reason it is helpful, firstly, to examine the main protagonist of the ethic of the Game, Vuk Mićunović.

The common people (not a class statement but rather as Vladan Desnica put it "those there's most of"), tend to exist almost entirely in the Game, largely because this is their upbringing and they have no other ethical measure. By and large this must be true of even the more advanced societies. People exist within their Game. This applies not to the less educated alone, but also to the class of the rulers and politicians. Even their opposition is still firmly in terms of the rules of the Game. The individual thus, consciously or unconsciously, surrenders his being to the Game. Such a surrender leaves scope for the individuality. (Individuals

lived happy and ordinary lives for fair periods of time under Hitler or Stalin.) The surrender is natural and even essential, but its ethics are primarily of the Game.

In *The Mountain Wreath* Njegoš makes Vuk Mićunović the ethical voice of the Game. So the opening of the poem which, at first, seems to be a monologue by Danilo, becomes a dialogue. Mićunović has only appeared to be asleep and has heard Danilo's every word (thus lending irony to Danilo's words "*Moje pleme snom mrtvijem spava*" - "My people sleep the sleep of the dead" (L. 37). His answering speech is to be the first of several in which he stands for the ethic of heroism in the Game, since for him the Game is life and its standards are both clear and unquestionable. One may quote his first lines:

*Ne, vladiko, ako boga znadeš!  
Kakva te je spopala nesreća  
Teno kukaš kao kukavica  
I topiš se u srpske nesreće?  
Da li ovo svetkovanje nije  
Na kome si sabra Crnogorce  
Da čistimo zemlju od nekrsti?  
I bez toga ovo nam je slava,  
Na koju se vrsni momci kupe  
Sposobnosti svoje da kušaju,  
Silu mišce i brzinu nogah;  
Strijeljanjem da se nadmašuju  
I sjećanjem u opkladu plećah;  
Da slušaju božju leturđiju  
I da vode kolo oko crkve;  
Da viteštvom prsa nabrecaju.  
To je tamjan sveti junacima,  
To gvozdeni srca u momcima! -  
Turi takve razgovore crne:  
Ljudi trpe, a žene nariču!  
Nema posla u plaha glavara!  
Ti nijesi samorana glava:*

*Vidiš ove pet stotin momčadi,  
Koje čudo snage i lakoće  
U njih danas ovđe vidijesmo?  
Vidaše li kako strijeljaju,  
Ka se grada vješto izigraše,  
Kako hitro grabljaju kapice?  
Tek što vučad za majkom pomile,  
Igrajuć se strašne zube svoje  
Već umiju pod grlom ostriti;  
Tek sokolu prvo perje nikne,  
On ne može više mirovati,  
Nego svoje razmeće gnjijezdo:  
Grabeć slamku jednu i po jednu  
S njom put neba bježi cijučući.  
Sve je ovo nekakva nauka! (L. 89-125)*

("No, Bishop, if you care for God! What evil thing has taken hold of you? That you wail like some poltron cuckoo bird And drown yourself in all our Serbian sorrows Is not today a day of festivities At which we Montenegrins are foregathered To cleanse the land of loathsome infidels? And, more than this, it is our Slava day, When the finest of our young men come together To test their strength and their abilities, The power of arm and fleetness of their feet; To try their skill at shooting at the mark, To cleave the roast lamb's shoulder for a wager; And to hear the divine liturgy And to dance the kolo round the church That valiant ardour's urge should swell their breasts. This to all brave men is holy incense, Making youthful hearts as strong as iron! Cast away such dark and gloomy thoughts! Men endure, wailing is for women; A timid ruler has no place with us! You are not an independent person: Do you not see these five hundred brave lads, What miracle of strength and fleetness theirs Have we not seen upon this very place. Have you not seen how well they hit the mark, And how nimbly they did grab the caps? Just as the wolfcubs, following their dam Engage in playing with their dreaded fangs Know how to sharpen them upon a throat; No sooner do the eaglet's feathers sprout Than it no longer can remain at rest But tears and pecks and pulls apart its nest, Grabbing and ravaging it straw by straw And with it flies up shrieking to the sky. In this there is a lesson to be learned.")



He goes on to state that six times as many men as this are ready to fight the Turks and that these are Danilo's strength. For none can there be any hope save in the will of God. There will be fighting to the end until either the Montenegrins or the Turks are destroyed. All hope was buried on the field of Kosovo and their only salvation rests in their two hands. The speech ends with the famous aphorism:

*U dobru je lako dobro biti,  
Na muci se poznaju junaci. (L. 137-138)*

("When things go well 'tis easy to be good, In suffering is it seen who is the hero.") The ethics of these lines are entirely those of the Game. For Mićunović the facts of possessing strength for the struggle are sufficient. For him heroism answers all possible questions. Danilo's predicament is, for Mićunović, only a dangerous faltering of spirit. The leader has no right to weakness. His responsibilities are to History and fate. The destruction of the renegades poses no moral question. (How often, one might ask, has this been the attitude of nations, all of whom have felt themselves in the right?) For Mićunović life is suffering and heroism. After Danilo's brother Rade has cruelly reproached Danilo for his doubts and the Kolo has sung of the cup of honey and the cup of gall, Mićunović affirms his final view of life:

*Bez muke se pjesna ne ispoja,  
Bez muke se sablja ne sakova!  
Junaštvo je car zla svakojega...(L. 603-605)*

("Without suffering the song cannot be sung, Without suffering the sabre is not forged! Heroism conquers every evil...") The dynamic truth of the statement must be modified by its ethical narrowness. It is the ethic of the Game. (I recall an RAF recruiting officer during my school-days during the last war whose answer to the question of death was: "If you believe in God and are loyal to the king, you'll be all right!". *Druže Tito, mi ti se kunemo?*) /Comrade Tito, we swear to follow you!/) For Mićunović the killing of the Moslem renegades poses no ethical problem. He has no doubt and tolerates none in others. The very natural protest of Serdar Vukota that he never had a young brave but fate snatched him, that he never had a brave lad but fate took him before his time (close to Danilo, but here instinctive and not the result of intellectual cogitation) Mićunović answers with scorn and his idealisation of heroism:

*Žertve blagorodne  
Da prelaze s bojnijeh poljanah  
U veselo carstvo poezije,  
Kako rosne svijetle kapljice  
Uz vesele zrake na nebesa. (L. 993-997)*

("The noble victims May they pass off from the fields of battle To the joyful kingdom of poetry Just as the bright and dewy droplets Move with the rays of sunlight to the sky.") The poetry of the last two lines would be impressive, were it not repetitive. Yet the lines are of the ethics of the Game, ethics that are often in conflict with other human feeling.

For Vuk Mićunović there is no truth but heroism. Yet, beneath this, there is another ethical motivation. He replies to Ridžal-Osman:

*Zar obadva nijesmo hajduci?  
On je ajduk roblja svezanoga,  
On je bolji e više ugrabi;  
Ja sam hajduk te gonim hajduke. (L. 1188-1191)*

("Surely are we not both of us hajduks? He's a hajduk over fettered slaves, He's the better, by what he takes; I'm a *hajduk* who pursues the *hajduks*".) The difference he emphasises is of an ethical nature. The Moslem is merely the tool of an aggressive religion and a ruthless empire. Mićunović stands for freedom. (How many Games say the same thing? Yet here it is as near truth as may be.) The words, however, bear witness to another level of ethical feeling that is more natural, more intimate than any rules of any Game.

It is this level of ethical feeling that is expressed in the poem in various ways. Njegoš uses for it the term *čovještvo* (human feeling). It is portrayed as present in the most ordinary people. It is instinctive and ever-present in all but the most corrupt. *Čovještvo* is difficult to translate because ethical terminology is apt to avoid the reality. Some so-called ethical philosophers have termed it "common-sense ethics", but this is just what it is not. Kant already knew this. It belongs rather below the diaphragm. Perhaps it comes closer in reality to the English term "sportsmanship". In *The Mountain Wreath* Njegoš expresses it in various places and its presence is emphatic. In the scene where the crosses are carried to the hill above the church on Mount Lovćen Vukota Mrvaljević

and others catch some young partridges who have probably been scared by the firing of the guns. Serdar Vukota orders their release:

*Utekle su k vama da uteknu,  
A nijesu da ih pokoljete. (L. 196-197)*

("They have fled to you to seek for shelter And surely not for you to slaughter them.") So the old woman accused of witchcraft and who confesses to spying for the Vizir is saved by the chieftains from being stoned to death because she had acted under duress in that the Vizir threatened to burn her sons and grandchildren in their houses. It is the same feeling that moves Draško in his description of life in Venice. He expresses clear ethical repugnance at the Venetian system of prisons:

*Najgore im pak bjehu tavnice  
Pod dvorove đe dužde stojaše;  
U najdublju jamu koju znadeš  
Nije gore no u njih stojati:  
Konj hoćaše u njima crknuti,  
Čovjek pašče tu svezat ne šćaše,  
A kamoli čojka nesretnjega. (L. 1474-1480)*

("But worst of all were their dungeons Underneath the palace of the Doge. Not the worst pit you can imagine Is worse than to inhabit one of those. Even a horse would perish in such places. No man would even tether his dog there, Let alone one of his fellow men.") His conclusion on the life of Venice is one of direct ethical condemnation:

*I čujte me što vam danas kažem:  
Poznao sam na one tavnice  
Da su božju grdno prestupili  
I da će im carstvo poginuti  
I boljima u ruke uljesti. (L. 1496-1500)*

("And hear well, brothers, what I say to you: These self-same prisons made one thing clear to me, That these men have terribly transgressed

God's will And that their kingdom's rule shall surely perish And come into the hands of better people.") This is, of course, a bit of prophesy after the event, on the part of Njegoš and the last line could be a reference to Napoleon or even diplomatic flattery of Austria. None of this changes the intrinsic meaning. The system of spies and the fear of people to speak freely comes under the same condemnation. One may find the same sort of evaluation in another part of the poem when Tomaš Martinović, telling how they killed not only the two Alić brothers, but also the Christian girl Ruža Kasanova who was Alić's willing bride, adds the judgement:

*Tu smo grdno obraz ocrnili  
I od boga dio izgubili. (L. 497-498)*

("Here we evilly besmirched our honour And lost our grace with the almighty God.") In all cases it is an ethic that has no immediate or rational relation to the Game. Rather it is a feeling that is universal to man.

It is this measure of judgement that is directed against the Turks. In the first lines of the poem Danilo speaks not merely of the Ottoman Turks but of Islam itself as the aggressive force that, but for the French, might have engulfed all Europe. One might ask why one Game might not be as good as another? The answer is clearly put. The force of Islam was aggressive, likened to a plague of locusts. Islam is by nature, like many forms of Christianity, a converting faith. Orthodoxy and especially Serbian Orthodoxy never sought to spread itself specifically by conversion. Conversion is also aggression, worse aggression often than naked military aggression. Besides this there is the historical fact of Bishop Danilo's being taken prisoner by the Turks through their breaking a promise of safe conduct, a fact referred to in the poem by Danilo. The young Batrić is taken in the same way and murdered. This, in the poem, stands as an indictment of Islam and, as such, militates against the praise of that faith by such as Mustaj-Kadija. Njegoš was certainly describing what was well-known to his contemporaries throughout the Balkans. When one considers modern Islam and its taking of hostages and murder, one may wonder whether it is not a characteristic of the faith! In the poem Njegoš merely portrays reality. The judgement of Danilo's soliloquy, then, is an ethical one which goes beyond the rules of a Game.

This, however, is far from being Danilo's sole predicament. As the one intellectual in the poem he suffers the loneliness of a relatively educated man in a primitive society for which he bears ultimate responsibility. For him this is more than a problem. It is a state of being. As an individual he curses the day that saw him born. He is isolated and

without help. "*Nada mnom je nebo zatvoreno*" (L. 39) ("Above me the heavens are shut."):

*A ja što ću, ali sa kime ću?  
Malo rukah, malena i snaga,  
Jedna slamka među vihorove,  
Sirak tužni bez nigđe nikoga!* (L. 33-36)

("And I, what shall I and with whom? One pair of hands and little strength. A straw tossed amid the whirlwinds, A sad orphan without kith or kin.") Danilo is not, of course, without kin or friends, but in his responsibility he is alone. He is of the Game as much as is Mićunović, but his awareness makes it difficult unilaterally to accept the attitude of the Game. Indeed, one might say that it is never possible for the true intellectual ever to accept any Game and its rules utterly and completely. The educated man who does so is no intellectual. Like Mićunović, Danilo knows that the question of the renegades must be resolved if Montenegro is to exist, but he sees beyond this to the bloodshed and disunity this will cause. The ethics of *čovječstvo* are deeply involved. Of the Turks he has no doubt: "*Na tron sjediš nepravo uzeti*" (L. 56) ("You sit upon a throne unjustly taken.") However, he dreads setting one brotherhood against another and the resulting bloodshed. Thus he answers the chieftains:

*Slušaj, Vuče i ostala braćo!  
Ništa mi se nemojte čuditi  
Što me crne rastezaju misli,  
Što mi prsa kipe sa užasom.  
Ko na brdo, ak' i malo stoji  
Više vidi no onaj pod brdom.* (L. 520-525)

("Harken you, Vuk, and you other brethren! Make you no wonder at the view I take, That dark thoughts are tearing me apart, That my breast boils over with dread horror. He who stands upon a hill, though low, Sees more than he who stands beneath the hill.") Danilo cannot take the attitude of his brother Rade: "*Što se mrči kada kovat nećeš?*" (L. 541) ("Why soot your hands, if you don't want to forge?") The ethic of *čovječstvo* competes with the ethic of the Game. Thus, for the moment, Danilo gives in to the demands of the Game and calls for action only to recant and call for a

meeting with the Moslem leaders. He sees the human need to oppose the natural violence of nature:

*Vuk na ovcu svoje pravo ima  
Ka tirjanin na slaba čovjeka;  
Al' tirjanstvu stati nogom za vrat,  
Dovesti ga k poznaniju prava  
To je ljudska dužnost najsvetija!* (L. 616-620)

("The wolf has his right over the sheep, As has the tyrant over the weak man. Yet to place foot on the tyrant's neck, To make him recognise the right and true, That is the most sacred of man's duties.") If the thought of his religion and its symbols being defiled fired the fires of hell in his breast, still, later, Danilo can find excuse for the renegades as men:

*Da, nijesu ni krivi toliko;  
Premami ih nevjera na vjeru,  
Ulovi ih u mrežu đavolju.  
Što je čovjek? Ka slabo živinče!* (L. 760-763)

("For they themselves are not so much at fault, The infidel enticed them with his falsehood, Entangled them in the devil's meshes. What is man, but a weak and feeble creature?") It is truly an ethical trap, a contradiction from which there is no escape. Where there is no responsibility, the heroic man can act well within his own sense of *čovještvo*. Vuk Mandušić takes no part in the slaughter of the renegades, but goes off to fight a battle of his own to rescue his cousin's family from the Turkish Vizir's tax-collectors. Truly if you are below the hill, you may combine the Game with humanity, but this is no solution for Danilo. At the end of the poem he regards Mandušić with affectionate humour. Mandušić's naivety, his belief that Danilo can get his favourite rifle repaired, is the charm of the purely heroic that the rules of no Game can sully.

The poem seeks not an answer to the opposition of *čovještvo* and the Game, but it does seek a resolution. In this, as in so much else in the poem, the role of Abbot Stefan is crucial. He is not an intellectual, but a fairly ordinary Montenegrin monk who has gained his philosophy from observing the nature of existence in his many travels during a life of eighty summers. His acceptance of the Game presents no difficulties for

his view of nature and of being. His view is not ethical. The Game is justified by the universal natural duty of self-defence. Stefan's laughter and Danilo's tears at the final completion of the slaughter synthesises the ethical contradictions, but only in Stefan's universal sense. Danilo still weeps. Regarding Stefan's second speech he laughs and attributes some of it to "*Dobra vatra , a još bolje vino*" (L. 2521) š"A good fire and still better wine").

Stefan's view of Nature is a presentation not of the Game but of the playing field. He appears late in the poem (L. 2224) and his two long speeches are made, one to the Montenegrins to encourage them before battle and the second to console Danilo whom he describes as young and inexperienced. Nature is a constant struggle in which all beings are armed for their defence. Defence is the natural duty. Stefan's God is completely transcendent.

*Ko će, sinko, božju volju znati,  
Ko li boža prozreti čudesna? (L. 2220-2221)*

("Who, my son, can tell the will of God? Who can fathom all his great miracles?") Nature is struggle. The blow strikes the spark from the stone. The struggle is, for man, both external and internal:

*T'jelo stenje pod silom duševnom,  
Koleba se duša u tijelu. (L. 2511-2512)*

("The body groans beneath the spirit's weight And the soul sways unsure in the body".) There is no end to contradiction. It is inherent in being. The rules of the Game thus fit, as also the ethics of *čovještvo*, into the wider scheme of Nature. Thus Stefan accepts the rules of the Game. "*Slavno mrite, kad mrijet morate!*" (L. 2356) ("Die gloriously, if die you must!") Tragedy and suffering are life. Man's position is the fate of his own being. To his question: what is man? Stefan answers with the affirmation: he must be man. Without the duties of the Game and the suffering it implies, life would be stunted. Yet all is dominated by an intelligent force. This is the way Nature works and man must accept the contradictions of his being. Man's position itself is contradictory.

*Tvarca jedna te je zemlja vara,  
A za njega, vidi, nije zemlja. (L. 2330-2331)*

("A small creature whom the earth deceives, Yet he sees the earth is not for him.") The peace and satisfaction man seeks is not there.

*Niko srećan, a niko dovoljan,  
Niko miran, a niko spokojan. (L. 2517-2518)*

("None are happy, no one is contented, No one is calm and no one at peace".) Acceptance of the struggle is the demand of life and embraces both the ethic and the Game:

*Stradanje je krsta dobrodjetelj;  
Prekaljena iskušenjem duša  
Rani t'jelo ognjem elektrizma,  
A nadažda veže dušu s nebom  
Kako luča sa suncem kapljicu. (L. 2324-2328)*

("Suffering is the virtue of the cross. Tempered in trials and suffering the soul Nurtures the body with electric fire. And hope connects the soul with heaven As a ray of light a droplet to the sun".)

Stefan may laugh despite the suffering and deaths because he views them as part of the scheme of things. This is how Nature works and there is no way of changing it. Njegoš does not go so far. Danilo remains as profoundly pained and unconvinced by Stefan's "sifting the world through a sieve" ("*da prečišćaš svijet na rešeto*", L. 2523). The questions are not really resolved. Suffering is still suffering and contradictions are unresolved, save that there is the sense that behind all is an inevitability.

The Ethic and Game is just one more theme underlying the plot of *The Mountain Wreath*. Much has been written on those of heroism, of the relativity of joy and suffering in the poem, and of course of the central historical and national theme. This is yet another and emphasises the complexity of *The Mountain Wreath*. In choosing the subject of the slaughter of the renegades, whatever Njegoš may have believed its significance, he must have also felt the human contradictions which such a theme and situation must have involved. No matter whether he did or not, the fact is that his poem involves the reader with the three levels of ethical existence: the rules of the Game, the innate human sympathy or empathy which is *čovječstvo* and the wider, more factual view of the nature of existence which contains both of the former. Sufficient is it to



show that *The Mountain Wreath* is far removed from a romantic poem. It offers no resolution of problems, no ideal consolation, only an acceptance of the state of tragic contradiction and the fate of history and the Game.

#### (IV) The Genre and Scene Structure of *The Mountain Wreath*

The genre of *The Mountain Wreath* presents a problem. This is reflected in the obvious embarrassment sensed by many critics when faced with the need to define it. This in itself might be dismissed as trivial, were it not for the indications of complexity which it involves. After all, the work is a drama by its graphic form. That is to say it presents itself, even in the line to line experience of reading it, as a drama. Equally and more essentially it is experienced throughout as poetry. The dramatic element is poetically present and the academic question whether it is a drama, epic or a lyrical poem ceases, perhaps, to be all-important.

Matija Ban stated that Njegoš's reply to his objection that *The Mountain Wreath* was not dramatic because it was all speech and little action, was that he intended to rectify this in a future edition. (V. Latković & N. Banašević, op. cit., p. 142). One might be inclined to thank "whatever gods there be" that Njegoš never did! The question of the genre definition of *The Mountain Wreath* has exercised more than one critic. Pavle Popović in his excellent book *On "The Mountain Wreath" (O "Gorskom vijencu"*, Geca Kon, Beograd, 1923) answers the question whether it be a drama with a direct negative. It is not, he says, written for the theatre. It is a poem in dramatic form, as distinct from a poetic drama. (Ibid., p. 82.) Jovan Skerlić is more precise, but less true, when he wrote: "In form this historical event of the eighteenth century is a drama, but only in form. In fact it is an epic reduced to dialogues in which there are highly lyrical elements, especially in the thoughts of Bishop Danilo." (Jovan Skerlić, *Istorija nove srpske književnosti*, Rad, Beograd, 1953, p. 174.) An epic principally tells a story. Its essential time is the past compared with the essentially present time of the lyric and the drama. The idea of an epic "reduced" to dialogues does not help much. In the first place the continued line of the epic story is not immediately striking, perhaps until one reads Pavle Popović's careful analysis. The lyrical element is only arbitrarily to be attributed to Bishop Danilo, for one might feel that the poetic impact of Stefan, Vuk Mićunović *el alia* is just as lyrical. Miodrag Popović seems closer to the experience of reading *The Mountain Wreath*. He claims that it breaks the barriers of epic, lyric and drama. It thus fits no accepted form. This, he maintains, is its great originality. Popović concludes that: "From out of the picturesque collective fabric often emerges a modern writer." (M. Popović, *Istorija srpske književnosti, Romantizam, 1*, Nolit, Beograd, pp. 252-253.) The question of genre, in itself, is generally less important to critics than it was in the last century so that a more general definition may be in order.

Milovan Đilas regularly uses the term "poem". "It seems in the poem as if there were no past or measurement of time. Here the poet lives in the present idea." (M. Đilas, *Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop*, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1966, p. 328.) Jovan Deretić has no problem in calling *The Mountain Wreath* a dramatic poem (*dramski spev*) and adds, with regard to the Greek drama, that Njegoš acted not as a Classic but as a Romantic. (Jovan Deretić, *Istorija srpske književnosti*, Nolit, Beograd, 1981, p. 299.)

The above are, perhaps, sufficient examples of the discussions of the genre of *The Mountain Wreath*. Mainly they all, with the possible exclusion of Skerlić, seem to agree that it is a dramatic poem or a poem in dramatic form or just a poem. Deretić, however, is unembarrassed to refer to it as a drama on various occasions. All would agree that it is not a drama written to be acted in the theatre. Njegoš's own experience of the theatre, though greater than Draško's, was probably not considerable. That *The Mountain Wreath* is not suitable for presentation on the stage was clear to Skerlić who mentioned that attempts to stage it were unsuccessful. (Skerlić, op. cit., p. 174) and my own attendance at a performance in Beograd in 1953 went far to confirming this. Njegoš clearly set out to create a poem in dramatic form. If one considers the known sources of drama which he possessed, the Greek plays, Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, the plays of Lord Byron, to name the most likely, his undertaking presents nothing extraordinary. The Greek plays, without a knowledge of the Greek theatre, would offer little help. Byron stated that none of his plays were written specifically for the theatre. One may recall such works as Thomas Hardy's *The Dynasts* or even that Pushkin uses a graphic dramatic form in his poem *The Gypsies*. The play without acts would have been familiar to Njegoš from Sophocles. The same would have been known to him from *Boris Godunov* which consists of a series of scenes, achieving a flexibility in reading, but not necessarily on the stage. There is, then, nothing out of the ordinary in Njegoš adopting the dramatic form in writing an epic-lyrical poem. The mere graphic presence of dramatic form effects the impact of any poetry. Perhaps this was why Pushkin adopted it in parts of *The Gypsies*. In his last work *The False Tsar Stefan the Small (Lažni car Šćepan Mali)* Njegoš divides the play into acts and scenes. The work is not a success, for drama in the full sense of a work for the stage was not Njegoš's strength.

The fact remains that *The Mountain Wreath* is not readily stageable. Such directions as that preceding line 2045 which would bring some three or four hundred tribesmen onto the stage is just one indication that Njegoš was not thinking practically of the stage! Poetically, on the other hand, the direction is fully justified. They provide a mass background and "public pressure" to the scene of the interrogation of the witch that almost leads to her being stoned to death. Poetically the presence of numbers on the stage of the readers' minds seems fully

justified. A poem in dramatic form seems to be the best description of the work and, with it, the genre problem may safely be left.

This accepted, there still remains the more complex question of the work's structure, the nature and the method of its impact. The impression of themes and thematic lines of any work tend to be *post hoc*. One reads a work and is left with dominant impressions. To have any concept of such "structure" one must have read the work. This is not to denigrate the value of examining the relation of themes one to another. The Russian formalist division of a work into the fable (*fabula*) and sujet (*syuzhet*) refers usefully to the fact that most works have what may be called a plot (something takes place) and also a more complex, underlying theme or set of themes which are born by the plot and which the work might seem to be really about. Thus the siege of Troy is the fable of the *Iliad*, but the sujet is varied and manifold.

Pavle Popović who demonstrated how each incident in *The Mountain Wreath* corresponds to a stage in the preparations for the destruction of the renegades, also points out that this is far from being the sole theme of the poem. "It might even seem that Njegoš did not desire to portray this as the main plot. Had he so desired, he could have done so in the manner of history." (P. Popović, op. cit., p. 30.) This is the conclusion of a critic who applied perhaps the closest reading of any of the critics of *The Mountain Wreath*. He readily admits the sujet of national customs, proverbs and beliefs. Njegoš, he wrote, had two aims: "He wished to portray the event and to portray the people." (P. Popović, *ibid.*, p. 78.) The virtues of Popović's close reading are undeniable, yet his acceptance of the purely ephemeral, political significances is rather less so. The passages on Venice are there to show the differences between Europe and Montenegro. (*Ibid.*, p. 99.) The incident of the partridges is a hint at the Austrian treatment of the Serbs who took refuge there in 1690. (*Ibid.*, p. 60.) If this were so, it is not what would occur to the general reader, nor would he be much better off if it did!

Miodrag Popović, writing in a later epoch, is clearly aware that the question is more complex. ("Njegoš is complex", M. Popović, op. cit., p. 226.) *The Mountain Wreath* is a "polyphonous sounding". (*Ibid.*, p. 228.) Regarding the structure Popović states that *The Mountain Wreath*, by its composition, differs from any of the examples that Njegoš could possibly have had. (*Ibid.*, p. 252.) Determined to see Njegoš as a Romantic, Popović emphasises the role of picture, colour and sound, but this adds little to a discussion of the structure.

Milovan Đilas, in his second book on Njegoš (*Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop*, op.cit.), which followed his earlier book (*Legenda o Njegošu*, Kultura, Beograd, 1952) does suggest a structural scheme. He divides the work into essentially three parts: Part I, the Whitsun assembly

and the crosses being born to the church on Lovćen, Part II, the feast of the nativity of the virgin, pointing out that is by far the longest part, ending with the appearance of the Abbot Stefan and Part III, the scenes of Christmas Eve and New Year. (Ibid., p. 320.) Perhaps the extreme length of the second part may arouse objections.

Jovan Deretić states clearly that "The source of the action is the national collective..." Njegoš is not interested in people, their personal experiences, their pains, joys, desires... The sole significance he gives them is their historical, national importance... The sole interest that stimulates them to action is the general interest; Montenegro and its freedom. (Jovan Deretić, *Istorija srpske književnosti*, Nolit Beograd, 1983, pp. 300-301.) Were this true, there would be little point in writing about *The Mountain Wreath* save as a historical document! Regarding the actual structure, Deretić, rightly, notes that it is not linear but cyclical. This links it with the epic. Gundulić's *Osman* is also not linear. Deretić identifies four main thematic lines: Poetic vision, Political history, Pictures from popular life and "The resolution and unity in action together with the appearance of the Abbot Stefan through whom *The Mountain Wreath* becomes a philosophical poem." (Ibid., p. 301.)

This truly ignores the real effect of reading the poem. Yet, on the other hand, it is positive to define at least some of the thematic lines. These four main themes offer a thematic structure, be it right or wrong. Political history is a reference, at the best, to the utterly transient. Goethe's objection to the political poem still stands! If such exists in the work, then it is of interest to the historian alone and not the reader. History, of course, is very much a factor, especially in Danilo's speeches and in the Kolos. Deretić is fully aware of the structural importance of Danilo: "Danilo's doubting is the motive force of the action." (Ibid., p. 301.) But to view the poem in this way is to impose not an artistic unity, but a disunity. It seems rather like saying that Njegoš, having created the opening scenes of Danilo's monologue and the dialogue with Mićunović, now decided to have a break and to portray some of the habits and customs of the ordinary Montenegrin people. There is no unity between the two. The reader is struck by quite the contrary. Danilo's cursing the day he was born is his personal expression of despair at the situation, historical and traditional, in which he is placed and the customs etc are the flesh and blood of that situation. The characters in the poem are all individual, both in their nature and in their ideas. Of them all, perhaps Stefan might be thought of as the embodiment of ideas. Yet his appearance is vibrant with individuality. So much so that all do not accept his ideas in their entirety. To the four themes offered by Deretić others might well be added, according to the reader. The theme of the relativity of good and evil, of pleasure and suffering; the cup of honey that must be mixed with the cup of gall; the theme of heroism as a necessity of

existence; the theme of the need to do evil in order to do good. Yet none of these exist save in the impact of poetic experience, that which is transmitted to the reader. Were that not so, *The Mountain Wreath* would have had few readers and this article would not be being written. Đilas and Deretić seem still to maintain that bad habit of Marxists of reducing all phenomena to the abstractions of history, society, class etc. The impact of *The Mountain Wreath* cannot be explained save by the individual experiences and sufferings not only of the characters involved, but of the reader and the over-all lyrical impact of the entire poem. It is in this sense that the tragedy and contradictions of history and, indirectly, of all existence are lived through as the challenges and dilemmas of individuals which separate the work from a more romantic epic and which constitutes its originality.

Yet, as we stated at the outset, the seeing of structure in terms of thematic lines is an effect that comes after the act of reading. To envisage any theme whatsoever assumes one has read the work. This, of course, involves a serious regression. One may, for example, object that exactly the same applies to the division of a work into chapters and acts. Where acts are missing a certain confusion inevitably arises in the minds of critics, rather as when a poem lacks punctuation. Much of the difficulty is that the mind tends to supply the missing acts or the missing punctuation automatically and, possibly, arbitrarily. *The Mountain Wreath*, like all works, is experienced in reality line by line. It impacts as poetic direct speech in a defined situation and this is how the reader experiences it, no matter what *post hoc* ideas he may have at a later date.

The experience of reading *The Mountain Wreath* is primarily of a series of scenes. They are not always easy to define without the possibility of objection. Nonetheless it would seem worth the effort to examine the scenic structure, since to reduce the view much more would be to quote the work in its entirety! In the case of some of the longer speeches, one might go further in considering them as poems with stanzas. For example, the opening soliloquy of Danilo is what one may easily term Scene 1: Whitsun eve, deep in the night. Danilo's opening monologue may well be seen as a lyrical poem with its stanzas. If *Vidi vruga su sedam binjšah* ("Behold the devil with seven scarlet cloaks") is clearly the first, then *San pakleni okruni Osmana* ("Osman was crowned in an infernal dream") is the second. The third stanza turns from history to Danilo's own predicament: *A ja što ću, ali sa kime ću?* ("And I, what shall I do and with whom?"). Stanza four changes from helplessness to anger: *Crni dane, a crna sudbino!* ("Black day and black destiny!"). Stanza five repeats the form of the first stanza: *Vidi posla cara opakoga* ("Behold the actions of that evil emperor"). Stanza six refers to the coming assembly and Danilo's apprehensions (L. 1-79). Thus the

opening monologue has the structure of a poem in six stanzas, but it is not a scene.

To determine the first scene is not without difficulty. Danilo's monologue becomes a dialogue. Vuk Mićunović has merely pretended to sleep and has heard his every word. He reacts: *Ne, vladiko, ako boga znadeš* ("No, my Bishop, for God's sake."). (L. 89) The scene is now a dialogue and Mićunović ends with the aphorism:

*U dobru je lako dobro biti,  
Na muci se poznaju junaci!* (L. 137-138)

("When things go well 'tis easy to be good, In suffering one learns who is the hero!") The words make a rhythmic and poetic ending to the scene. What follows, however, is the incident on Lovćen, ending with the release of the little partridges. It is almost a symbolic tableau, with its crossed lightning and the firing of the guns. To count this as a scene will raise the same problem as do the Kolos. It acts really as a sort of sub-scene, very much in the literal sense of the word. If only because, if it were for the stage, which we may assume it is not, it would be a literal "change of scene", we must count it as scene two. Some critics might well prefer to call it an appendage to the first scene.

Scene III is clearly signalled by the change of time. It is a new assembly on the day of the Virgin's nativity. It opens with the Kolo, here certainly a part of the scene. Its voice is affirmed as part of the scene by the words of vojvoda Milija that it is the voice of the people. The scene consists, basically, of two reported visual events: knez Janko's description of Mićunović's encounter with the Nikšić Moslems, ending with the trick played on hadži Brunčević and Tomaš Martinović's account of the killing of the girl Ruža and her moslem lover. The development of plot comes with Bogdan Đurašković's warning that their plans may be known to the enemy. (L. 420).

Scene IV may be taken as the arrival of Danilo. There is a clear direction: *Vladika Danilo vide da su se okupili svi, pa i on izide među njih*. ("Bishop Danilo, seeing that they are assembled, comes out among them".) The scene consists of Danilo's being reproached by his brother Rade and his wavering between calling for outright war and then urging that talks be held with the leaders of the Moslem renegades. It is interrupted, rather than ended, by the Kolo. Again this is an interlude, rather as the scene on Lovćen, which seems to interrupt one scene and link it with the following.

Scene V begins with the arrival of the renegade leaders. It contains the confrontation of the two faiths. It ends in an uproar followed by a silence. Between the scenes, again, the Kolo takes up its classical role.

Scene VI. This is divided from Scene V by the Kolo and is signalled by the arrival of the messengers bearing the new Vizir's letter. It concludes with directions: a moonlit night and the Montenegrins sit by their fires on the great threshing floor.

Scene VII comprises the dreams of the characters and especially the incident of Mandušić's talking in his sleep. They tell their dreams and the mood is sad and the scene ends with the mention of Draško who is expected back from Venice.

Scene VIII begins with the arrival of Draško, following the old Serbian saying: *Mi o vuku, a vuk na vrata* ("Speak of the wolf and it's at the door!"). The rest of this long scene is taken up with Draško's account of Venice. It includes Mićunović's reminiscences of Kotor.

Scene IX picks up Rogan's order to put six or seven lambs on the spit so they may lunch and go home. Now they eat and tell fortunes from the markings on the lamb shoulder bones. Vuk Lješevostupac refuses to sing more to the *gusle* and the scene is interrupted by the sound of gunfire heralding a mixed wedding party. One might argue that this is only a continuation of the scene, yet, as one reads, surely this comes as a new element signalled by the firing of shots. The confrontation of the two faiths takes place as the wedding party passes and the scene is ended with the remarks of Bogdan Đurašković.

Scene X is marked by the direction that the wedding party passes and then follows a funeral party for the young Batrić. Here, like the Kolo, there is an interlude of the lament and suicide of Batrić's sister. The sister's lament serves, again, as a sort of interlude that leads into Scene X. Whether one treats it as a separate interlude, as one has been tempted to treat some of the Kolos, makes little difference to the actual scene structure of the poem.

Scene XI is clearly indicated. The chieftains sit and talk when three or four hundred people from the Ozrinić, Cuca and Bjelica tribes arrive. It comprises the humorous incident of pop Mićo's letter and the incident of the witch.

Scene XII is again indicated clearly: the chieftains sit by their fires under a blood-red moon. It begins with the first appearance of Abbot Stefan and contains the first of his philosophic speeches and ends with all sleeping except for Stefan.

Scene XIII begins at dawn of the following day. It is a short one and basically consists of the oaths taken by the chieftains to take action against the renegades, including Danilo's attempt to dissuade Nikola of



Crmnica from taking the oaths because his people are too few to succeed. Ironically it is Nikola who heroically kills the renegades at a great loss and evokes Danilo's tears as he reads his letter in the final scene. The scene ends as the chieftains and elders depart for home.

Scene XIV is clearly marked by its title: *Badnje večje* (Christmas Eve). The fact that the scene has a title does not entitle it aesthetically to be considered as an act. To do so would unbalance the entire impact of the poem. On the contrary, what it does is to give special emphasis to the scene, as also the title to the final following scene. For the reader it represents a final emphasis which is both symbolic and synthetic. It contains Stefan's second philosophical speech and the scene of his getting slightly drunk in his celebration of Christmas. It gives the sense of joy and justification and ends with Stefan giving communion and absolution without confession to all who have partaken in the fighting. It is the view of life dominated by experience; Stefan's *Ja sam prošao sito i rešeto* ("I have passed through sieve and colander"). (L. 2486)

Scene XV is entitled *Novo ljeto* (New Year) and is the final scene of the poem. It has the synthesis of Danilo's tears and Stefan's laughter. It ends almost humorously with the arrival of Vuk Mandušić.

Thus *The Mountain Wreath* divides naturally into a structure of fifteen scenes. Possibly other readers may wish to modify this. If they do so, this will not alter the fact that the structure of *The Mountain Wreath* is that of a poem in dramatic form divided into scenes.

This perhaps tedious examination attempts to follow the reader's line by line experience of reading. Naturally the over-all experience of having read will involve many other questions that require discussion in their own right. This is the structure to which the thematic line has to refer, for it is the immediate experience of reading, if to it we add the individual poetic impact of the lines.

All this leads one to conclude that *The Mountain Wreath* is not a poetic drama, but a poem in dramatic form based upon a structure of scenes.

## (V) The Tableau in *The Mountain Wreath*

Miodrag Popović placed some emphasis on the musicality of Njegoš's poetry, but he also stressed the visual appeal, especially in *The Mountain Wreath*. He refers to a combination of "sound and picture" (*slika i zvuk*) and concludes: "Njegoš belongs to the category of poets with a distinctly visual imagination". (Op. cit., p. 275).

The pictorial element in the poem certainly merits some attention. It must, however, be remarked at the outset that in language there is no such thing as pure vision; it is always audio-vision. Yet language may evoke a visual experience by reference, so that the reader or hearer experiences a scene of an event as though he were a witness. Such "pictures" or tableaux act rather as the details in a large fresco.

To adopt the term tableau requires some reservations. It suggests rather a static, icon-like depiction, rather as one finds sometimes in the epilogues and endings of Turgenev's novels. These are often static. Njegoš does not produce this type of tableau. Rather it is as if one were to describe a painting by Breughel the Younger, one would inevitably use terms of action for the actually static visual experience. With Njegoš one does the opposite. One uses terms of static vision for a scene involving action and words denoting action. The resulting experience, however, is very similar and to avoid emphasising it would be to ignore an essential element of Njegoš's work. The structure of *The Mountain Wreath* contains much action that is reported. It is therefore easy to see the value of the tableau in enhancing the impact of a described event.

To commence, it may be useful to give an example of what is not a tableau. In the opening scene Vuk Mićunović uses a double extended simile, the standard device of epic, which is rich in observation of nature:

*Tek što vučad za majkom pomile,  
Igrajuć se strašne zube svoje  
Već umiju pod grlom ostriti;  
Tek sokolu prvo perje nikne,  
On ne može više mirovati,  
Nego svoje razmeće gnjijezdo:  
Grabeć slamu jednu i po jednu  
S njom put neba bježi cijućuci. (L. 117-124)*

("No sooner wolf-cubs run behind their mother, In their play they will begin to sharpen Their dread teeth upon each other's throats; No sooner does the falcon gain his feathers, Then he can no longer stay at rest But rather he will pull his nest to pieces, Pulling it asunder straw by straw And then flies shrieking upward to the sky.") Visual as the simile is, it is not what we mean by tableau, for it directly refers to and conditions another action. The tableau stands alone as an independent incident.

Its whole point is its independence. It exists as an entity that relates to the whole as one unity to a greater. Its role may be symbolic or it may be illustrative or just part of a varying background and design. In *The Mountain Wreath* it becomes almost a sub-scene with the bearing of the crosses to the church on Mount Lovćen. It is typically audio-visual, beginning, as it does, with the firing of guns in order to count the echoes. (I recall an Irish farmer who lived at the foot of the highest mountain in Ireland taking me in 1946 "as a treat" to a high point for this very purpose.) There follows the account of Serdar Radonja's of how he sat in the sun and watched the thunder and storm-clouds come in over the sea and cover the (Bosnian and Hercegovinian) lands below in darkness. This and the symbolic crossed lightnings surely appeal to the vision. Even the shouts that herald the taking of the covey of young partridges involve an imaginary picture. Sound is emphasised, yet the whole scene has a visual impact.

Much the same may be said of other incidents where the visual element forms a part. Thus, at the conclusion of the scene involving the reading of the Vizir's letter there is the visual episode of the cock fight, introduced by knez Rogan, the word *gle* (look!) emphasising its visual nature. Its purpose is, of course, symbolic of the Turkish attitude. Rogan wishes the smaller cockerel to win while Skender-aga would wish the stronger to be victor. (L. 1198-1209). There are various other incidents in the poem which, despite an element of sound, are principally visual. One may quote the occasion of Mandušić's dreaming aloud, the dream he so "conveniently" forgets. The same may be said of the reading of the lambs' shoulder blades (L. 1708) or the arrival of the three to four hundred OZRINIĆI etc (L. 2045). This is followed again by the incident of the trial of the witch and pop Mićo's letter, both of which contain broad visual elements.

It may be objected to all these examples that they contain a great deal that is pure speech and sound. Certainly they are not pure tableau. Yet, if one considers them as a whole experience, then they present a vision of the event. There is a sense of the objective reality of the milieu in which the poem takes place. It is worth remembering that what appears exotic to the Western, especially the modern reader was everyday reality to Njegoš.

The reported action in the poem naturally might be expected to involve the visual appeal in its necessary description. Thus knez Janko reports his and the OZRINIĆI's bargaining with the Moslems and the scarcely avoided clash (L. 359). The account is dramatic, including the clash between Vuk MIĆUNOVIĆ and Hamza kapetan. To those critics who have designated the characters of *The Mountain Wreath* as animated ideas, the character and individuality of the personages involved is surely a difficulty. The scene of the near quarrel is balanced by Janko's account of a joke played by the Montenegrin young men on the old Hodža Brunčević (L. 400). The result is an active tableau. The OZRINIĆ youths stick a large sheep's horn down the barrel of the old man's carbine, which he fails to notice. The result conjures up a picture which animates what would otherwise be a trivial prank:

*Bože jedan! tri stotine drugah,  
Sve popada mrtvo od smijeha,  
A odža se čudi šetajući  
Što se radi od toliko ljudih,  
Dokle vide u pušku rožinu. (L. 411-415)*

("Oh dear Lord, three hundred of our lads Fell to the ground, splitting their sides with laughter! But the hodža wondered, as he strutted What might have come over all these people, Until he spied the horn struck in his carbine.") In contrast to this is the following account of the wedding party of the Moslem Alić with the Serbian girl Ruža and their subsequent deaths (L. 453-475) which is reportage but not a tableau.

In Vuk Mandušić's talking in his sleep his description of Milonjić's daughter-in-law is a tableau. Much of his speech is the style of the folk epic. Mandušić's dreaming justifies his silence in an earlier scene. The essence of the "dream" is erotic. His talk of the cause of his emotions, however, breaks away from the epic style and presents a tableau without which the whole episode would lose its appeal:

*Tada ona vijenac rasplete,  
Pade kosa do niže pojasa;  
Poče kosu niz prsa češljati,  
A tankijem glasom naricati  
Kako slavlja sa dubove grane. (L. 1289-1293)*

("Then she did unloose her plait of hair And her tresses fell below her waist. She combed her tresses down upon her breasts And in a high voice began to lament, Like a nightingale from an oak tree branch.") Audio-visual, but here the visual surely dominates. It is a picture augmented by sound and a sound simile. Such an element emphasises the experience of a reality. It has nothing to do with the abstractions of the ideas that the poem has in abundance. There is a constant appeal to the reality of individual experience and, in this, the audio-visual tableau plays a distinct role. It serves as a confirmation of reality and a muted judgement of ideas and attitudes, thus widening the scale of the whole poem and rooting it in existential reality: "This is what I saw, now judge for yourselves!" This is very clear in the long scene containing Draško's account of his visit to Venice. The tone of the account and of the reactions of the listeners is an ill-informed and primitive and, perhaps, generally biased view of Venice and the life of urban civilisation seen by people who are ignorant of it. This may be so, but it does not destroy the truth of what is seen and the effect it has. This, again, involves visual presentation. We may take two examples from Draško's account. The first occurs at the very beginning of Draško's long speech, in reply to the question whether the Venetians are handsome:

*Bješe, brate, dosta lijepijeh,  
A grdnijeh deset putah više. (L. 1406-1407)*

("Yes, brother, there were many handsome, But ugly folk outnumbered them ten times.") This is a general opinion, but one which is then objectivised. Almost suddenly amidst general description comes a picture:

*Gledao sam: po dva među sobom  
Đe uprte kakvu ženetinu  
Tjelesine mrtve i lijene,  
Potegla bi po stotinu okah,  
Pa je nose kroz gradske ulice  
Usred podne tamo i ovamo. (L. 1414-1420)*

("I saw two men carrying between them Hoisted a fat and massive woman, A great fat body, lifeless and bone-lazy. She must have weighted some three hundred pounds! And they bore her through the town streets Hither and thither, at the height of afternoon.") It is a sight one might see,

in more modern guise, in most modern cities where it would certainly not arouse the same feeling of disgust (perhaps the poor soul was a cripple?). The passage is a picture, but with it there is the feeling of the viewer, which the reader experiences as well as the sight. Literally it is seen through Draško's eyes. Its impact on him, a man from a world in which such sights do not exist and where physical strength is a condition of survival, dominates the tableau. Draško's description of the theatre is his own, lyrical reaction, but the same may not be said for Mićunović's account of the people in Kotor:

*Kako tridest napuni godinah,  
Svaki dođe kao babetina,  
Od bruke se gledati ne može;  
Kako pođi malo uza stube,  
Ublijedi kako rubetina,  
A nešto mu zaigraj pod grlom,  
Rekao bi, oni čas umrije! (L. 1686-1692)*

("When they attain the age of thirty years, All of them begin to look like hags, One feels ashamed even to look at them; When they begin to climb the smallest stairs, Their faces turn as pale as a white sheet And something starts to throb beneath their throats So one might think they were not far from death.") Again, almost one might say in miniature, we have a tableau. This is what the Kotor people looked like to Mićunović whether one agrees with him or not. One might go further and say that the passage makes the reader share both Mićunović's experience and his reaction to it.

The above are examples where the visual element might be said to dominate that of sound and where the narrative relies upon a picture. There are, as we stated earlier, some scenes that consist of a tableau or several tableaux which, apart from the work as a whole, stand almost independently.

The use of tableau may well have come to Njegoš naturally through the folk epic and without the influence of any foreign sources. The passage relying on the purely visual experience is regularly to be found in the folk epic. (An example would be the picture of the exit of Boško Jugović, the standard-bearer, on his way to the battle of Kosovo.) In Rogan's description of the dead Batrić there is an echo of the folk epic. It is still description, more than picture; the repetition of a situation:

*Kad se šćaše ođest kud da ide,  
Pa obuci one puste toke,  
Šal crveni sveži oko glave,  
A pani mu perčin niz ramena,  
Dvije puške metni za pojasom,  
A pripaši mača o pojasu,  
A u ruke uzmi džeferdara,  
Krasna lica, visok kao koplje. (L. 2035-2042)*

("When he dressed to go upon a visit He would don his toques of pure silver, A crimson shawl entwined about his head, A braid of hair falling down his shoulders, And two pistols he'd thrust into his belt And with them in his belt he'd thrust his sword And in his hand he carried his long gun. Handsome of face, and tall, straight as a lance".) This is not a tableau in the sense we have used it, but rather the folk epic description and, in all probability, this is the source of Njegoš's tableau, a further development of the technique of the folk epic, as is so much of his poetry.

## (VI) The Role of the Ring Dance in *The Mountain Wreath*

The role of the Kolo, the Ring-dance or rather the song sung during it, in *The Mountain Wreath* is worthy of some attention. The Ring-dance, not always a circle, but sometimes more like a snake, usually has its songs in octosyllabic, but in *The Mountain Wreath* Njegoš uses the decasyllabic. In the poem its relation to the chorus in the Greek plays is obvious. Njegoš had read plays of Sophocles and Euripedes in translation and their influence is clear.

The five Kolos in *The Mountain Wreath* certainly play a part that is both reminiscent of the Greek chorus and also markedly different. The first four Kolos occur in the earlier part of the work (during the first 1210 lines of a poem of 2819 lines) and thus play a less parallel part than the chorus does in the classical plays. In the plays of Sophocles the chorus takes the part both of a general commentary and a direct dialogue with the events taking place. Often the relation to the main protagonists is intimate and almost personal. If we take but the plays *Ajax*, *Electra*, *The Women of Trachis* and *Philoctetes*, we have a chorus consisting of sailors, women of the Mycenae, women of Trachis and, again, sailors. In every case they are people who, by nature, are close to the protagonists of the plays. In *Philoctetes* there is some general commentary on the action and position of the characters:

*The story was told  
Of the fate that fell,  
In an ancient time,  
On the ravisher bold;  
Whom the father of all  
For his insolent crime  
Bound fast on a wheel  
In the fires of Hell.*

Sophocles: *Electra and Other Plays*. Translated by E. F. Watling, Penguin Classics, 1954, p. 185).

Or the chorus may be an adviser:



*Ajax, none can deny you have spoken frankly  
And like your true self. Yet do not be hasty;  
Forget these bitter thoughts and let your friends  
Win your submission. (Ibid., p. 34).*

The reference to the past and to fate is balanced by what might seem good advice. The chorus may also speak in a lyrical vein, emphasising the feelings of the characters.

*Two deaths, two sorrows. Oh  
Where shall we weep?  
Which is the heavier to bear,  
This one or that? (Ibid., p. 150).*

So also the chorus speaks of what is fated:

*It is here, sisters, - the moment has come and  
the word that was spoken  
So long ago is with us now... (Ibid., p. 146).*

The chorus plays a role even of mere warning:

*This is a time when none should speak or listen  
Without great caution... (Ibid., p. 98).*

It is no purpose of this essay to expand upon the art of Sophocles, for which I would claim no competence whatsoever, but rather to show the flexibility of Sophocles' chorus and its constant parallel role in the plays.

Njegoš's use of the Kolo is less regular and far less flexible. Its presence in *The Mountain Wreath* is thus very different from the chorus in the Greek plays. Yet it does represent a general sense of the power of past tradition and the compulsion of historic fate in the minds and lives of the people. It is the lived experience of the historic situation and the real background to the doubts and conflicts of the poem. The Kolo is not on intimate relations with the persons of the poem, but rather a more general

common memory and attitude. Njegoš makes its nature very clear in the words of vojvoda Milija after the first Kolo:

*Čujete li kolo kako pjeva,  
Ka je ona pjesna izvedena?  
Iz glave je cijela naroda. (L. 291-292)*

("Hear you not how the Kolo sings? All that this poem expresses Comes from the mind of the entire people.") If, in the Greek plays the chorus is the voice of the fates or of people close to the actors, the Kolo in *The Mountain Wreath* is the voice of the folk tradition of history, imbued with the ideals of heroism and duty. Yet the five Kolos do parallel the action and serve as an emphasis and comment on various stages of the poem's development.

The first Kolo follows on the scene between Danilo and Mićunović and that of the tableau on Lovćen. It opens the scene of the Assembly on the day of the Virgin's nativity and begins with lines that are typical of the folk epic:

*Bog se dragi na Srbe razljuti (L. 198)*

("The good God was angered with the Serbs"). It serves as an addition to Danilo's opening speech regarding the invasion of Islam and stresses the sins of the Serbian rulers that brought about their downfall. Where Danilo speaks of history, the Kolo expresses folk tradition. The beginning *in medias res* is typical of the epic. The folk style, however, soon gives way to a quite different and freer poetic style and the decasyllabic flows on into a fluent enjambment and the language seems to echo the ode as the Kolo sings of Miloš Obilić:

*Veličastvo viteške ti duše  
Nadmašuje besmrtne podvige  
Divne Sparte i velikog Rima. (L. 228-230)*

("The greatness of your noble, knightly soul Surpasses the immortal, valiant deeds Of wondrous Sparta and of mighty Rome".)

The content, with its emphasis on popular legend and tradition is not so much a support of the attitude of Vuk Mićunović as it is an

explanation of it. It serves as the background to the long scene of discussion between the chieftains preceding Danilo's appearance and altercation with them. We know the feelings of the chieftains from the Kolo, just as we know of Danilo's predicament from his earlier soliloquy.

The second Kolo follows knez Rade's attack on Danilo for his hesitation. It opens with the aphorism of the cup of honey and the cup of gall. It proceeds to tell of the revenge of Ivan beg Crnojević for his brother's death. As the old Ivan beg, sword in hand and white beard flowing (relics of folk epic), and lance in hand, at Karuce on the Crmnica defeats 15,000 Turks and leaves not one alive, there is the sense that, taking the good with the bad, still sometimes "fortune favours the brave":

*Junaku se češće putah hoće*

*Vedro nebo nasmijat grohotom .(L. 583-584)*

("Many a time the cloudless sky will laugh Upon a hero with full heavy laughter".) The Kolo ends with a blessing on the vengeance of Ivan beg for the soul of his son Uroš. So the cup of honey that must be mixed with the cup of gall that seeks it symbolises the need to take fate as it comes and hope. Life is a mixture of good and evil, neither of which can exist without the other. There is a striking contrast between the style of the aphoristic opening and the folk style of the rest.

The third Kolo is a shorter one, 23 lines compared with 41 and 40. It occurs as messengers are despatched to summon representatives of the renegades to discuss the possibility of peace, largely at Danilo's behest. Once again the Kolo speaks the mind of the people, of the Game, this time with a yet greater emphasis. Whereas hitherto the Kolo is merely signed as such, now the direction is changed with the added verb *propoje*. *Kolo propoje!* The exact translation of *propoje* is not easy to find. It indicates a deliberate act rather than a mere singing. The Kolo breaks in, interrupts the action. Its contents acquire all the more emphasis.

The epic style again dominates, if only because this is the attitude of the Game, of the populace.

*Ljuta kletva pade na izrode.* ("A bitter curse fell on the renegades".) The content is the fate of Staniša Crnojević who took Islam and whom, according to folk tradition, his mother cursed. Staniša is overtaken by his mother's curse and is defeated and flees to Bayazid, the Sultan, "to eat Hungarian noses". (L. 709). It is further confirmation of the popular feeling towards any accommodation with the renegades, and will be echoed in the sarcasms and reactions of the Montenegrin chieftains to the moslem praise of Islam. Like the first Kolo, this explains what is to follow, as the conscience and awareness of those present.

The fourth Kolo comes immediately after the meeting with the renegades and the reading of the Vizir's letter and before the scene of the moonlit night and the dreams of Mandušić and others. It exactly bridges the two scenes. It sings of Novi Grad and its liberation from the Moslems by the Venetians and Montenegrins. Of the five Kolos it is the grimmest, seeming, as it does, to begin with a picture of peace.

*Novi Grade, sjediš nakraj mora  
I valove brojiš niz pučinu,  
Kako starac na kamen sjedeći  
Što nabraja svoje brojanice. (L. 1210-1213)*

("Novi Grad, you sit by the sea-shore, And count the waves as they run down the tide Like an old man who, sitting on the rocks, Counts and recounts the beads of his rosary".) It then goes on to say: *Divna sanko što si onda snio!* (L. 1214. - "What a happy dream you must have dreamt!"). The dream is the bloody liberation of the city by the defeat of the Turkish army under Topal pasha and it ends with the charnel-house of Turkish bones that stands to the present as a memorial. This short Kolo (17 lines) is like a warning of what is to come! It is worth noting that its style is not that of the folk epic, but of a ballad. This would seem suited, since it refers to a more recent event than that of Ivan beg's vengeance.

The fifth and final Kolo, again fairly short (26 lines), comes right at the end of the poem (L. 2622). It echoes the first Kolo which bewails the fate of the Serbian people and the defeat at Kosovo. This time it is victory of a part of the Serbian people and Montenegro is a free and independent nation. Its tone has much of the folk epic, yet this is only superficially true. The first section that tells what was (the sun obscured in cloud and manly hearts grown cold), ends with a visual image that is not typical of the folk epic and involves enjambment:

*Ka kad zrake umru na planinu  
Kad utone sunce u pučinu. (L. 2630-2631)*

("As the sun's rays die out on the mountain When the sun sets on the sea's horizon".) There follows a typical folk exclamation: *Bože dragi, svijetla praznika!* ("Dear God, what a bright day of rejoicing!") and praise to the Martinovići, the Novaks and Vuk Borilović, concluding that their monument is the freedom of Montenegro.

This final Kolo expresses the consummation of the fabula, of the plot, so carefully described by Pavle Popović (vide op. cit.), just as the final scene of the New Year, symbolically the New Year of the new Montenegro, synthesises the subtext of conscience, doubt and sorrow in Danilo's weeping and Stefan's laughter.

In discussing the role of the Kolo in *The Mountain Wreath* one should, perhaps, not exclude the role of the lament of Batrić's sister. It, too, does not easily fit into any scene. It, like the Kolo, is aside from the flow of the text. The lament, however, stands alone in the poem. Its purpose is a single one which it dramatically fulfils.

If the chorus in the Greek plays stands aside and comments, the Kolo in *The Mountain Wreath* has but one direction - the achievement of the extirpation of the renegades and the liberation of Montenegro. From the first to the final, the Kolo reminds, urges and finally applauds. It is the Game and this is all the ethic of the Game. In this sense it is not universal fate, but rather the fateful awareness of a tradition of a people. The other side of the poem, the doubt and contradiction has no part in the Kolo. The Kolo, the voice of the people, is the blind, historical force that wins, because it has no choice. The choice is to uphold the tradition and kill the enemy, or perish. Thus the Kolo plays the role of a special form of fate; the fate of history, rather than that of universal being.

## **(VII) Some Characteristics of the Poetry of *The Mountain Wreath***

To discuss the nature of poetic language in a particular work is never easy, if only because what one deals with is not a general, but a highly individual element. What is successful is what the poet has succeeded in doing. It can only be as it is. To change or reduce to statistical numbers is only to destroy what is. For this reason, more often than not, one can merely quote and leave it to the reader to appreciate or not, to agree with one or not. To attempt to do this in terms of another language is nigh on impossible. Nevertheless in discussing the Kolo in the preceding essay I have touched on some of the poetic characteristics and it would seem an omission to write of *The Mountain Wreath* and not discuss at least some of the salient features of Njegoš's poetry. For, after all, it is the poetic expression, not the theme or themes, that gives the work its power, indeed which *is* the work for, expressed otherwise, it would be something else and its impact quite different.

Prior to *The Mountain Wreath* Njegoš's entire work may be seen as a long experiment with poetic style, a searching for his own expression. The search goes from the early poems of *The Hermit of Cetinje (Pustinjak cetinjski)*, through his translations of the first book of the *Iliad* and a part of *The Lay of Prince Igor (Slovo o polku Igorove)*, through his exploration of the octosyllabic line and the extended simile in *The Epic of Freedom (Slobodijada)* to his final settling for the decasyllabic in *The Ray* and in *The Mountain Wreath*. That Njegoš never finally abandoned the ode may be seen in his dedication of *The Mountain Wreath* to Karadžić, with its sixteen syllable line, really two octosyllabics held together by the final rhyme. This, however, is not important in the poetry of *The Mountain Wreath* itself. Rather, it is the supreme achievement of the decasyllabic, developed to a freedom and versatility which it had never before achieved nor has ever achieved since, which presents itself for discussion.

Perhaps a preliminary subject of interest is Njegoš's imagery and, as far as may be known with any certainty, his sources. These were probably many and not possible of authentic evaluation. One invaluable indication, however, is Njegoš's day-book with its excerpts from the *Méditations poétiques, the Nouvelles Méditations Poétiques, Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses, and Jocelyn* by Lamartine and *Odes, Les Orientales, Les Feuilles d'Automne, Poésies Politiques and Les Chants du Crépuscule* by Victor Hugo. (*Njegoševa bilježnica, Cetinje, 1956, pp. 144-163.*) These excerpts must belong to the latter period of Njegoš's life when his knowledge of French was sufficient to enable him to appreciate

poetry in the language. It is impossible to put any exact date on them. The latest of Lamartine's poems quoted here, *Jocelyn*, was published in 1836. Hugo's *Chants du Crépuscule* appeared in 1835. Neither of these dates helps, nor does the fact that the following entry, *Na Album Balaševim*, is dated 1851, the year of Njegoš's death. One may assume that the French poems were read and noted over a period of time, or at least resulted from a longish period of reading.

Seeking literary borrowings is a dangerous occupation. Coincidence, especially between different languages and literatures, can be astonishing! Influence when closer than generalities and undetermined by the evidence of the writer in question is hard to authenticate with any certainty. Here, however, we have a sure proof of poetry that Njegoš read and deemed worthy of note. We can see the passages that impressed him and which he wished to preserve. This does not mean, however, that he noted them in order to make use of them in any literal sense. What is of interest is to see what type of excerpt Njegoš made. Largely the excerpts fall into two categories: the thought expressed and the imagery. Quite often it is clearly both. The sentiment that might attract Njegoš is clear when he notes Lamartine's:

*Mais que sert de lutter contre sa destinée?  
Que peut contre le sort la raison mutinée?*

From *Meditation 10* Njegoš notes the lines:

*Mortel, du jour ou tu respirez,  
Ta loi, c'est ce que tu désires;  
Ton devoir, c'est la volupté.*

The thought is surely the motive here. On the other hand the lines from *Meditation 13*:

*Ne pourrons nous jamais sur l'océan des âges  
Jeter l'ancre un seul jour?*

clearly attract by their metaphor. The lines from *Harmonie 2*:

*Atome dans l'immensité,  
Minute dans l'éternité*

is striking expression, one that well reflects Njegoš's own tone and spirit. From Victor Hugo there is a passage almost any poet might note:

*Je cherche, o Nature,  
La parole obscure  
Que le vent murmure  
Que l'étoile écrit.*

*(Les Chants du Crépuscule, 17).*

Yet again we find Njegoš, the magpie, chasing fine expression. *Chaque homme enfle une bulle ou se réflete un ciel.* (*Les feuilles d'Automne* 27). From *Les Orientales* he again notes the happy expression: *Mon âme ou ma pensée habite comme un monde.* Or from *Harmonies* 3:

*Et chaque être mortel, par le temps emporté  
Est un hymne de plus a ton éternité.*

Surely Njegoš was noting *le mot juste*, the laconic expression and the metaphor he sought himself.

When it comes to a question of actual borrowing, it is a rather different matter. Often one is tempted to think it more a question of agreement than of imitation. From *Les Feuilles d'Automne* Njegoš notes the metaphoric verse:

*Matelot dispersé sur l'ocean de dieu.*

The oarless boatman of *A Montenegrin to Almighty God* (*Crnogorac k svemogućemu bogu*) springs to mind! When Hugo writes "*Tout miel est amer, tout ciel sombre*", one may too easily think of Njegoš's cup of gall and cup of honey from *The Mountain Wreath*.

As regards direct borrowing, the question is complex. Pavle Popović quotes Lamartine's "*J'ai vidé, comme toi, la coupe empoisonnée*" and, rather naturally, sees it as Stefan's "*Otrova sam čašu*



*iskapio*" ("I have drained the cup of poison). It is from Lamartine's first *Meditation* and, therefore, was certainly read by Njegoš, but he did not note it in his day-book. (P. Popović, op. cit., p. 192). This does not, of course, disprove Popović's assertion. One may speak of the familiarity one senses in such lines of Hugo's as

*L'ether, ces ocean si liquide et si bleu  
Sans rivage et sans fond, sans borne et sans milieu.*

The one case, however, where one might safely hazard asserting that Njegoš directly borrowed a line is that of Lamartine (*Meditations* 30):

*Ah! Périssent á jamais le jour qui m'a vu nître!*

which in Danilo's opening speech in *The Mountain Wreath* becomes the two lines:

*Grdni dane, da te bog ubije,  
Koj' si mene dao na svijetu!*

It is a beautiful example of how the same idea becomes such different music in another language!

There are various such possible examples in the day-book. The lines from Hugo's *Ode 3*:

*Et quelle est la main invisible  
Qui garde les clefs du tombeau*

may well make one think of the Dedication to *The Ray*, yet in fact they have little real similarity to the line *Ovoga su u grobu ključevi*, although the metaphor may well have come from Hugo. At least the day-book shows Njegoš searching for tight expression and metaphor.

Before one says more regarding the poetry of *The Mountain Wreath*, one must note that Njegoš never entirely deserts the style of the folk epic where it serves his needs. Thus in the many reported incidents in the poem Njegoš employs the style of the folk narrative. An example is knez Janko's account of Hamza kapetan's challenge to Vuk Mićunović:

*"Ja sam bolji, čuj vlaš, od tebe,  
 Bolja mi je vjera nego tvoja;  
 Hata jašem, britku sablju pašem,  
 Kapetan sam od careva grada,  
 U njem vladam od trista godinah,  
 Ded mi ga je na sablju dobio  
 De su carstvo sablje dijelile,  
 Te mu tragu osta za gospodstvo".  
 Raspali se Mićunović Vuče... (L. 366-374)*

("Hear you, Vlah, I'm a better man than you, My faith is a better faith than yours! I ride a horse and carry a sharp sword, I am captain of an imperial town Which we have ruled for full three hundred years. My grandfather won it by the sword When empire was divided by the sabre, So that its rule descended thus to us.' Thereupon Vuk Mićunović flared up.") The tone is typical folk epic, especially the take up of the last line.

To this one might add the obvious case of the lament of the sister of Batrić. This is merely a parody that plays its particular role in the poem.

The real character of Njegoš's poetry is his use of the metaphor and, to a lesser extent, the simile. Miodrag Popović (op. cit.) notes that the essence of Njegoš's style is laconic. This and the metaphor overcome the narrative style of the folk epic. (Op. cit., p. 301). The metaphor and the simile differ considerably from that of the epic. Danilo, in his first speech, uses only the simple folk simile in likening the scourge of Islam to a plague of locusts. (I, 6). Mićunović, on the other hand, uses the extended simile, which Njegoš may have learned from the *Iliad* and, even possibly, from Gundulić's *Osman*, in the simile of the wolf cubs and the young falcons. (L. 118-124). This, as also much straightforward description (as in the scene on Lovćen) where the symbolic sense comes only after the realism, has its place in *The Mountain Wreath*. Yet the striking nature of Njegoš's style lies largely in the powerful metaphoric poetry of such lines as *Mlado žito, navijaj klasove...* (L. 1652) ("Young wheat, put forth your ears...") or Stefan's *Plakanje je pjesna sa suzama* (L. 2547) ("Weeping is a poem with tears") or, again Stefan, the beautiful simile:

*I nadežda veže dušu s nebom  
 Kako luča sa suncem kapljicu. (L. 2327-2328)*

("And hope does bind the human soul to heaven, As a ray of light a droplet to the sun."), or, again, as Stefan says of his own soul:

*Pa se stara igra povrh vina  
Ka blijedi plamen po rakiji. (L. 2475-2476)*

("And the old one dances o'er the wine, Like the pale flame playing over rakija.")

The metaphor belongs especially to the speeches of Danilo and Stefan, but this is to omit the aphorism and the folk proverb. For Njegoš, the proverb develops into a central poetic image, as Đilas rightly remarks. (*Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop*, p. 365). There can be no doubt that this involves the question of aphorism as imagery. Đilas remarks on the same page as quoted above that if all the borrowings were taken from *The Mountain Wreath*, there would be little left, but this, of course, is to ignore the poetic form given to the aphorisms and the manner in which they are employed. It is often Njegoš who gave them beauty and, perhaps, a wider circulation. (Regarding originality, the same sort of thing may be said and has been said of Shakespeare.) The poetic element of Njegoš's style may be felt in such lines as:

*U dobru je lako dobro biti,  
Na muci se poznaju junaci (L. 137-138)*

("When things go well 'tis easy to be good, 'Tis adversity that shows who is the hero.")

*Udar nađe iskru u kamenu , (L. 2322)*

("'Tis the blow that finds the spark within the stone."). Or:

*Bez muke se pjesna ne ispoja,  
Bez muke se sablja ne sakova , (L. 602-603)*

("Without travail the song could not be sung, Without travail the sabre is not forged".), or, lastly, the second Kolo's opening lines:

*Čašu meda još niko ne popi,  
Što je čašom žuči ne zagrči. (L. 563-564)*

("None ever yet drank of the cup of honey Who did not embitter it with the cup of gall.") Such lines may be contrasted with the more obviously everyday sayings such as:

*Ko razgađa, u nas, ne pogđa. (I, 508)*

("Who thinks too much shall never hit the mark.")

The metaphor and the aphorism belong in the poem mainly to Danilo, Stefan and Mićunović, for they tend to make the more universal statements. The everyday saying belongs more to the ordinary people, to the rough chieftains in the confrontation with the renegades or, indeed, the above quoted passage which is spoken by knez Janko and typical of his rough and humorous character.

The aphorism bears, in much of its form, a direct relation to the metaphor, for much of the typical aphorism is metaphoric. When Danilo says:

*Med za usta i hladna prionja, (L. 764)*

("Honey's sweet even to the cold lips of age") he is using metaphorical language. If, in English, we say: there's no smoke without fire, we are using metaphor. The natural usage Njegoš makes of the saying is thus not difficult to understand and lends an enriching originality to his poetry with the very device which might seem, at first glance, to be unoriginal!

Vuk Karadžić's collection of *Folk Proverbs (Narodne poslovice)* was published in Cetinje in 1836, printed in Njegoš's printing press which he had brought back from his first trip abroad in 1833. It was published in Vuk's orthography, a bold political step on Njegoš's part and the one he was not to risk repeating. It would be surprising if Njegoš had not read Vuk's collection to which he probably contributed. A comparison of the saying in *The Mountain Wreath* and those in Vuk's volume might well prove of interest.

Njegoš's most concentrated use of the aphorism in *The Mountain Wreath* is in the exchange of letters between Danilo and the Vizir. The

Vizir's letter makes full use of the aphorism. Such completely metaphoric lines as:

*Da se vuci ne prejedu mesa.  
Da ovčica koja ne zanese  
Svoje runo u grm pokraj puta (L. 1084-1086)*

("So the wolves shall not gorge themselves, So no sheep shall chance to leave its fleece, On a bush that grows beside the path.") are sufficient to suggest the diction. Danilo replies in the same vein:

*Tvrđ je orah voćka čudnovata,  
Ne slomi ga, al' zube polomi! (L. 1133-1134)*

("The nut is hard. A fruit it is full strange. You'll not break it, but it will break your teeth!") Both letters are a *tour de force* of aphorism and metaphor.

Leaving aside the metaphoric and aphoristic elements of *The Mountain Wreath*, much of the poem contains straightforward speech and description that characterises the speaker as well as clearly presenting the subject. Examples of this are Draško's description of Venice and Mićunović's of Kotor. Draško's account of how no man in Venice feels free to speak his mind in public is a sufficient example of Njegoš's ability to capture simple reality in his decasyllabic line:

*Niko žaliti ne smije nikoga,  
Akamoli da mu što pomaže.  
Kada viđeh vitešku nevolju,  
Zabolje me srce, progovorih:  
"Što, pogani, od ljudih činite?  
Što junački ljude ne smaknete,  
Što im takve muke udarate?"  
Dok Grbičić meni poprišapta:  
"Nemoj takve govoriti riječi,  
Ne smije se ovde pravo zboriti!  
Tvoja sreća - ne razumješe te. (L. 1485-1496).*

("No one dares show pity to another, Let alone to offer them their help. When I saw the way these good men suffered, My heart began to ache and I spoke out: 'You scum, What do you do to these good people? Why don't you simply kill them manfully? Till Grbičić whispered to me softly: 'Here you must not speak out what you think. You're lucky that they did not understand you!'".) This decasyllabic line has nothing of the epic about it. It is almost prose in the clarity of its clear and vivid recounting. The tourist is lucky to have a more sophisticated countryman as a guide! Much the same may be said for the flexibility and the fluency of the language in the sarcastic reactions of the Serbian chieftains to the renegades, especially Mustaj-Kadija. Vuk Mandušić says:

*Danu, Bajko, puhni mi u oko,  
Jere mi se grdno natrunilo. (L. 952-953)*

("Come, Bajko, blow into my eye For I've got a lot of something in it".) In the original, the sarcasm is delightfully present. This is only one example of colloquial usage. Yet, as has been said, where the subject fits, the folk epic style is parodied to effect. Thus, after the suicide of Batrić's sister, Serdar Janko speaks of her in epic style:

*No joj puče srce u prsima  
A obrnu svoje naopako  
Za onijem sivijem sokolom,  
Pa ne moga odoljet žalosti,  
Nego život uze sama sebi. (L. 2026-2030).*

("But her heart burst in her breast And the world, for her, turned upside down, In her grief for her grey falcon brother. She could never overcome her sorrow And so she put an end to her own life.") This is parody and not very subtle parody at that, but it reflects and thus comments on the attitude of the speaker, of Serdar Janko and the traditional style that was the form of the popular ethos. One may conclude that, on the level of variety alone, there is a richness of language and a subtlety of mood that goes to make a great poem.

Any commentary on the poetry of *The Mountain Wreath* is incomplete, however random it may be, if it does not touch upon the physical vehicle of the poetry: the metre and the verse. Njegoš's

decasyllabic line is like no other. The natural metre of Serbian is the decasyllabic which is that of the epic folk poetry and the octosyllabic which is the metre of many of the lyrical folk poems and also the traditional metre of the Kolo. This Njegoš changes to the decasyllabic in *The Mountain Wreath*. The folk decasyllabic consists of five trochaic feet with a caesura after the second. The final foot is normally a long accent, probably to enable the singer to draw breath. The third and fourth feet often, therefore, bear a subdued stress which results in a dactylic effect. For example, if one takes the opening line of "The Mother of Yugoviches" (*Smrt majke Jugovića*), *Boga moli Jugovića majka* ("The mother of the Yugoviches prayed to God") the correct trochaic scansion would be *Bóga móli Júgovića májka*. Yet the fact that the accent naturally falls on both the first and the second syllable of the word *Jugovića*, despite the long syllable which acts weakly, the effect is that of a dactyl of three short syllables. This dactylic effect is very audible in some of Njegoš's lines. Serbian is a syllabotonic language, like Russian and English and, without taking too much notice of the quantities, a task almost impossible for the foreigner and, in any case, a factor that varies from area to area, the stress itself provides a counter-point of metre/stress. Our line would then be (for most listeners and readers): *Bóga móli Júgovića májka*, giving a line of three dominant stresses to a metre that still demands by inertia its five trochaic stresses, thus producing a counter-point.

This is the decasyllabic line which Njegoš knew from childhood and heard all his life. For him it must have been his earliest and most instinctive concept of poetry. His own line, however, moves from the traditional to a flowing decasyllabic that runs one into another, with a variety of tone and a range far beyond that of the folk epic line. The freedom achieved in the confines of the decasyllabic returns one to the Dedication of *The Ray*. It is not for nothing that, reading the Dedication, one is aware of a new achievement, only, largely, to be disappointed by the main body of the poem. In *The Mountain Wreath* the decasyllabic attains the zenith of flexibility and freedom. There are, of course, difficulties. One does not know exactly how Njegoš pronounced what he wrote, unless one knows the dialect spoken in his area. His dialect was that of the Katuni. It is said to have only two tones, as opposed to the four tones of standard Serbian. According to Đilas, these consist of a sharp, short falling and a long and gently arched falling tone. Nor can one be entirely certain of where his stresses would have fallen. Yet this should not embarrass the foreign reader too much. After all, most readers and lovers of Shakespeare have no idea how he may have pronounced his lines, yet still the originality and character of his metre and rhythms comes through. All we can say is that the lines come to us with a naturalness and beauty that transcends our ignorance.

Very largely Njegoš keeps to the traditional caesura after the fourth syllable. The opening lines, spoken by Danilo, thus have the caesura after the fourth syllable:

*Vidi vraga/ su sedam binjišah.*

("See the devil/ with seven scarlet cloaks".) We may choose lines at random and we shall find the caesura in its traditional place: *Ima rašta/ rugaš li se zbilja.* (L. 1269). ("Are you joking/ sure, you have good reason".) Yet there are places where the tone of the speaker seems to break through tradition and the caesura. For all but the most pedantic of readers, the caesura shifts. Thus the angry Serdar Ivan Petrović to the renegade Ferat Zaćir:

*S Muhamedom/ i glupost u glavu!*  
*Teško, Turci,/ vašijem dušama,*  
*Što obliste zemlju/ njenom krvlju!*  
*Malene su jasli/ za dva hata.* (L. 1012-1015)

("Muhamed has stuffed nonsense in your head! May your souls, oh Turks, be cursed for ever! For deluging our land in its blood. One manger is too small to feed two horses!") Objections might be made to this, but it would seem, both from sound and sense, that the caesura in the third and fourth lines has shifted to the sixth syllable. The cause, if this be so, is the emphasis of the sense upon the line. Other examples may well be found and bear witness to the freedom and fluency of Njegoš's line.

Another element of Njegoš's decasyllabic is, again, arguable though not certain. This refers to our above remarks on the dactylic undertone of the folk decasyllabic. I recall the late Vladan Desnica calling my attention to this, namely the staccato ending of some of the most famous lines. Two lines from Danilo's opening speech illustrate this:

*Jedna slamka među vihorove,*  
*Sirak tužni bez nigđe nikoga!* (L. 35-36)

("A lone straw tossed amid the whirlwinds, A sad orphan without friend or kin".) To read the first line in the normal scansion requires an accent of the *-ove* of *vihorove*. It is possible that Njegoš may have stressed the



word in this manner. To stress the word as *vihórove* would break all scansion. The natural effect is that of staccato treble dactyl. Be all that as it may, it is difficult to imagine, in the second line, an accent on the final syllable of *nigǎé* or on the penultimate syllable *nikóga*. To accept the dactylic counter to the general rhythm of the metre, expected by the reader, has some aesthetic value in that it adds a sharpness and emphasis to the sense of the lines. Whatever the exact legality of such impressions, the very fact that they suggest themselves adds to the vitality and subtlety of Njegoš's lines.

Yet none of this is essentially the qualitative difference between the folk decasyllabic and that of *The Mountain Wreath*. One of the real differences is a subtle one. For the oral epic the running of one line into another is not a natural feature because, firstly, of the need to draw breath. Secondly there is the need to hold the attention of the listeners which requires that each line is a unity, to be followed by another unity. Thus what is termed enjambment is present, when it is present, only grammatically, that is to say two lines are linked only with a weak conjunction. Without going into any detail and aware that this is but one example, we may quote, yet again, "The Mother of the Yugoviches" (*Smrt majke Jugovića*):

*Boga moli Jugovića majka:  
Da joj Bog da oči sokolove  
I bijela krila labudova...  
Što molila, boga domolila;  
Bog joj dao oči sokolove  
I bijela krila labudova...*

("The Yugoviches' mother prayed to God That God might give her the eyes of a falcon And the white wings of a swan... What she prayed for, that did God give to her And He gave her the eyes of a falcon And the white wings of a swan".) The enjambment between lines, where it occurs is carried by the weak and unstressed conjunctions *i* and *da*. The flow between the lines is almost unnoticable. Quite different are such lines from *The Mountain Wreath* as:

*I nadežda veže dušu s nebom  
Kano luča sa suncem kapljicu.*

("And hope does bind the human soul to heaven As a ray of light a droplet to the sun".) The relative pronoun *kano* is not a great deal stronger than the conjunctions in the folk passage quoted above, but the rhythm and sense naturally flow from one line into the other. The folk decasyllabic, regardless of the grammatical link, retains the unity of each line. One may find more definite examples of enjambment in *The Mountain Wreath*. Such is to be found in the purely narrative mode of Draško's description of Venice:

*Gledao sam: po dva među sobom  
De uprte kakvu ženetinu  
Tjelesine mrtve i lijene ...*(L. 1415-1417)

("I saw a men by twos who in between them Bore some great fat woman on their shoulders, A lifeless and bone-lazy body..."). The enjambment here is essential. Apart from the natural flow of the lines, none of these could really stand alone. The same might be said of Draško's description of another side of Venice:

*Najgore im pak bjehu tavnice  
Pod dvorove đe dužde stojaše.* (L. 1474-1475).

("Worst of all were their many dungeons Underneath the palace of the Doge.") One may find undeniable examples as where Serdar Ivan says:

*Što bi ovo te još ne dođoše  
Ozrinići, naši krajičnici?* (L. 311-312).

("Why is it they have not arrived The Ozrinićes, our good border-folk?") Here, in the original, the enjambment is unavoidable, since the first line is without sense on its own. The same may be said of Stefan's:

*Pa se stara igra povrh vina  
Ka blijedi plamen po rakiji.* (L. 2475-2476).

("And the old one dances o'er the wine As the pale flame flickers over rakija.") Again the lines are incomplete on their own. This is one of the

principle differences between Njegoš's decasyllabic and that of the folk epic.

These various characteristics of the poetry of *The Mountain Wreath* are entirely insufficient to describe conclusively the poetic nature of the work. Its individuality, like the tone of a person's voice, is intangible. An application of a statistical method would scarcely throw much more light. The elements discussed in this essay suggest only some characteristics of the poetry of *The Mountain Wreath* which may assist in the enjoyment of the poetry. Yet the poetry remains what it is and, perhaps, those who truly enjoy it have little need of a well-meaning attempt to point to some of its features.

## (VIII) Existence in *The Mountain Wreath*

Having examined the ethical levels in *The Mountain Wreath* in a previous essay, it might be thought that to discuss the portrayal of living in the poem to be superfluous. Yet the ethical question is far from the central character of being that contains the action and events of the poem. It is the purpose here to examine the general view of life as a conditioned status and which is the containing element of the poem. It may seem that this will be repetitive, as, indeed, it entails going over ground that has been gone over before, yet not to glance at the material from this, wider point of view would mean to miss a considerable part of the poem's significance.

The term "existence" is chosen advisedly. It seeks to avoid the word "philosophy", for poetry is not philosophy nor are poets philosophers. The poem creates a living experience of being, with all its contradictions and complications. It is not thought but living and the thoughts expressed are also a part of that living. Living also includes thoughts and opinions, clashes of conscience and contradiction of duty and personality. This is one essence of tragedy. One might object that any statement concerning life is "philosophical" in the vulgar sense and therefore why cavil? It really has to do with such statements as Milovan Đilas's that *The Mountain Wreath* is "a drama of animated ideas". (Op. cit., p. 367). This is simply not true. Of course in so far as people do have ideas, all ideas are animated, but this does not seem to be Đilas's meaning! Rather the level on which "ideas" are expressed reflects the state of suffering, of facing a predicament and various responses to it, but always in the situation of things being what they are and people being as they are. With the exception of Stefan, there is little of pure "ideas" in the poem. The central theme of the poem, the destruction of the renegades, serves to portray the fate of people in History, both as a nation and as individuals and suggesting the unity of fate and the individual in a lived experience in which there are no clear logical answers to any question, save what is forced upon all by the position in which they exist. In *The Legend of Njegoš (Legenda o Njegošu, Kultura, Beograd, 1952, p. 208)* which, despite its smugness is a better book than its author might credit it today, states that *The Mountain Wreath* consists not of characters but of symbols. It might have been truer to say that the people live and, therefore, "symbolise" life in its general nature. If one were to take just Danilo's opening soliloquy, the dominant feature is surely not idea but deeply felt emotion. If, as Đilas says, there is concretisation of an idea, then the very word concretisation means more than the creation of mere symbols or animated ideas.

Again, Đilas affirms that Bishop Danilo *is* Njegoš. (Op. cit., p. 346). It is, then, surely true to say that all other personages in the poem, even Mustaj-Kadija are Njegoš. True, in Danilo Njegoš may well have seen an ancestor whose task he, Njegoš, was continuing and therefore put more lyrical feeling into the character, yet can one say that the personages of Mićunović, Mandušić, Stefan, the chieftains and even some of the renegades with their own individualities are not also Njegoš, just as all parts of of a work are a part of the author? Had Njegoš's purpose been only to write symbolically of his own fate or to indulge in a political poem, why should he have created a work that engages our sympathetic response without even sparing a thought for any possible ulterior motives? The fact would appear that as all the incidents of the poem fit into the development of the plot to eradicate the renegades, so, on another level, the life portrayed and lived fits together into a general picture of existence and a synthesis or possible synthesis of its contradictions.

Equally one questions the view that Njegoš portrays the customs of the people. The customs and the life described in the poem were not exotic for Njegoš (as they may well have seemed even to Vuk Karadžić and other Serbian contemporaries) but the everyday reality of life. His portrayal of customs etc was incidental and more apparent to us today that it would have been to Njegoš or his Montenegrins. We, as modern readers, are in danger of committing an anachronism, if this aspect of *The Mountain Wreath* is overstressed.

The "philosophical" view of existence in the poem relates back to the Dedication of *The Ray*. Man is a living contradiction between his animal nature and his mind that makes him aware of the chain of physical, mortal existence. Man is aware of death as an inescapable fact of the future. Man's instincts place him lower than the beasts, while his mind raises him to the level of the immortals. Yet man's very mind is a limitation. He is bound in a fateful sleep in which his most sacred aims are illusory.

*Nema dana koji mi želimo,  
Nit' blaženstva za kojim čeznemo.*

(*The Ray* , L. 106-107).

("The day we desire does not exist, Nor the bliss for which we long.")  
Man is a tragic animal faced with problems whose answer lies only in the grave. All this is a philosophical lyrical statement. The Dedication concludes:

*Mi smo iskra u smrtnu prašinu,*

*Mi smo luča tamom obuzeta.*

(*The Ray*, L. 139-140).

("We are a spark in mortal dust, We are a ray in dark enshrouded.") In *The Mountain Wreath* what the Dedication gives as a philosophical statement is portrayed as action and being in terms of History and fate in the life of the Montenegrin people.

The lyrical element in *The Mountain Wreath* is not that of the poet as much as it is of the characters. Of course, as I have said elsewhere, the whole is the poet, Njegoš, and this may be said to be lyrical. Danilo's opening speech, from his account of the plague of Islam on Europe, to his cursing the day he was born, is clearly lyrical, but it is dramatic. It is the lyricism of one individual, representing an individual state, yet not, perhaps, more so, in fact, than his opposite, Vuk Mićunović. Individuality, like the reality of life and situation, is woven closely into the fabric of the action. Even Stefan, the most obvious source of universal statement, is also clearly individual. His words do not entirely convince Danilo who sees a good fire and even better wine as the cause of his "sifting the world through a sieve". Although Stefan appears and immediately launches into his first speech, one is at once aware of his age and blindness and gradually a personality develops. The action of Stefan's words upon the reader are less than that of his character as a whole in the given situation. To ignore this would be to join with such people who have considered Kirilov in Dostoevsky's novel *The Devils* as a mere animated idea or who fail to note the importance of the moment, the two persons present and the general situation for the power and impact of Ivan Karamazov's "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor".

What one has tried to say is that *The Mountain Wreath* is not a philosophical treatise, but an artistic experience, the experience of contradiction ending in synthesis as Danilo weeps and Stefan laughs. It is the poetic synthesis one senses in Stefan's words: *Plakanje je pjesma sa suzama* (L. 2547). ("Weeping is a poem with tears.") Yet, in this poem there is a view of existence which frames the action and gives it a significance that far exceeds that of the localised events which it creates. For this reason it may be of some interest to examine it, however briefly, especially since it is all too easy, recalling one or another part of the poem, to establish a one-sided view. This means hazarding a more "philosophic" account of the poem than might be critically correct without the above provisos.

Man is born in History, in a historical situation. This he cannot escape. He may seek to alienate himself from it. As an individual, by the

very fact of being so, he is alienated. I am, therefore I am not the other. History is not just the state of one class or one society, but rather of what we have elsewhere termed the Game. The Game has its rules and its methods. The individual, alienated as he is, is still fated to be and to be is to be in the Game. There is no choice. To be is to be in the world, in History, in the Game or a Game. To be is also a constant need to assert being and this is possible only in History, in a Game and within the framework of its rules and values. This will be true even if the individual turns successfully against one Game, for then he inevitably joins another. Thus even the pure anarchist fails, because he too, in destroying all existent Games, creates his own, that of the Non-Game. So in terms of a Game is the sole way in which the individual may assert and thus create himself. It is what Jean-Paul Sartre seems to mean by objectivisation. To do this is to confront responsibility. I feel I should take responsibility for my being.

Thus Danilo exclaims:

*Crni dane, a crna sudbino!  
O kukavno Srpstvo ugašeno,  
Zla nadživjeh tvoja svakolika,  
A s najgorim hoću da se borim!* (L. 43-46).

("Oh black day, oh black fate! Oh wretched, extinguished Serbian nation! I have survived all manner of your evils, And now I must contend with the worst of all!") Later, with almost the same paradigm, he curses the day that gave him birth (L. 85). Faced with responsibility, man senses a profound isolation. The sole responsibility for a decision becomes a predicament of isolation which leaves the individual outside the very Game for which he is responsible:

*Jedna slamka među vihorove,  
Sirak tužni bez nigđe nikoga!  
Moje pleme snom mrtvijem spava,  
Suza moja nema roditelja,  
Nada mnom je nebo zatvoreno,  
Ne prima mi plača ni molitve.* (L. 35-40).

("A straw cast among the whirlwinds, A sad orphan without friend or kin! My people sleep a deep and lifeless sleep. Above my head the heavens are closed tight And receive neither my cries nor prayers.") Here the predicament is a specific one relating to a single historical situation. Yet in *The Mountain Wreath* so many specific elements seem to reflect the universal. Danilo's plaint naturally takes one back to the Dedication in *The Ray* and to the "oarless boatman" in "*A Montenegrin to Almighty God*".

Danilo's isolation is not solely that of responsibility. It is also that of the intellectual. As such, he must stand slightly aside from the Game and view its dangers.

*Ko na brdo, ak' i malo, stoji*

*Više vidi no onaj pod brdom. (L. 524-525)*

("Who stands upon a hill, although a low one, Sees more than he who stands beneath the hill.") Isolation is the essence of individuality, tenuous and illusory as it is. To be is not to be the other, yet without the other there is nothing not to be and without the Game there is no orientation of our being.

Man is perforce born into History. We do not choose the time or the situation of our birth. History is the condition that belongs to no man, yet which is created, largely unawares, by every man. In one sense it is the great abstraction, in another it is the condition without which man cannot exist as an individual for whom some standards and traditions are necessary, even if only to negate them. It is the plane on which the individual may assert himself. Man dwells and acts in History, as a fish dwells and acts in a river. This also lies at the back of Danilo's sufferings. The pain and contradictions of existence arise out of our historical situation, among other things. The Game with its rules and traditions is more than an abstract. It is the plane on which the individual affirms his individuality. (Sartre seems to say something like this in his *Questions de Méthode*.) The Game, whether he wills it or not, is the individual. The Game itself exists as different from other Games and this is History. Whether one single Game could, for any time, entirely contain all mankind is something still only in the realm of conjecture. Individuality, with its essence of negation, may scarcely exist without some form of conflict. The self-conscious individual, while living in the Game, will always be moved to question it. Danilo is a Serb and a Montenegrin. He can understand the renegades as fallible human beings, but this cannot alter their position regarding the Game for which Danilo stands.



To abandon the Game is not to be liberated from History. To abandon the Game is merely to choose another Game. In a universal sense, one Game is as good as another. If not, who is to be the judge? On the other hand the Game, to a large extent contains and even is the individual. The renegades, despite even the two centuries represented by Mustaj-Kadija and others in the poem, cannot be anything but a threat to the existence of any Game and, for that reason to themselves. This is not to speak of those who would change the Game. All Games do this, even the Catholic church changes! Rather it is the fundamental change from one over-riding Game to another that must be fateful. To have changed sides during the wars of the eighteenth century between England and France would have meant less, far less, than to have changed sides to the Ottoman empire, though this was often done. The renegade cannot entirely cease to be his own self. Even Omer-pasha Latas in the 19th century seems, fundamentally, to have retained hidden affections for his native Serbs! In the case of the Montenegrin renegades in the poem, they are still Montenegrin, yet cannot be because of their actions. They are neither the one nor the other. This is the problem as it seems to appear in *The Mountain Wreath*.

History is a jungle of abstraction, but it is also a jungle of immediate physical threats to existence, be it in a period of war or in a peaceful and democratic community. This is the truth for the individual. Danilo's situation, however, is not that of the ordinary individual nor of a Hamlet. He is faced with a specific and contradictory problem. Nonetheless the problem suggests much that goes far beyond it and this is one of the underlying values of *The Mountain Wreath*.

The problematical nature of the individual's life is placed, by Njegoš, in the wider aspect of Nature as a whole and the reality that lies outside the human Game and of which that Game is a part, no matter what be its rules or prejudices. Indeed, it is difficult to see any of the sides or elements in the poem as being more or less approved of by the author. Njegoš creates Mustaj-Kadija as he does Vuk Mićunović. The general working of nature stands at the back of the entire poem, just as does the condition of creative existence and the pain and effort required by it.

Abbot Stefan may well be considered as the exponent of the universal condition of existence. Yet the recognition of suffering and the realisation of struggle is expressed in the poem before Stefan appears. The Kolo has sung of the cup of honey and the cup of gall, the essential need for the two opposites. Struggle has been poetically emphatic in Danilo's account of History. Mićunović has linked struggle with the most profound human activities and with the very highest purpose and ideal of the Game:

*Bez muke se pjesna ne ispoja,  
Bez muke se sablja ne sakova!  
Junaštvo je car zla svakojega -  
A i piće najslađe duševno,  
Kojijem se pjane pokoljenja. (L. 603-607)*

("Without pain the song cannot be sung, Without pain the sabre is not forged. Bravery is the conqueror of all evil, The drink that is the sweetest to the spirit That intoxicates all generations.") Behind all this is the spark of divine inspiration that Njegoš accepts at the end of *The Ray*. It emerges from struggle. Thus Mićunović presents two images: the song and the sabre. The one beauty, the other action, or rather the two aspects of beauty. (One might recall W. B. Yeats: "A terrible beauty was born")

Danilo, on the other hand, places the question not in nature but in History. Having questioned the very nature of the drive that drives the Game - is it mere instinct or spiritual guidance from another sphere? - he proceeds to put the contradiction:

*Vuk na ovcu svoje pravo ima  
Ka tijranin na slaba čovjeka;  
Al' tirjanstvu stati nogom za vrat,  
Dovesti ga k poznaniju prava,  
To je ljudska dužnost najsvetija! (L. 616-620)*

("The wolf has the right to his sheep, As does the tyrant over the weakling. Yet to place a foot on the neck of tyranny, To lead the tyrant to knowledge of the right, That is the most sacred duty of mankind.") The first line is an aphorism. But the wolf is not in human History. (Although the suffering and persecuted wolf of the modern world might be said to be disastrously in human history!) The rule of the strong comes up against the defence of the individual in his Game. But, asks Danilo, is this truth or merely an illusion?

The view of life as a struggle comes from Stefan. He accepts the contradictions which appear to exercise Danilo. Life is a contradiction and, therefore, solutions to its questions are not possible. In his first speech he speaks of this:

*Smiješna su svojstva naše zemlje,  
Punana je ludijeh premjenah.  
Priroda se svakolika pita  
Sunčanijem čistijem mlijekom;  
U plamen se i ono pretvara,  
Danas žeže što juče njivljaše.  
Kolijevke kakve bi trebale  
Ne imadu sve naše rijeke;  
Vidimo li mi ona strašila  
De pustoše nemilosno zemlju? (L. 2280-2289).*

("Unusual are the traits of earthly things, They are filled full of mad transformations. All forms of nature nourish themselves On the purest milk of the sunlight; But this milk transforms itself to fire. Today it sears what yesterday it fed. Not all rivers here upon the earth Possess the kind of bed that suits their flow. Do we not see terrifying things Devastating the earth mercilessly?") Earthly existence is, then, chaos, till, with reference to the Dedication (If life be not a dream) the true problem is that of perception. Is all this a profound secret we cannot unravel?

*Je l' istina e ovo ovako,  
Al' nas oči sopstvene varaju? (L. 2296-2297)*

("Is it true that things are as they seem, Or do our very eyes deceive us so?") Thus man cannot trust even what he sees. All our values, in any Game, are suspect. Doubt of perception refers us back to Danilo. Man can judge of life only by what he sees, yet the wise man has ever doubted the validity of what he sees!

Given that perception is a poor guide, then the practical view of life is that it is a matter of conflict and self-defence. All things, all organic beings, plant or animal, are armed for their defense. Man is the defender of woman. The people are the defenders of their nation and church. The Game is thus related to the general state of conflict. With all its complexity and tragedy, it is only part of a general pattern of existence. Over all this, we are told:

*Opet umna sila toržestvuje. (L. 2312).*

("Still an intelligent force reigns supreme.") In other words: it works! In order not to commit an anachronism, one may accept that here Njegoš (and Stefan) refer to divine force, but to assume this is unnecessary to an acceptance of the statement. Because all things are armed, life is as it is. If it were not so, then such would be unthinkable. What Mićunović has already expressed as the faith of the Game is also a basic truth of all life, even the inorganic.

*Udar nađe iskru u kamenu,  
Bez njega bi u kam očajala. (L. 2322-2323).*

("The blow finds the spark within the stone, Without it the very spark would turn to stone.") This returns one to the spark in *The Ray*, only now it is no longer the romantic idea of a divine gift, but is rooted in the reality of existence. The divisions of good and evil, largely the rules of a Game, are of less ultimate consequence. The difficulties and contradictions they cause are to be accepted, if only because of the necessity of the Game. The positive does not exist without the negative. To kill the one is to kill the other.

Man is also, like all being, subject to the same laws. Yet man, with his mind, is confronted with contradiction. Duty and feeling, the individual and the Game, come inevitably into conflict. This is Danilo's problem, as Đilas puts it, to do evil in order to do good. Perhaps it is this that makes man feel that he has little in common with the life he is forced to live. (An abiding excuse for religions!) The human mind may well be the difficulty here. As he is, what can man do? Aware of death as a personal certainty, man is truly the worst off of all creatures. Yet, like all beings, man has no choice but to fulfil life in his own terms (be they divinely ordained, or not). Thus Stefan asks the question: "What is man?" and replies with the assertion: "He must be man!" (L. 2229). The need to earn an honest name is an essential need for man:

*Ime česno zasluži li na njoj,  
On je ima rašta polaziti. (L. 2333-2334).*

("If man attains an honest name on earth, Then his being born was not in vain.") In other words, to do the best by man's own innate nature is all he can do. Man's innate ethical feeling (vide "The Ethic and the Game") is

part of his being and, in terms of this, he must live. A man must be a man, just as a tiger must be a tiger.

To live, for a man, involves the Game as the matter of his being an individual. Thus heroism (one might assume not merely the heroism shown sword in hand, but in all aspects of human life) is an ultimate beauty. (Does not every man in civilised London have the desire "to make something of his life", in other words, to be sung in the folk songs?) To do so in a Game is the only way there is! Stefan speaks for the given situation in Montenegro, yet it is perhaps applicable more widely in life generally:

*Slavno mrite, kad mrijet morate!* (L. 2156)

("Die gloriously, when die you must!") In his second speech, Stefan warmed with wine and the fire, introduced an element of almost bitterness: "*Ja sam proša sito i rešeto*" (L. 2486) ("I have passed through sieve and colander.") and affirms that "*Niko srećan, a niko dovoljan*" (L. 2517) ("No one's happy, no one is content."). We may recall the hope that binds the soul with the sun and ask what its place is here? Of course the answer is that hope is a motive force that keeps man to his task. On the other hand to seek satisfaction, peace and happiness in life is the act of the unaware. Even the man of the Game, Mićunović, knows that suffering and travail are the key to living, not peace and satisfaction.

Stefan's speeches serve both as an expression of the conditions in which tragedy takes place, in which death and destruction occur and the motives of conflict which engender them arise. The main point of the poem is still the fact that there is no easy solution. The end might appear so, but this end is only on the level of the plot; Montenegro is finally assured of its being. All the other questions remain open. Danilo is not convinced by Stefan. The episode of Mandušić, with which the poem concludes, is partly humorous and bears a suggestion that the unthinking existence, the instinctive heroism, is the real answer. Nothing will ever really be better.

The levels on which the plot of *The Mountain Wreath* is played out are really threefold: Those who accept the Game and its rules without question; Those who question the Game and come into contradiction and responsibility and Those who accept the Game, but understand it in the context of Nature. There is no suggestion that any of these is "right", but that they are all levels of experience that, taken together, present a synthesis, like Danilo's weeping and Stefan's laughter, or like Stefan's statement that weeping is but a poem with tears! It will vary in life

between those who seek to take an intellectual view of being and those who, like knez Janko, speak of the views of Danilo in this way:

*Bože dragi, čudna razgovora!  
Bi li ovo deca poslovala?  
Ne smijemo činit što činimo,  
Ne smijemo javit što je javno;  
Neke misli na vrat tovarimo  
Ka da posla do mislit nemamo,  
Ka da činit što treba ne znamo.  
Kad sam gode mnogo razmišljava,  
Vazda mi se posa povukova. (L. 499-507).*

("God almighty, what sort of talk is this? Would our children talk in such a way? We must not do what we are doing, We're not allowed to say what is well-known, We load a lot of thoughts upon our necks As if we'd nothing else to do but think! As if we did not know what must be done! Whenever I have wasted time in thinking, The work in hand has ever lagged behind.") One would seem to be invited to think that both views exist and therefore, for good or ill, both are right in their way.

Examining the view of existence in *The Mountain Wreath*, whether the conclusions drawn above be correct or not, it is at least clear that Njegoš has moved far from the Romanticism expressed in the Dedication to *The Ray*. The complexity of existence expressed in *The Mountain Wreath* is surely more at home in the literature of the end of the nineteenth and of the twentieth century than in the poetry of 1847. Life is a jungle, be it the Matto Grosso or a civilised society, in which all men have the duty to make their way. They must learn how to adapt to conditions and to adapt conditions to themselves. Not a romantic message, surely? This would make Njegoš in 1847, as has been said, a relatively new voice in European poetry and a poet who can appeal to our modern awareness.

To write about Njegoš at the present time is, of course, slightly hazardous. The facetious Balkan tragedy that is being played out with the aid of the powers of Western Europe and America has led to nationalistic feelings that have been seen to act adversely on the acceptance of the national culture of all parties. Thus there have been attacks on the works of Ivo Andrić and also on Njegoš. I am informed that some Nitwit wrote an article suggesting that Njegoš wrote in favour of genocide! People always have been and, I fear, always will be thus, but perhaps one might

quote the words of George Sampson regarding Milton's *Paradise Lost*:  
"A poem does not become unreadable when its theology is no longer  
accepted." (*The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, Third  
edition revised by R. C. Churchill, CUP, Cambridge, 1990, p. 308).

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