

The Image of an Architect and Masonic Symbols in Works by Milorad Pavić

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Abstract. The paper analyzes works by the Serbian postmodernist writer Milorad Pavić. It attempts to prove that he possesses knowledge of royal art and uses masonic symbols in his writing related to geometry and architecture, including the radiant delta, compass, masonic gloves, and clepsydra. It is assumed that under the influence of these particular ideas, the writer creates the leading image of an architect and the motif of construction as freemasons believe in the Great Architect of the Universe. In the short novel *Damascene*, according to speculative masonry's beliefs, the building of the church projects the building of a temple in a human soul. M. Pavić, as *an architect*, creates a structure of every novel, which he identifies with the *golden section*. This paper finds special symbols of the divine proportion in his prose, including snail's shells, pyramids, and violins. A dynamic structure as an embodiment of the *open* work concept and a broad spectrum of themes provide artistic communication with a creative recipient. A reader has an opportunity to choose their own style of reading and solving textual puzzles because Pavić's prose represents a wide variety of themes, symbols, images, and allusions that embody the secrets of Freemasonry, allowing for various interpretations.

Keywords: Milorad Pavić; golden section; the motif of construction; the image of an architect; masonic symbols.

Introduction

Prose by Milorad Pavić (1929–2009), an outstanding Serbian postmodernist, is characterized by modifying the prism of literary conventions, a powerful intellectual blast, multiple meanings, and never-ending search. It seems significant that the author introduces a builder's image and multiple mentions of the *golden section* as a criterion of a perfect form in his works. The constant search for a new form that would embody the concept of an "open" work manifested itself in the original structures of his novels (a lexicon novel, crossword puzzle novel, clepsydra novel, tarot novel, horoscope novel, and delta novel). An accomplice reader can choose their reading path and solve textual mysteries,

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for Pavić's prose abounds in themes, symbols, images, and allusions hiding the secrets of freemasons and encouraging them to look for various interpretations.

Although Pavić's prose has been researched a lot, the topic of masonry has not generated much interest. Focusing on the novels *Dictionary of the Khazars*, *Inner Side of the Wind*, *Last Love in Constantinople*, *Second Body* and the tale *Damascene*, Nemanja Radulović, a Serbian literary scholar was the first to write about masonic symbols used by the writer. The researcher goes beyond the "royal art" and presents a variety of esoteric and occult elements in Pavić's prose (Radulović, 2012). However, other experimental works of the author, like *The Glass Snail*, *Unique Item*, *Multicolored Bread / Invisible Mirror*, and *A Choir of Birds from Paris* failed to attract the researchers' attention. This paper aims to research the symbols of masonry in the prose by the Serbian postmodernist for it entails associative links, helps decode the text better and offer a special game for a creative recipient. To achieve the aim, we shall use close reading, typological, receptive-interpretive and intertextual methods of research.

1. The image of an architect and motif of construction

Architects, the knight templars, masonic symbols, and mysticism take various forms in Pavić's works. This paper attempts to distinguish the elements containing the echo of free mason's secrets and prove that the writer had in-depth knowledge about masonry and aimed to show it by inserting "identification marks" and "identification hints", which are often the keys to reading his works. It is assumed that these ideas foregrounded an architect's image, the motif of construction, and the image of a temple itself in his prose.

Masonic worldview found its reflection in architecture, painting, theatrical performances, and literature. The mythological prehistory of masonry connects its appearance to Adam, the forefather of humanity, the first builder on earth, the construction of the Egyptian pyramids, and Egyptian priests' sacraments. A legend goes that masons are the heirs and followers of the constructors who built Solomon's Temple. According to it, the fraternity of freemasons is connected to knight orders, especially the Templars.

The masons recognize a common name for the deity to be the "Great Architect of the Universe." In *Dictionary of the Khazars*, especially its Christian part, we encounter Avram Branković who is looking for a way to create Adam the primordial man (Pavić, 1988, p. 19). In the Muslim part of the novel, there is a parable about Adam Ruhani, a primordial angel-like ancestor of humans or the Spiritual Adam (Pavić, 1988, p. 64–65). In the Jewish part, we find Adam Kadmon, a man and a woman, simultaneously (Pavić, 1988, p. 85–86). Assumingly, Pavić used the idea of Adam Kadmon as a Jewish variant of gnostic mythologem of *Anthropos*, whose nature is revealed in the context of the interpretation of a biblical story about the creation of human, as some interpreters distinguished between the Adam created out of "the dust of the ground" and Adam created in the likeness of God (Averyntsev, 2007, p. 32). On this basis, it was believed that Adam Kadmon combines the male and female aspects giving continuation to the ancient mythological motif of the androgyny of the original man.

It is worth noting that the novel contains a dictionary entry entitled *Music mason*, where craftsmen sculpt salt and listen to the music of their marble (Pavić, 1988, p. 76–77). Pavić has a violin-shaped self-portrait – he studied at the faculty of philosophy (majoring in “Literature of Yugoslavia”) and in violin class at the conservatoire at the same time. The motif of the violin (its perfect shape could be the symbol of the *golden section*) is often present in his writings.

Notably, the image of a creator, a constructor, in the Serbian writer’s works is recurrent and always surrounded by the aura of mystery. An architect’s macro-image is present in Pavić’s crossword-puzzle novel *Landscape Painted with Tea* which resonates with Byzantine culture. Atanas Svilar, the main character, designed buildings that were never to be built. Here, we also find a story about the construction of the Serbian Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos. Pavić’s *Blue Mosque*, included in the novel, deserves special attention. For ten years, the mosque’s constructor visited a Byzantine temple every day and constructed it using its model.

Literary scholars call clepsydra novel *Inner Side of the Wind* an androgynous novel because it is divided into male and female parts (Mihajlović, 1992). Notably, the sandglass as an esoteric symbol is widely used in masonry. The leitmotif of the novel is construction, as the work contains descriptions of building construction, especially temples. The main character Radacha Chihorić was both an architect and a monk who could not take vows at first because he belonged to Patarenes. Patarenes and Cathars in Serbia and Bosnia were Bogomilism followers – a heretic doctrine of dualist nature. Having become a monk, he constructs five temples dedicated to Our Lady shaped like the Greek letter Θ. Later, the main characters Radacha Chihorić (as a representative of the *Byzantine school*) and Sandal Krasimirić (as a representative of the *Swiss school*) simultaneously construct two towers over the Danube. The author creates a metaphor of competition between the representatives of two schools of architecture – eastern and western – drawing parallels between the two artists and two civilizations.

An Egyptian story lies in the short story (interactive drama and a short novel) *The Glass Snail*. Pavić introduces an architect’s image, whose prototype is Senemut, a prominent ancient Egyptian architect, and the most favoured official of Queen Hatshepsut, into a modern plot. An ideal reader should become a virtual “archaeologist” to figure out the secrets from the history of ancient Egypt. Notably, the Egyptians made an enormous contribution to the study of the geometry of the world and its “perfect” proportions. For masons, a pyramid is an obvious sign paying tribute to the constructors of the past and an example of a perfect form, for the pyramids were constructed using the *golden section*. Certainly, a snail as an emblem is not a random choice either. It illustrates the natural spiral structure as an example of “divine proportion.” Pharaoh Thutmose III is one of the characters of *The Glass Snail*. It is worth mentioning that the Mystical Order Rosae Crucis originates from ancient Egyptian mystery schools. Thus, it seems essential that the Pharaoh Thutmose III united everyone initiated into a single fraternity. Due to the rules imposed by the ruler, the fraternity became a mystical order with a

single code (Shpravskyi, 2010, p. 327). Masonry inherited some of their principles, all their functions, the language of symbols, and the rites of passage from the Rosicrucian movement (Tshelskyi, 2015a, p. 74).

2. Decoding masonic symbols

Pavić gave his tale *Damascene* the subtitle *Interactive Tale for Computer and Compasses*, which serves as a beacon for the reader. While the *computer* refers the reader to computer hypertext, experiments with non-linear reading, elements of the game as composites of postmodernist artistic practices, *compasses* reaffirms us in our suppositions concerning masonic symbols in writer's works. Set-square and compasses as tools belong to the central symbols of masonry. Together, they represent the union of heaven and earth where the set-square is the symbol of earth, and the compasses – of the dome of heaven (Karg, 2019, p. 172).

In *Damascene* (as well as in a short novel of the same name) the motif of construction is the central one, while the masonic symbols are scattered around the text. In the first part of the work, called *Builders* the author mentions numerous sacred places built by architects, construction of palaces with elements of ancient Greek architecture, and eight hundred Serbian architects named John who returned to their homeland carrying their guild flag with compasses on it. No doubt, the writer wanted to mention the guild of masons and John the Apostle – patron saint of the masonry, evangelist, Christ's disciple, a privy author of the Apocalypse which is full of gnostic and hermetic symbolism. Masonic lodges often bear his name. Stonemason fraternities often celebrate the day of John the Apostle, which is connected with admitting new members.

In *Damascene*, we read about two architects, both named John who are building a church dedicated to the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary for the wedding of Attilia Nikolić, the daughter of their client, and, simultaneously, a palace for her to live in after she gets married. According to Radulović, the two Johns are a direct allusion to masonry, for both John the Apostle and John the Baptist are patron saints of freemasons (Radulović, 2012, p. 2).

Pavić opens a network of intertextual references and sends the reader to study the sources, for the architect who is supposed to build the church is called John the Damascene. John Damascene was a Byzantine theologian, philosopher, and poet who had a great impact on the development of theology in the Byzantine Empire, and medieval philosophy in Western Europe, Kyiv Rus, and the Balkans. There is another architect character in this work – John of the Ladder, who is commissioned to build a palace. The author once again counts on interpretative cooperation with the recipient prompting them to learn more about the figure of John of the Ladder (also known as John Climacus, John Scholasticus and John Sinaites) who was an orthodox monk. His main work is *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, which the church called the best book for spiritual growth. The ladder leading to Heaven symbolized difficult spiritual ascent to God.

Interestingly, masonic degrees resemble stairs – with each step, a person reaches a higher level of education and enlightenment. According to another explanation, the stairs represent faith, hope, and charity, the three theological virtues, called the divine ladder (Karg, 2019, p. 75). You will recall that after the ceremony, each mason starts building their symbolic temple following the principles of fraternity. It is an allusion to the construction of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem (Karg, 2019, p. 71). In the text under study, both architects presented their drawings of the future buildings to the client on Andrew the Apostle’s day. Assumingly, this is Pavić’s way to hint to the Scottish Rite – one of the two greatest branches in freemasonry. Masonic lodges of this rite often bear the name of the patron saint of Scotland.

Instead of one, the architect showed the projects of three temples – made of boxwood, stone, and mysterious third material. Suspension of construction is explained as follows:

You must have sinned, my Lord. You must have owed something to somebody, or short-changed someone. When you remember what you did wrong and who you were unjust to, show repentance and put matters right. Return the debt, then John can complete your church.
 – For God’s sake, Damascene, where is John building the third church?
 – In Heaven. John always builds the third church in Heaven (Pavić, 1998).

Thus, the problem of spiritual growth, nurturing one’s inner virtues, the problems of sin and repentance are central to this work. This resonates with the masonic idea of a spiritual temple of wisdom in the human heart, the temple that has to be built and dedicated to God (Karg, 2019, p. 92).

Masonic buildings are often called temples as a tribute of respect to the construction of the Solomon’s Temple. In this case, the word *temple* is deprived of religious sense but pays respect to the masons’ craft (Karg, 2019, p. 81). In the dining hall of the unfinished palace, one can see the symbols of the masonic temple as a place of masons’ gathering to perform rituals. Blue sky, moon, stars, and unusual clock-like sun are depicted on the ceiling. Attilia Nikolić realized it could be used as a compass showing the way to architect Damascene. Interestingly, the word *compass* in English denotes both the magnetic compass used by navigators and pilots and a pair of compasses, a technical drawing instrument used to measure the dimensions in construction. Later, the character uses the architect’s large wooden pair of compasses to measure the distance to the Church of Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the *Temple*.

Pavić’s experimental novel *Unique Item* (a delta novel) also abounds in masonic allusions. Analyzing its poetic features, we will focus on the structure. *Delta* (graphically depicted as Δ) is the name of the fourth letter in the Greek alphabet. It is indicated below the novel title and appears in it several times at the intersection of textual fragments. In geography, the *delta* denotes the mouth of the river, which *breaks up* into numerous streams. Δ serves as a paratextual marker to indicate the split in the story. Note that masons have the all-seeing eye inside of an equilateral triangle called the “radiant delta” (“sacred delta”, “sacred pyramid”) as their emblem. This symbol has a long history. It

was often used in Egyptian and Jewish cultures representing deity and global surveillance. Its interpretation is close to Christianity. It appears as a symbol of the Holy Trinity in Christian countries. Historically, many masonic symbols have religious connotations. The radiant delta symbolizes the omnipresence of the Great Architect of the Universe (Karg, 2019, p. 184). Pavić's "Egypt mania" is illustrative if we consider the impact ancient Egypt made on masonry.

The text of the delta novel contains narrative parts, which abound in various signs, symbols, mysticism, and fantasy. An attentive reader will notice references to masonry at all levels of the text. Mozart's *The Magic Flute* is mentioned in the novel. The author indicates that certain fourteen minutes of this opera constitute an audio password, a key opening the lock to a vault (Pavić, 2004, p. 63). *The Magic Flute* is called the apotheosis of masonry or its musical code. Its libretto is mysterious, and the action takes place in ancient Egypt. However, one can see masonic symbols behind the exotic Egyptian secrets: trial by fire, water, earth, and air, the use of numbers, and masonic music chords (Karg, 2019, p. 228).

It is to Egypt that Madam Lempicka from the novel decides to go. When studying the works on *royal art*, we found intriguing information that one of the biggest collections of works on freemasonry is preserved not far from Poznań. Among Polish scholars, the books by Małachowski-Lempicki are considered to be of special value (Tsehelskyi, 2015b, p. 146). We assume that Pavić knew about these sources and borrowed the last name of the character.

Later in the text, we see a Polish-Ukrainian-Lithuanian trace. The author activates Satan's prototype, using the appearance of a female demon called Marina Mniszech, who speaks Lithuanian. In *Unique Item*, she sends masonic gloves as a present, knocks on the door in masonic knock, and intends to question a man about women's masonic lodges (Pavić, 2004, p. 129–130). The author hints at disputes around women's involvement in masonic lodges, which are recurrent in freemason circles (Gize, 2015, p. 13). It is worth noting that Marina Mniszech was the daughter of Jerzy Mniszech, a Polish nobleman and diplomat connected to the Ukrainian lands of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. She was the first foreign Tsaritsa of Moscovia, wife, and widow of two tsars, False Dmitry I and False Dmitry II. Pavić got interested in the Halychyna Mary Stuart's personality and one of the most outstanding political schemes of the 17th century. What concerns the "demonic" characteristics of the image, we assume that the writer was aware of certain historically documented facts. Having moved to Moscow, the new tsar and tsaritsa brought the customs observed by Polish gentry (Szlachta) in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: at the wedding, they opted for European cuisine, ate from individual plates, and used forks. The use of medicinal herbs also looked like some witchcraft, not to mention their intention to hold a masked ball and prepare masks (Pahutiak, 2012). The above facts served as a confirmation of the demonic origin of the couple. The fourth chapter of the novel contains a fragment, "The dream of Pushkin's death." We see that the author does not just include some excerpts of Pushkin's poems into his novel but makes the poet himself one of the characters who resort to African magic and summons the demon Marina Mniszech to

learn about the circumstances of his death. Legends have it that Pushkin was connected to masons, and a woman is typically associated with something infernal, thus death.

In Pavić's novel *Invisible Mirror – Multicolored Bread (novel for children and others)*, we can trace references to the novels about the Holy Grail and the Knights of the Round Table. Masons inherited a lot from templar knights who participated in crusades. Much has been written about the connection of masonry with such a legendary artefact as the Holy Grail. Encoded literary references are not intended for odd reader; they reveal themselves to the "others" familiar with the author's writings on this topic. The main characters are looking for twelve silver knights in combat armour. The protagonist of the "female" part is the Travelling Rose. In this context, the first thing that comes to mind is the symbols of the secret Rosicrucian society – a Rosy Cross. According to one of the interpretations, a rose and a cross are the symbols of Christ's Resurrection and Atonement, the divine light of the universe and the carnal world of suffering, the symbols of Virgin Mary and Jesus, the male and female elements, the material and the spiritual.

Pavić's novel anthology *Paper Theater* includes *A Choir of Birds from Paris*, where the events get a geographical location – the character lives on Rue Vieille du Temple that leads to the Seine River along with templar's street – *Rue du Temple*. The introduction of special godonyms and antroponyms (main characters are called Marie-Madeleine d'Aubray and Godin de Sainte-Croix) in the literary work foreground the references to templar knights. Every day, listening to the birds singing, the narrator hears the word «Saintecroix». Assumingly, Pavić was familiar with Zbigniew Herbert's research on the secrets of the French gothic temples (*Stone from the Cathedral*) where the author compares freemasons with birds of passage who travelled to find better working conditions (Herbert, 2009, p. 29).

Conclusion

Proceeding from the analysis of the material, we have grounds to claim that masonic ideas and the foundations of mason philosophy resonated with the author. The image of the creator, architect, the motif of construction, and the image of a temple itself are central to Pavić's prose. Assumingly, this was the author's way to refer to the masons who believe in the Great Architect of the Universe and masonic temple symbols. While each part of the *Dictionary of the Khazars* features a story about Adam whom masons regard as the first builder on Earth, the image of the architect dominates in *Landscape Painted with Tea*, *Inner Side of the Wind*, *The Glass Snail*, and *Damascene*. The principles of geometry and architectural and building tools were important for the masons and their craft. The subtitle of *Damascene* mentions compasses as one of the most important Masonic symbols. The text itself contains many direct allusions to the Masonry (illustrates the symbols of a masonic temple, main architect characters are named after John the Apostle and John the Baptist, patron saints of the freemasons). The original structure of the novel *Inner Side of the Wind* manifests through the *clepsydra* principle impersonating time and being an important Masonic symbol. In Pavić's novel *Unique Item*, the subtitle given by the author

illustrates, in our opinion, the sacred delta as an ideal triangle. On the pages of the novel, we also find mentions of masonic gloves as an element of masonic clothes and Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*, whose subtext involves many masonic artefacts. A reference to the novels about the Holy Grail and the Knights of the Round Table is found in *Invisible Mirror – Multicolored Bread*. It also illustrates the symbols of Rosicrucianism, which left a significant legacy for the masons. According to a legend, freemasons were connected to the medieval order of the Knights Templar, who are referred to in Pavić's *A Choir of Birds from Paris*.

Non-linear texts analyzed in this paper prove a constant striving to construct a perfect creative form which the author connects to the *golden section* mentioning it many times and illustrating the emblems of *divine proportion* in his prose. Text architectonics, combined with a rich thematic array, ensures communication with the reader by provoking interpretation. For the sake of the interpretation adventure and extension of readers' horizons, Pavić never got tired of modelling artistic experiments. Notably, Pavić even compares a book to a building, where the reader may reside for some time or a temple they enter to pray.

Some aspects remain sealed for us and remain to be analyzed in the following papers, for we are talking about the esoteric prose (in a certain sense), whose secret symbols may be opened and interpreted by knowledgeable readers. Masonic ideas and symbols we noticed have a deeper context and open broader horizons. They constitute a certain secret code encountered in many writings by Pavić and invite to embark on new interpretation adventures.

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