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**THE DEMONIC VITALISM  
OF THE *FEMME FATALE* AS A TRAGIC EXPRESSION  
OF REBELLION – *KAP ŠPANSKE KRVI*  
(*A DROP OF SPANISH BLOOD*) BY MILOŠ CRNJANSKI**

**The demonic vitalism of the *femme fatale*  
as a tragic expression of rebellion – *Kap španske krvi*  
(*A Drop of Spanish Blood*) by Miloš Crnjanski**

**Abstract:** This paper points to the exceptional place of the novel *Kap španske krvi* (*A Drop of Spanish Blood*, 1932) in the literary work of Miloš Crnjanski and Serbian literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The novel is overpowered by other great literary pieces by Crnjanski *Dnevnik o Čarnojeviću* (*The Journal of Čarnojević*), *Seobe* (*Migrations*), *Druga knjiga Seoba* (*Other books of Migrations*), *Roman o Londonu* (*A Novel about London*). Nevertheless, it is interpreted as the first Serbian novel in which the model of a fatal woman is activated and, in the era of modernism, revitalizes the romantic concept of *femme fatale*.

**Keywords:** demonism, vampirism, activating romantic stereotypes, destructivity and activism, pathology of love relationships, nihilism

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The novel *A Drop of Spanish Blood* holds a diversely specific place in the literary work of Miloš Crnjanski and Serbian avant-garde literature between two world wars. On the one hand, this novel has remained in the shadow of his other great novels (*The Journal of Čarnojević*, *Migrations*, *A Novel about London*), and thus gained a significantly reduced orientation of interpreters

and readers. On the other hand, this novel, with its theme, and the choice of heroes and narrative design, makes it vividly different from the romanesque circle of Crnjanski himself, but also from the Serbian avant-garde as a whole. An additional reason for its peculiarity lies in the fact that the author published it for the first time in the form of forty newspaper articles in March and April 1932 in the newspaper *Vreme*. The publication was conducted continuously, on a daily basis, from 15 March to 17 April, and after a short break, from 24 to 29 April, when the publication was fully completed. Miloš Crnjanski did not include this novel in his *Complete Works* from 1966, and the novel was published in its entirety by Nolit only in 1970. The reason why Crnjanski did not include *A Drop of Spanish Blood* in his *Complete Works* is not known, which is unusual precisely because of statements he later gave, which reflect the writer's regret related to the poor reception of the novel and, at the same time, his clear assertions about its considerable literary value. With a high personal and artistic self-awareness, Crnjanski gives two reasons that, in his opinion, affected the unfavorable criticism and the fact that *A Drop of Spanish Blood* remained in the shadow of the *The Journal of Čarnojević*, *Migrations*, and *A Novel about London*: "The novel *A Drop of Spanish Blood* failed because it was printed in a newspaper. Back then, as soon as you had a novel printed in a newspaper, it was *immediately* considered to be journalism. Secondly, *A Drop of Spanish Blood* is a hard alien novel. Look, the focal point is no more the style, nor is it the intellectual content itself, let alone the opus of a woman and the love of a foreign man. But, you see, there are things there that are not banal. Nevertheless, it failed because the critics who want to top an Crnjanski will always look for his weak spot. All writers, even the greatest ones, have the so-called failed books. I find that quite acceptable, but this is a beautiful book, with such youth described in it"<sup>1</sup>. Crnjanski appreciated the journalistic profession he was engaged in and he is one of the rare writers whose literary talent and passion for literature were not (at least not significantly) endangered by this form of engagement<sup>2</sup>. On the contrary, these two activities went together with

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted according to Vladimir Bunjac, *Dnevnik o Crnjanskom* (Beograd: BIGZ, 1982), p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> "Just as much as I feel to be a writer, I feel to be a journalist, too. A problem again. When I entered journalism in 1922, then all my friends and acquaintances contended: a failed poet, a failed narrator. However, I do not think that journalism has harmed me anyway. What does it mean to be a writer [...] One night by the phone in a spacious editorial office is much more interesting and important than a year of inactivity. This is where one gets into contact with

Miloš Crnjanski quite easily and naturally and, however unusual, they supported and strengthened each other. (Let us just mention that it was exactly in newspapers that Crnjanski published most of his outstanding travelogues, and that he is the writer who elevated the travelogue reportage of the interwar years to a level that goes far beyond the passing timeliness of journalistic texts.) The respect for the journalistic media was certainly one of the reasons why he published *A Drop of Spanish Blood* exactly in a daily newspaper, not seeing it at all as diminishing the artistic quality of his novel. The supposed objection that the novel was “alien” refers to the fact that it is only in this novel where Crnjanski does not deal with the fate of his nation or topics that could be related to some fateful aspect of the people to which he belonged. Shortly after Nolit’s publication of *A Drop of Spanish Blood*, Marko Nedić will point out what it is that distinguishes this novel from the rest of Crnjanski’s novels: “In *A Drop of Spanish Blood* Crnjanski does not invoke any other time, country or environment outside of the ones described in the plot, there is no hope in it beyond the one that is certain and achievable at that specific moment. The motif of homeland in this novel is by no means realised at the literary plan of the work”<sup>3</sup>. Placing the main plot in Munich and the literary presentation of the historical story of the late love of Bavarian King Ludwig I and the Spanish dancer Lola Montez made readers and critics, who compared it with other novels, see it as a “banal” and artistically less successful novel. On the basis of historical facts, Crnjanski writes a very interesting and stylistically recognizable romanesque story about love, eroticism, misconceptions and aging (“This is a problem of love, and thus a problem of many a thing, and the fact that the plot is set in Munich, well, it’s not my fault that they lived in Munich”, says Crnjanski in 1972<sup>4</sup>). In the handwritten legacy of Miloš Crnjanski, which is kept in the National Library of Serbia, there are three dactylograms that contain the complete translations of the novel *A Drop of Spanish Blood* into English. As it is, the novel was

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the earth, with what surrounds us, this is exactly where you can understand certain social and personal relationships. In a word, a poet or a writer should live in a kind of an editorial office at least for a while. It is worth as much as a journey abroad.” Милош Црњански а., *Есеји и чланци II*. (Београд,-Lausanne: Задужбина Милоша Црњанског, БИГЗ, Српска књижевна задруга, L’Age d’Homme, 1999), 442.

<sup>3</sup> Недић, Марко, „Стари роман Милоша Црњанског“, *Летопис Матице српске*, CXLVII, књ. 407 (1971), 450.

<sup>4</sup> Милош Црњански а., *Есеји и чланци II*. (Београд,-Lausanne: Задужбина Милоша Црњанског, БИГЗ, Српска књижевна задруга, L’Age d’Homme, 1999), 558.

most probably translated by Crnjanski himself in the years of refuge, who offered it unsuccessfully to English publishers as early as in 1948. This is evidenced by his correspondence with Alec Brown and Anne Canyon from which only some of the letters received by Crnjanski have been preserved, while the letters written by Crnjanski himself have not been preserved<sup>5</sup>.

With a pronounced modernist tendency for novelty and experiments, curious and daring to express himself in various genre models, and remaining faithful to his unique style, Crnjanski was brave enough to try himself out in new contents. Through a literary form that he gave to a historical story of an unachievable and abruptly discontinued adventure of an elderly king and an exotic dancer, Miloš Crnjanski plays with stereotypes in a modernistic way and revitalises in this novel the romantic concept of *femme fatale*, that is, for the first time in Serbian literature, he forms a kind of a character novel in which the main heroine is a fatal and demonic woman whose action radically influences not only the literary heroes who are fascinated by her, but also the historical flows preceding the outbreak of the revolution in 1848.

It is clear that the typical figure of a fatal woman, if we take it to be the enthralling synergy of sensuality and cruelty in women of exceptional beauty, is older than romanticism, that is only experiences the culmination of her presence and literary achievement in European romanticism. “There have always been fatal women in myth and literature, because myth and literature are only fantastic reflections of the aspects of real life, and real life has always provided more or less perfect examples of conceited and cruel femininity” – concludes Mario Prac in his *Agony of Romanticism*<sup>6</sup>, pointing out that the first part of the romantic epoch is dominated by the so-called Byronian fatal hero, while late romanticism enthrones a fatal, almost demonic heroine, whose fatal attraction serves the purpose of destruction and self-destruction, and whose main inspiration was found in the mythical figure exotic and powerful Cleopatra. Crnjanski, who devoted a great number of his essays to Serbian romanticism and its poets, revitalises the concept of a romantic fatal heroine, starting from a real heroine (her real name is Eliza Rosanna Gilbert and by her origin she is an Irishwoman born in India and her fake Spanish

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<sup>5</sup> More about the genesis of the novel *A Drop of Spanish Blood* and the self-translation into English can be found in the afterword by S. Jaćimović, the editor of the critical edition of Miloš Crnjanski, *Pripovedna proza II. Kap španske krvi. Suzni krokodil*, priredila Slađana Jaćimović (Beograd: Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog, 2013), 543–557.

<sup>6</sup> Mario Prac, *Agonija romantizma*, trans. Cvijeta Jakšić (Beograd: Nolit, 1974), 157.

origin was already revealed during her life<sup>7</sup>), who, as the embodiment of the female principle, dominates over men at one point in time, combining the contradictory concepts of Eros and Thanatos in her actions.

The character of Lola Montez, with her problematic Spanish background, such that this small but fateful “drop of Spanish blood” is highlighted even in the title as the essence of her sensibility that brings unrest to the weary dreariness of Munich and its inhabitants, was built as a complex, multilayered figure – a mixture of cruelty and fragility, sensitivity and coldness, lucidity and gullibility, moral freedom and disgust over the hypocrisy of everything that is perceived as a hollow respect for banal and weakened stereotypes. Her physical looks, as well as her overall appearance along with the inevitable exhaustive descriptions of clothing and everything that makes the inseparable attributes of her personality, are consistently emphasized with the purpose of shaping her characteristic fatal demonism. Her pale complexion, which in the theories of romanticism stands out as the inevitable characteristic of specific women-vampires, that is of fatal women who fulfill their desire by destroying their admirers, the marble beauty of the body that is compared with the statues of the Greek Venus sculptures, but also with the strength of the Amazons, with black hair and blue eyes (whose colour alternates between fire and ice, lust and lethargy, life and death), place Lola into the ranks of fatal ladies who awake life not only in men who follow them blindly, but also in the whole environment unused to changes and activism. From the first page of this meticulously composed novel, which begins with Lola approaching Munich, and a symbolic image of heavy humidity and a foreboding storm, the writer carefully articulates all the elements of her appearance that bear the symbolism of the demonic and the ominous, as willful opposing everything that symbolizes the city’s religious piety of the cult of the Virgin Mary. In addition to the inevitable *black dress*, the image of Lola Montez as a demonic woman is complemented with a black fan “like a black raven”, a silver dead skull on the horsewhip handle, a brooch in the form of a little black lizard and a black Great Dane dog as the only creature that the heroine believes, an unequivocal incarnation of a chthonic animal. Furthermore, she comes to Munich in a big black carriage and is driven in it through the city, as described, “as if she was always going to a funeral”, and the city’s residents perceive her as „a wanton demon, a Babylonian daughter, an evil black cat that brings bad luck”, and finally,” a black vampire who sucks the

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<sup>7</sup> Elizabet Abot, *Istorija ljubavnica* (Beograd: Geopoetika, 2006), 94–98.

blood of Bavaria". The demonic characteristics of the beautiful dancer will be visible in her movement, which is often compared to that of a snake, as much as a "crazy, deadly lightness" that will be recognized in her dancing, and the sound of her castanets that will echo "like drums beating the sounds of death"<sup>8</sup>. It is precisely this oxymoronic compound of extraordinary beauty and awe, the divine and chthonic dimensions, the permeation of sensuality and deadness that makes eroticism, which is concentrically spreading from Lola's character to other heroes, be perceived as dark and fascinating, transforming all of her relationships into a form of perverted sensuality in which the principle of destruction makes the basis of a love relationship. It should be noted that her character also reveals forms of characteristic travesty: in the desire for an unrestricted examination of her own limits of power, the main character often dresses as a young man, gaining additional beauty and attractiveness. Also, adding to her character, the narrator will repeat as a leitmotif that her face has the beauty of an "English boy", the same way as he stresses her extraordinary appearance on a horseback and her riding skills. That is, in the circle of weak, unfulfilled young men, ministers, priests and other men who surround her, her extraordinarily feminine and, at the same time, android appearance is seen as a manifestation of that kind of power and dynamism that her potential victims lack.

The love story in *A Drop of Spanish Blood* is a narrative design of a kind of pathology of love. In her perverted sensibility, Lola does not seek ordinary and institutionalized love – her love is inseparable from suffering, that is, she affirms her action only in the suffering and sacrifice of men: "He will love me because I was so cruel and humiliated him to scum"<sup>9</sup>. Dragoš Kalajić, the first one to point out in the preface to the first posthumous edition of *A Drop of Spanish Blood* the importance of deeper reading and understanding of the complexity and significance of this marginalized novel by Crnjanski, emphasizes that male desire and suffering are "food and energy for the triumph of a *femme fatale*", that is that the heroine's focus of action lies in the "longing for a perfect image of herself in the mirror of her victims' suffering"<sup>10</sup>. In other words, although her appearance is promoted almost without exception as a figure that provokes passion and often suicidal love in

<sup>8</sup> Милош Црњански, *Кап шпанске крви* (Београд: Књижевне новине, 1985), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Милош Црњански, *Кап шпанске крви*, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Dragoš Kalajić, pogovor za Miloš Crnjanski, *Кап шпанске крви* (Београд: Књижевне новине, 1985), 173–200.

others, Lola's demonic seduction is more directed towards her own self, that is, in essence, it is deeply egotistic because the formulae of seduction that the heroine has brought to perfection primarily serve the purpose of proving her own domination and a confirmation of primal, somewhat animal femininity, and not the purpose of developing a love relationship between a man and a woman. Like the don Juanism of male heroes, the fatality of the seductress is reflected in a series of pleasures that do not lead to the satisfaction of the desire, but rather increase it. By tasting all the pleasures she was ever offered, not fearing anything whatsoever in testing the boundaries of her own sensibility, Lola Montez constantly feels a gap that cannot be filled even by repeating the pleasures. Like his great contemporary Andrić in the narrative "Byron in Sintra", Crnjanski tells a story about hell "which is actually the life of every sensual being"<sup>11</sup>, because an insatiable desire constantly searches for a new object of craving, and the fulfillment of the desire does not bring tranquillity, but rather extends suffering.

A series of male heroes as objects of Lola's seduction consists of characters different both in their age and in their social position. From unnamed students whom Lola seduces not only with their demonic beauty, but also with her advanced ideas (the so-called Lolamans), poor noblemen (the character of a young, strong and simple Delinger), callous intellectuals (Count Hirschberg – noble and "spoiled by books"), ministers (Berks, Seisenheim), court appointed advisors, princes (former, rejected lover Prince Royce) to the elderly and tired King Ludwig I. Thus, with erotic norms being exceeded in a romanesque plot, a series of transgressions is started in the form of crossing moral, age, national and social limits. The relationship with Ludwig, which is the nucleus of the plot about one year of Lola's rule in Bavaria, is given in the pronounced opposition in a contact of youth and age, bodily beauty and ugliness (Ludwig is gross, with a flabby lip, and a bump on the forehead), hot sensuality and sexual impotence. Although being completely in the power of her beauty, as Lola's passion increases (or her pretence of passion becomes more pronounced), Ludwig's melancholy and body weakness become more and more obvious. Hence, their love encounters in the novel are shaped as a pathetic show in which actors are not able to play their roles to the end – Lola to awaken the arrested youthful sexual energy in the king, and Ludwig to prove himself as a man capable of curbing her hot Spanish blood. The relationships that the fatal heroine experiences with other heroes

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<sup>11</sup> Ivo Andrić, *Lica* (Zagreb: Mladost, 1960), 26.



are completely different – they are all shaped by blatant sensuality in which Lola takes and leaves her lovers, rewards them and punishes them, feeds on their suffering, and leads them to slavish obedience, suicidal intentions or deep emotional emptiness. A woman who claims that she was born for love is incapable of experiencing it and goes through her love adventures with “disgust” towards men who she persistently conquers (she always pronounces the word “men” with a grin<sup>12</sup>).

But Crnjanski models this character, as well as other important female characters in his novels (Dafina, Mrs Božič, Nadja), through the complexity of expressing mighty femininity in public and complex inner life with accentuated self-awareness. The image of Lola Montez breeds a character of a tragic romantic heroine of strong individuality and a lonely modern heroine predetermined by self-excommunication from the world and by a nihilistic attitude towards the established values. Lola, “who had neither shame nor heart”, often experiences the doubling of her own being in connection with the others, and says that she “fears nobody but herself”<sup>13</sup>, she feels “immeasurable pity for herself” and, at the moment when her destiny is again reversed to skittish, she perceives herself as a “crushed blossom”<sup>14</sup> or “as an exhausted, lonely deer in an empty world”<sup>15</sup>. Her resistance to the church and Christian preached values is strengthened and based precisely on such a nihilistic attitude towards the world and the human fate that pervades other novels by Miloš Crnjanski as well. Her exclamation “I am the Messenger of Satan” is a protest against hypocrisy that is experienced in ecclesiastic preachings and the institution of the church in general, in which it is the man’s will for power that is rather recognized than true care for the salvation of one’s neighbours.

When read from this perspective, *A Drop of Spanish Blood* reveals the germs of certain sensical lines that will develop in later exceptional achievements by Miloš Crnjanski. The story of the fatal Lola is at the same time a story of age as the only certainty of human destiny, which is the main fear of the Spanish woman, and the weakening of the vital functions also marks the narration of the exile in *A Novel about London*. The critique of the church and Lola’s struggle against the Jesuits (who will ultimately abruptly

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<sup>12</sup> Милош Црњански, *Кап шпанске крви*, 149.

<sup>13</sup> Милош Црњански, *Кап шпанске крви*, 96.

<sup>14</sup> Милош Црњански, *Кап шпанске крви*, 150.

<sup>15</sup> Милош Црњански, *Кап шпанске крви*, 63.



end her rule in Munich), bear a pronounced criticism of the papacy in the prose of *The Hyperboreans*, and of the nihilistic scorn that Prince Rjepnin, the main hero of *A Novel about London*, expresses towards institutionalized Christianity (“Then all the bells of London would toll and carry the voice of belfry banging: that God is solace and help to the man”<sup>16</sup>). Lola, like Rjepnin (though completely different from him) does not accept pretence, hypocrisy and lies, and her pronounced active demonism is nothing else but an expression of resistance and throwing down the gauntlet to the world and society dormant in stereotypes and emptied values. For Munich, which the exotic dancer awakens with her appearance and action, is a symbol of the decadence of tired Europe at the dawn of the great revolution. Eroticism that exceeds the set boundaries and pulls on the demonic cloak gains the force of powerful political, cultural and social movements. Although, in the circular composition of the novel, Lola ends her short-term triumph of eros by leaving down the same dusty road in the same black carriage and into the uncertainty of the skittish life of a travelling dancer, nothing is the same anymore once she leaves. The foreboding storm that announces her arrival in Munich will take place in the time that will follow after her departure: in the abdication of the elderly Ludwig and the emptiness of the heroes she marked with her fatal presence.

“The hard alien novel,” as Crnjanski called *A Drop of Spanish Blood*, develops through the fate of the fatal and demonic Lola, a complex network of sensical threads that will gain their complete fulfillment in the later works of the great Serbian writer. The expression of sex as the root of everything, which is ironically varied in *A Novel about London*, is imprinted in *A Drop of Spanish Blood* in the energy of heroine’s sexuality as an authentic expression of resistance towards the tired society of the decadent Europe. Her cruel femininity is, short-lived as it is, a triumph of the female principle in the world of men.

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<sup>16</sup> Милош Црњански, *Роман о Лондону* (Београд-Lausanne: Задужбина Милоша Црњанског, Српска књижевна задруга, L'Age d'Homme, 2006), 355.

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