

Slavic Epics: Gundulić's *Osman* and Mazuranić's *Death of Smail-Aga Cengic*

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In this paper I present and compare briefly two of the greatest Slavic poets, Đivo Franov Gundulić (1589-1638)¹, from Dubrovnik² (in Italian and Latin Ragusa) on the eastern coast of the Adriatic in Croatia³, and Ivan Mažuranić (1814-1890), from Novi in the Vinodol region of the Croatian littoral. In dealing briefly with these two epic poets I want to raise the issue of the so-called 'Slavic' epic.

At first sight it would appear that such two widely separated poets, writing two centuries apart, and representing the Slavic Baroque and Romanticism respectively would have very little in common. But the exact opposite is the case. Gundulić wrote and left unfinished his great epic, *Osman*, at the time when the Ottoman Empire, still a world power in the

¹ On Gundulić see Z. Zlatar, "Lectura Dantis apud Gondolam" in Z. Zlatar, *The Epic Circle: Allegoresis and the Western Epic Tradition from Homer to Tasso* (Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture No. 10, Sydney, 1993), 1-44; Chapter XII, 'Pan-Slavism and Orientalism in Gundulić's *Osman*' in Z. Zlatar, *Our Kingdom Come: The Counter-Reformation, the Republic of Dubrovnik, and the Liberation of the Balkan Slavs* (East European Monographs #342, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992), 425-457; and my forthcoming *The Slavic Epic: Gundulić's "Osman"*.

² On Dubrovnik there are only a few works in English, listed here in chronological order: Susan Mosher Stuard, *A State of Deference: Ragusa/Dubrovnik in the Medieval Centuries* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1992); Bariša Krekić, *Dubrovnik in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1972); id., *Dubrovnik, Italy, and the Balkans in the Late Middle Ages* (Variorum Reprints, London, 1980); Zdenko Zlatar, *Our Kingdom Come: The Counter-Reformation, the Republic of Dubrovnik, and the Liberation of the Balkan Slavs* (East European Monographs #342, New York, 1992); id., *Between the Double Eagle and the Crescent: The Republic of Dubrovnik and the Origins of the Eastern Question* (East European Monographs #348, New York, 1992); Harriet Bjelovučić, *The Ragusan Republic: Victim of Napoleon and Its own Conservatism* (E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1970). Frank W. Carter, *Dubrovnik: The Classic City-State* (Seminar Press, London, 1972), while useful is not reliable.

³ On Croatia see Francis H. Eterovich & Christopher Spalatin, (eds.), *Croatia: Land, People, Culture*, 2 vols. (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1964-70).

early 17th century, was beginning to decline⁴. By dealing with the last year of the reign, deposition, and then murder of Sultan Osman II (1618-1622), Gundulić was raising, in an epic form, the issue that would obsess most of Slavdom for the next three centuries: the liberation of the Balkan Slavs from the Turkish yoke. It is true that some shrewd Western diplomats already sensed that the great empire was no longer invulnerable. Thus Sir Thomas Roe, the British ambassador to the Porte, put it best when he said in 1623, upon presenting himself at the throne of the energetic Murad IV (1623-1640): "This government may stand but never rise again."⁵ But it took a very powerful vision, a poetic vision, on the part of Gundulić to link Osman II's tragic fate with the future liberation of the Slavs, and to look for a future united Kingdom of the Slavs in the various realms that the Polish Prince Wladyslaw (future Wladyslaw IV, 1637-1648) either was going to inherit or was actually claiming: Poland-Lithuania, Muscovy (whose Tsar he was elected in 1610 by the *boiars* in Moscow, though the expulsion of the Poles from the Kremlin, and the election of Mikhail Romanov [1613-1645] as the Russian Tsar rendered Wladyslaw's election obsolete), and the lands of the Balkan Slavs to be conquered from the Turks.⁶ Gundulić thus inaugurated a new theme for the epic: the liberation of the Balkan Slavs from Turkish rule as the central aspect of the so-called Eastern Question, i.e. the retreat of the Ottoman Empire from Europe. It is this theme which dominates Gundulić's epic *Osman*, and that justifies its being called a 'Slavic' epic: not because it was written by a Slav (though this is true, of course), but because its whole thematic is grounded in the Slavic past, present, and future.

Yet, Gundulić did not find the inspiration for such an epic among earlier Slavic poets or oral epics,⁷ even though by his time the great cycle of Serbian and Croatian epic poetry had already started producing some of the earliest examples of that heroic oral tradition which became all the rage in literary Europe from Goethe onwards, and though Gundulić was familiar with and often echoing this tradition. Having been born a member of the ruling group in the city of Dubrovnik⁸, nominally a tributary state of

⁴ On the Ottoman Empire see Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600* (New York, 1973).

⁵ Quoted by Leften S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453* (New York, 1958).

⁶ On Wladyslaw see A. Sliwinski, *Krol Wladyslaw IV* (Warsaw, 1925).

⁷ See Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1960, 2nd ed., Atheneum, New York, 1974); id., *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1991); John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1988); Svetozar Koljević, *The Epic in the Making* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980); for other works see John Miles Foley, (ed.), *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research: An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography* (Garland, New York, 1986).

⁸ On the Dubrovnik patriciate see Z. Zlatar, *Our Kingdom Come*, Chapters I, III, VIII, IX.

that very Ottoman Empire⁹ whose destruction he so fervently awaited, Gundulić spent all of his relatively brief life (he died before his fiftieth birthday), pursuing the leisurely life of a man of letters. As a patrician (*vlastelin*, plural *vlastela* [the patriciate]) Gundulić spent his childhood and early youth during the waning of Dubrovnik's golden age¹⁰, when the city's extensive commercial investments in the Ottoman Balkans, poured into its so-called colonies [*kolone*] in Belgrade, Sofia, Sarajevo, Provardia, Novi Pazar, Prokuplje and others¹¹, were drying up and exposing the Ragusan merchants - some of the richest being patricians - to the new competition of the Safardic Jews¹² and Bosnian Muslims. As a gentleman [*gospār*] Đivo Franov Gundulić was attuned to Italy from which had come in the past the predominant literary influences on the literature of Venetian Dalmatia and free Dubrovnik, the body of literary works usually referred to as the Dalmatian-Ragusan literature. This literature was written in a Slavic vernacular, with two separate but much lesser branches in Italian and Latin. The Italian influence took the form of fashionable Petrarchism which completely dominated the literary circles of Dubrovnik and Dalmatia from circa 1500 onward, until the early 17th century.¹³ For more than a century all Dalmatian and Ragusan poets wrote mostly lyric poetry in a Petrarchan fashion, with many attempts to render into Slavic the great poems of Petrarch's *Canzoniere [in vita et in morte di Madonna Laura]*.¹⁴ In his youth Gundulić too wrote some lyric poems, and then followed the late Renaissance obsession with pastoral plays. Then in 1620 he suddenly changed.

There is no question that the coming of the Jesuits to Dubrovnik for the third time (they stayed until 1633)¹⁵, profoundly changed Gundulić's literary development: on October 1st he wrote a preface to his translation of some of King David's Penitential Psalms in which he announced his decision to become a 'Christian poet' [*krstjanin spjevalac*]¹⁶. He also

⁹ On the Turco-Ragusan relationship see Z. Zlatar, *Our Kingdom Come*, Chapter II. The fundamental monograph is in Russian: Maren M. Freidenberg, *Dubrovnik i Osmanskaia imperia* (2nd revised and expanded ed., Nauka, Moscow, 1989).

¹⁰ See Z. Zlatar, "From the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation: The Dubrovnik of Đivo Gundulić" in *The Festschrift to Professor Edward C. Thaden* (forthcoming).

¹¹ Z. Zlatar, "Dubrovnik's Investments in its Balkan Colonies, 1594-1623: a Quantitative Analysis" in *Balkanica VIII* (Belgrade, 1976), 103-118.

¹² See Z. Zlatar, "Trgovina balkanskih Jevreja preko Dubrovnika u XVI i XVII stoljeću (Analiza sistema izvoza)[Trade of the Balkan Jews through Dubrovnik in the 16th and 17th Centuries: An Analysis of the Export System]" in *Zbornik Jevrejskog Istorijskog muzeja u Beogradu IV* (Belgrade, 1979), 87-110, with a summary in English.

¹³ See Josip Torbarian, *Italian Influence on the Poets of the Ragusan Republic* (London, 1931).

¹⁴ A convenient summary in Croatian is by Frano Čale, *Petrarca i petrarkizam* ("Ključ za književno djelo: Interpretacije", Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 1971).

¹⁵ On the coming of the Jesuits to Dubrovnik see Z. Zlatar, *Our Kingdom Come*, Chapter IV.

¹⁶ On the importance of 1620 as the turning point in Gundulić's literary career see Z. Zlatar, *The Slavic Epic: Gundulić's "Osman"* (forthcoming).

made it clear that he intended to translate Torquato Tasso's great epic, *La Gerusalemme liberata* [*Jerusalem Delivered*] into Slavic [*slavenski*] and to dedicate it to King Sigismund III (1589-1632) of Poland.¹⁷ Thus he inaugurated a new phase in his poetic career which turned him from a lyrical, Petrarchan poet and playwright into an epic poet whose highest purpose was to combine the Christian idea of a crusade against the Turks with the liberation and unification of the Slavs. In short, he set the stage for a 'Slavic' epic.¹⁸

It has been pointed out by all literary critics in the last three centuries how much Gundulić owed to Tasso. Many have seen him, especially under the influence of Crocean theory of aesthetic criticism, as nothing but a pale imitator, a bad copy of the much greater Italian master. Thus a great twentieth-century Croatian literary critic and a leading Crocean follower in pre-war Yugoslavia, Albert Haller, condemned *Osman* as a poor imitation of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, cold, insipid, flowery, artificial, and unsuccessful.¹⁹ Haller's critique spelled the kiss of death for *Osman* for the next half a century. There is no question that there is some truth to what Haller and others have said. But, in view of what I have dealt with elsewhere about the relationship between originality and imitation which forms the intertwining series of links in the chain of the great European tradition of epic poetry from Homer to Tasso²⁰, Gundulić should not be singled out and Haller's verdict was too harsh. For in addition to being an imitator of Tasso Gundulić went beyond his great Italian model to broader visions and different themes.

Gundulić borrowed the formal structure of his epic from Tasso, though, as I have argued in my study of Gundulić's *Osman*, he did not imitate Tasso slavishly.²¹ For instance, Gundulić did not use the *ottava rima*, the obligatory stanza of Italian epic romances and Tasso's epic, but a much shorter, eight-to-nine-syllable verse, and a quatrain, typical of Dalmatian-Ragusan lyrical, Petrarchan poetry. This was held against Gundulić by all the old Ragusan literary critics who found such a verse

17 Djuro Körbler, (ed.), *Djela Giva Frana Gundulića* (3rd ed., the so-called Academy Edition, published by the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts as Vol. IX of *Stari pisci hrvatski*, Zagreb, 1938), 330 ('Povjeta' in 'Pjesni pokorne kralja Davida'). All subsequent quotations are from this Academy edition.

18 How Gundulić's *Osman* relates to other Slavic epics, specifically on the theme of Osman II's defeat at Hoczym has been explored by T. Eekman, "The War of Chotin in Literature: A Comparison of Some Poets about the Polish-Turkish War of 1621 in Slavic Literatures, and an Inquiry into the Problem of the Consciousness of Slavic Solidarity in these Poems" in *Dutch Contributions to the Fourth International Congress of Slavists* (Moscow, September 1958, The Hague, 1958), 41-82.

19 Albert Haller, *Gundulićev Osman s estetskog gledišta* (Belgrade, 1929).

20 See Z. Zlatar, "Allegoresis and the Western Epic Tradition from Homer to Tasso" in Z. Zlatar, *The Epic Circle* (Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture No. 10, Sydney, 1993), 47-180.

21 Z. Zlatar, *The Slavic Epic: Gundulić's "Osman"* (forthcoming).

and stanza too light for such an exalted theme. For it was the theme which, though similar to Tasso's in its Christian aspects, separates Gundulić radically from Tasso.

Tasso's theme is the liberation of Jerusalem, held by the Muslim Saracens, during the First Crusade in 1099. The reason why Tasso chose such a topic is quite evident: following the Turkish naval defeat at Lepanto in 1571 there were great hopes of pushing the Ottoman Empire into Asia, and liberating the Holy Sepulchre. The idea of a crusade was very popular in militant Counter-Reformation Europe.²² Gundulić, as a 'Christian poet', after his 'conversion', found this theme of a crusade highly appealing. But as a Slav he applied this theme to his own wider people, i.e. Slavs in general, and the Balkan Slavs in particular, and aspired to a Slavic-led, rather than a papal-led, crusade. That is why he gave up his early promise of translating Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* into Slavic, and wrote the first truly 'Slavic' epic instead. 'Slavic' in a sense that its theme, while consonant with the idea of a crusade, was nevertheless wholly devoted to the idea of the liberation of the Slavs by the other free Slavs led by the Polish Prince Wladyslaw as a general consequence of the decline of the Ottoman Empire. And that is why Gundulić, like Tasso, chose to change history to accord with his own Slavic vision: he depicted the Battle of Hoczym between the Poles led by Wladyslaw (only nominally) and the Turks under Sultan Osman II as a great victory for the Polish Prince, and the cause for the demise of the Turkish Sultan, when in fact Hoczym was a draw.²³ What mattered to Gundulić was not the past, but the future. And that is why *Osman* is all future-oriented, and not past-oriented.

Guundulić died rather prematurely in 1638, before the age of fifty, and for some reason or another, his epic *Osman* remained unpublished until 1826. It circulated in many manuscript copies, and earned its author the highest accolade, that of being called the Slavic Homer, and the first poet of the Illyrian Muse [*Illyricae Camenae facile princeps*]²⁴. But the great epic lacked two cantos: already in the early eighteenth century rumours circulated that the government of Dubrovnik, fearful of the Turkish response, had the two cantos burned, supposedly because of their anti-Turkish tenor. This is not very likely: had the city fathers been afraid of Turkish reprisals they would have destroyed the whole epic, not just the two cantos in question. It is more likely that Gundulić did not live to write

²² See Albert Mas, *Les Turcs dans la littérature espagnole du Siècle d'Or: Recherches sur l'évolution d'une thème littéraire*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1967); J. Lopez Toro, *Los poetas de Lepanto* (Madrid, 1950).

²³ The role of the Poles and of Wladyslaw in Gundulić's *Osman* was investigated by Stjepan Musulin, "Poljaci u Gundulićevu Osmanu" in *Rad Jugoslavenske Akademije znanosti i umjetnosti* 281 (Zagreb, 1950), 101-207.

²⁴ Körbler, *Djela Giva Frana Gundulića*, 332.

the two cantos. Gundulić thus suffered the supreme disadvantage of a poet whose greatest work remained in manuscript for a couple of centuries. When the Croatian national awakening or *Preporod* looked for past models on which to base the new literary movement of the nineteenth century - the so-called Illyrism [*ilirizam*], based on the mistaken notion that the South Slavs stemmed from the ancient Illyrians²⁵ - Gundulić was 'rediscovered' as the greatest poet of the South Slavs. Accordingly, the decision of the most important cultural society of the Illyrian movement, the so-called *Matica hrvatska* [The Croatian Queen Bee Society] to publish *Osman* in a completed form was greeted as the most singular cultural event of the 1840s. The task of supplying the printed version with the two cantos was given to a rather young but promising poet, Ivan Mažuranić.²⁶

Mažuranić 'invented' the two missing cantos and succeeded to such an extent that modern critics to this day have judged his additions as superior to the rest of Gundulić's *Osman*. This is going too far, for Mažuranić's cantos betray the highly Romantic spirit which Gundulić's epic did not and could not have breathed.²⁷ But there is no question that Mažuranić succeeded in appropriating Gundulić's style and diction to such a degree that, for instance, he used not a single word which cannot be attested to have been used by Gundulić.²⁸ It is quite appropriate thus to see Mažuranić's additions to Gundulić's *Osman* as the making of a great epic poet. For two years later in 1846 he proved to be one.

In 1840 a local Turkish potentate by the name of Smail-aga Čengić, from Hercegovina, was killed in a skirmish by a group of Montenegrins, as a revenge for his bloody extortion of excessive tribute from the subject Christian population. This event was reported even in German newspapers, but was seen as a regular feature of the lawless and unstable frontier region between Christendom and Islam. Mažuranić's own brother travelled across Hercegovina and Montenegro in 1841 and wrote an

²⁵ See Antun Barac, *A History of Yugoslav Literature* (Michigan Slavic Publications, Ann Arbor, s.d.), 105-118, for a very brief summary in English. It is based on his fundamental monograph, *Hrvatska književnost od Preporoda do stvaranja Jugoslavije*, Vol. I: *Književnost Ilirizma* (JAZU [Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti], Zagreb, 1954), especially pp. 212-223.

²⁶ The best biography is by Milorad Živančević, *Ivan Mažuranić* (Globus, Zagreb, 1988). On pp. 373-390 it includes a Bibliography of all important editions of Mažuranić's works and on pp. 391-469 works published on Mažuranić from 1838 to 1988.

²⁷ The most complete edition of Mažuranić's works is: Ivo Frangeš & Milorad Živančević, (eds), *Šabrana djela*, 4 vols. (Liber - Matiča Hrvatska, Zagreb, 1979). Vol. I contains *Smrt Smail-age Čengića* [The Death of Smail-aga Čengić]; Vol. II: *Pjesme* [Poems], *Dopuna "Osmanu"* [Additions to "Osman"] on pp. 119-168, and, among others, a reprint of *Rječnik "Osmana"* [A Dictionary to "Osman"] on pp. 407-564; Vol. III: *Prose Works*; Vol. IV: *Letters*.

²⁸ See his *Osmana Gundulićeva riečnik* published as an appendix to Mažuranić's edition of and additions to *Ivana Gundulića OSMAN* (Zagreb, 1844), 1-137 reprinted in Vol. II of *Sabrana djela*, 407-564.

account of various Turkish atrocities and oppression.²⁹ Then in 1843 or 1844 a Montenegrin traveller stayed with Mažuranić at Karlovac, the seat of the Croatian Military Frontier where young Mažuranić was working as a solicitor. The Montenegrin told very lively tales of the death of Smail-aga Čengić.³⁰ This inspired young Mažuranić to write a short epic of his own, entitled *Death of Smail-aga Čengić* [*Smrt Smail-age Čengića*], published in 1846.³¹

Nothing prepares us for a masterpiece: the rather provincial atmosphere of the Austrian-ruled military frontier, and Croatia, with its Germanic administration and Hungarian-modelled aristocracy, were quite unprepared for this short but powerful epic. Yet the leading critics and the public at large judged it immediately for what it is: an epic masterpiece.³² Pithy to the extreme, Mažuranić said everything he had to and wanted to say in 1,134 verses.³³ Unlike Gundulić's *Osman* which imitated *Jerusalem Delivered* in having a lot of imaginary diversions which

²⁹ Matija Mažuranić (1817-1851), "Pogled u Bosnu ili Kratak put u onu krajinu, učinjen 1839-40 po Jednom Domorođcu" in Ante Franić, *Hrvatski putopisi romantizma* (Zadar, 1983), the text on pp. 187-217.

³⁰ Živančević, *Ivan Mažuranić*, 196-198.

³¹ On the various editions and translations of Mažuranić's *Death of Smail-aga Čengić* see Ivan Brlić, "O izdanjima i prijevodima "Smrti Smail-age Čengića" *Gradja za povijest knjizevnosti hrvatske* 24 (Zagreb, 1953), 170-214, supplemented with Davor Kapetanović, "Bibliografija izdanja Smrti Smail-age Čengića, 1846-1968", an appendix to the photocopy edition by the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts [*Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti*](Zagreb, 1968), 151-183.

³² The most important commentaries are by: Karl Seeberger, *Čengić-Aga's Tod, übersetzt und erklärt in Programm des k.k. Staats-Obergymnasium zu Zengg* (Senj, 1863-64); Franjo Marković, "O Čengić-agi Ivana Mažuranića" in *Vienac* 50-52 (Zagreb, 1875); Vjekoslav Klaić, "Nesto o tehnici Čengić-age. I. O jeziku Čengić-age. II. O stihu i sroku. III. O ukrasih govora" in *Izvjescje o Kr. Velikoj gimnaziji* (Zagreb, 1874-75); P. A. Lavrov, *Petr II Petrovich Negosh* (Moscow, 1887), where an entire chapter is devoted to the work; Josip Pasarić, "Dva priloga k esteticnoj ocjeni Mažuranićeve epske pjesni Smrt Smail-age Čengića. 1) Pjesnik i umotvor njegov. 2) Pjesan Mažuranićeve prema esteticnoj nauci o epu. Analiza" in *Izvjescje Kr. vel. gimnazije* (Zagreb, 1888-89); id., "Elementi umjetne i narodne poezije u Mažuranićevoj epskoj pjesni 'Smrt Smail-age Čengića'" in *Izvjescje Kr. vel. gimnazije* (Zagreb, 1889-90); Tadija Smičiklas, *Ivan Mažuranić. Spomen-knjiga Matice hrvatske* (Zagreb, 1892), 96-137; Kerubin Šegvić, "Smrt Smail-age Čengića. Stvarni i estetični тумac" in *Program c. kr. Velikog gimnazija* (Kotor, 1893-94); Vladimir Mažuranić, *Pjesme Ivana Mažuranića* (Zagreb, 1895); Dragutin Prohaska, *Smrt Smail-age Čengića* (Belgrade, 1911); David Bogdanović, *Smrt Smail-age Čengića* (Zagreb, 1918); Đuro Grubor, *Komentar Smrti Smail-age Čengića* (Zagreb, 1923); Mladen Leskovac, *Smrt Smail-age Čengića* (Novi Sad, 1935); Savo Vukmanović, *Život i književni rad Ivana Mažuranića i teoriska obrada 'Smrt Smail-age Čengića'* (Nikšić-Berane, 1937); Antun Barac, *Mažuranić* (Zagreb, 1945); *Smrt Smail-age Čengića* (Belgrade, 1949/Zagreb, 1952); Slavko Jezić, *Ivan Mažuranić, Dimitrija Demeter, Djela* (Zagreb, 1958); Ivo Frangješ, *Smrt Smail-age Čengića* (Zagreb, 1965); Milorad Živančević, *Smrt Smail-age Čengića*, a critical edition published by Srpska književna zadruga (Belgrade, 1969).

³³ There are two English translations: *Smail-aga Čengić's Death*, translated by Charles A. Ward, with an essay on Ivan Mažuranić by Ivan Slamnig (Zagreb, 1969); and *The Death of Smail Aga by Ivan Mažuranić*, "rendered into English and dedicated to the Allied Forces on the Salonica Front by Capt. James W. Wiles" (Salonika, 1918), which calls it "a representative Serbian [sic] Poem". I am grateful to Dr. Alfred Vincent of the Modern Greek Department at the University of Sydney for procuring photocopies of these two translations.

echoed Tasso's advice to 'instruct by delight' [*giovare diletando*], Mažuranić eschewed everything non-essential. The epic is divided into five sections only: 1. *Agovanje* [Smail-aga's Display of Power]; 2. *Noćnik* [The Night Traveller]; 3. *Četa* [A Company]; 4. *Harač* [A Blood Tribute]; and 5. *Kob* [Fate]. Its story is short and simple but heroic and uplifting: Smail-aga's display of tyrannical behavior in Part I results in the accidental killing of his faithful servant whose son decides to avenge his father's death. The son, whose name is Novica, travels to Montenegro in secret by night, joins a company of disgruntled Montenegrins who have their accounts to settle with Smail-aga, and leads them back to the Turkish tents. In a night battle Smail-aga is killed and the Turks routed. The Montenegrin victory is celebrated as the dawn of freedom for the South Slavs.

It is quite clear even from such an incomplete account that Mažuranić's *Death of Smail-aga Čengić* shares the same theme with Gundulić's *Osman*: though the former deals with only one, rather local incident on the Christian-Turkish border of Europe, it does so in such heroic terms as to leave no doubt that it regards this incident as just a manifestation of the struggle of the Balkan Slavs for their freedom. Following Gundulić, Mažuranić 'tinkered' with historic truth: he made Novica the leader of the Montenegrin company when such a character was not really the son of Smail-aga's accidentally-killed servant, but a Montenegrin chieftain, Novica Cerović. Mažuranić did this in order to stress the ethical aspect of this struggle: to suggest that every evil act, no matter how petty and local in world terms, was the root cause of suffering and injustice, and had to be avenged.³⁴ Mažuranić endowed his epic with a very strong moral sense reminiscent of Gundulić's *Osman*.

Though his epic sings of an event reminiscent of South Slavic oral poetry of the bards [*guslari*], Mažuranić did not pattern his diction on that of the folk poetry. He did not use the obligatory decasyllabic verse [*deseterac*], but the somewhat shorter nine-syllable verse, though the former was used in some parts of his epic. His language is much closer to Gundulić's than to that of the bards. And he chose to restate powerfully the great moral lesson that permeates all of Gundulić's *Osman*: the wheel of Fortune [*kolo od sreće*] which makes short all tyranny, and brings down all the unjust empires of the world. While Gundulić placed this theme at the very opening of his *Osman*, and then repeated it emphatically at its

³⁴ The theme of revenge is central to both Gundulić and Mažuranić. It is deeply rooted in the mentality and culture of the Balkan Slavs. See Christopher Boehm, *Blood Revenge: The Enactment and Management of Conflict in Montenegro and Other Tribal Societies* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1984). The 'loss of face' which is at the root of blood revenge is also dealt with in Traian Stoianovich, *A Study in Balkan Civilization* (New York, 1967).

very end, Mažuranić devoted the short but crucial Section V to this motif at the end of his epic, after the action itself had been completed. Gundulić's Wheel of Fortune is presented thus:

Ah, what dost thou boast of,
O vain human Arrogance?
The more thy spreadest thy wings,
The lower wilt thou fall!

Eternal and without end
There is no thing under the sun,
And the highest mountain peaks
Are the likeliest targets of thunderbolts.

Without Divine Help from Heaven
The state of the World is rendered unstable:
Mighty and powerful empires
Are torn apart by themselves.

The Wheel of Fortune circling around
Does not stop in its revolutions:
Who was up, is turned down,
And who was down, is lifted up.

Sometimes the crown hangs over the sword,
Sometimes the sword comes down on the crown,
Soemetimes a slave is lifted over an empire,
And who was an emperor becomes a slave.³⁵

The theme of the Wheel of Fortune is restated in Canto XX, *Osman's* last, with a devastating effect:

Ah, O Emperor Osman, where are
Thy war horses, on which in glory,
Thou rode to the nether lands
Of Poland last summer?

Where is thy Imperial sabre,
Beautifully decorated,
Where is the obedience of faithful masses,
Over whom thou wast master alone?

Where are thy honors, where are thy praises,
That have made thee glorious hitherto?

³⁵ Đ. Gundulić, *Osman* (The Academy Edition, Zagreb, 1938), I, 1-20 (Roman numerals stand for cantos, Arabic for verses). All translations are mine. Copyright 1989, 1993 by Zdenko Zlatar. All rights reserved.

Have all so suddenly vanished?
Have all left thee all alone?

Ah, thus Fortune spins around
Its own Wheel! The Emperor,
Under whose feet multitudes
Of Peoples are subjected -

The Emperor, whose single word
Is Law to the entire East,
Who stood on high in the middle
Of gaudy and gay palaces;

Whose wishes, whose plans
Found the World too narrow,
His own servants now hem him in,
And he is trampled underfoot by his own slave.

O learn from this, ye arrogant men,
Who live this life without fear,
That nothing is so strong
That cannot fall in an instant.³⁶

This theme finds its echo in Part V [Fate, *Kob*] of Mažuranić's epic:

Mt. Lovćen rises up under the sky,
Nearby it a field spreads out.
In the field is a hermit's hovel,
And in the hovel one small room.
In that room they show a marvelous marvel:
A mad Turk as he prays to a cross.
The Turk stands beautifully dressed
With a turban and with a sharp sword,
And with a rifle and with a fierce knife:
Fear seizes you, he might cut you down.
But don't be afraid, dear brothers:
The Turk is gentle, he will not cut you down;
The Turk is humble, it is easy to scare him.
Just strike the earth with your foot,
To have him humbly cross his arms,
Cross his arms and bend his hand;
And even raise his right hand to his face
And then to the top of his brow.
Come up again, and guess for me, brother,
Whose proud turban is this?--
'That is the turban of aga Cengiđ,
But it winds mournfully around the head.'

³⁶ *Ibid.*, XX, 57-60, 69-88, 93-96.

Whose head is this, brother?--
 'That is the head of aga Čengić,
 But from it lightless eyes peer out.'
 Whose well-forged sabre is this?--
 'That's the sabre of aga Čengić,
 But it hangs cheerlessly by his thigh.'
 Whose golden weapons are these?--
 'Those are the weapons of aga Čengić,
 But they are rusting by his belt in peace.'
 Whose golden clothing is this?--
 'That is the clothing of aga Čengić,
 But it, sad one, will not reflect the sun!'³⁷

As Ivan Slamnig puts it, "Mažuranić's characterization is most akin to that of Gundulić in his epic of the Catholic revival in which human nature is subject to the basic transcendental order of the powers of good and evil and the individual is not allowed to develop his personality outside the limits set by God".³⁸ And the limits are set by God to every empire no matter how great, and to every tyranny, no matter how widespread: it is this belief in the Wheel of Fortune, in the power of Fate, that unites Mažuranić and Gundulić on a moral plane.

But they are also united on another stage as well: that of History. Both Gundulić and Mažuranić wrote their epics to glorify the struggle of their fellow Slavs against Ottoman tyranny. Gundulić wrote his when the Ottoman Empire still stood grand and imposing, Mažuranić wrote his during the twilight of that decaying edifice. It is more than likely that Mažuranić derived his poetic inspiration to write an epic on the fate of his fellow South Slavs under the 'Turk' from Gundulić's *Osman*.³⁹ He composed his own Slavic epic to rival and perhaps surpass that of Gundulić. No one expected such a remarkable epic poem to emerge from nineteenth-century Croatia. There were even rumors then and later in Serbian literary circles that *The Death of Smail-aga Čengić* was not written by a Croatian provincial solicitor, later the first commoner to become the Ban or Viceroy of Croatia, but by the Prince-Bishop [*Vladika*]

³⁷ *Smail-Aga Čengić' Death*, translated by Charles A. Ward (Zagreb, 1969), 34.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁹ Scholars have denied that Mažuranić was inspired by contemporary oral songs on Smail-aga Čengić's death; see Ljudevit Jonke, "Mažuranićev ep i narodne pjesme koje pjevaju o smrti Smail-aginjoj" *Rad JAZU* 264 (Zagreb, 1938), 97-122; Felicitasa Mokrenski, "Pjesme o smrti Smail-age Čengića" in *Prilozi proučavanju narodne poezije* 11/2 (Belgrade, 1935), 184-206. Smail-aga Čengić was recorded as a hero in Bosnian Muslim oral songs: Kosta Herman, (ed.), *Narodne pjesme muhamedovaca* (Sarajevo, 1888-1889). Živančević, however, has uncovered that some were published before the publication of Mažuranić's epic poem, and he has argued that many of them were already 'alive', i.e. circulating orally before they were actually published.

of Montenegro, Peter II Petrovich-Njegoš (1813-1851)⁴⁰, another great poet of the South Slavs⁴¹, and the author of a superb epic poem, *The Mountain Wreath* [*Gorski vijenac*]⁴². These rumors were only unjust slander⁴³: there is a preserved autograph in Mažuranić's own handwriting.⁴⁴ But rumors did confirm something else: nothing prepares us for a masterpiece.

⁴⁰ On Njegoš see Milovan Djilas, *Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop*, translated by Michael B. Petrovich (Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1966). This is a somewhat romanticized, but very incisive study of the great Montenegrin.

⁴¹ The bibliography on Njegoš is very extensive. Here is a brief selection: Michael Aubin, *Visions historiques et politiques dans l'oeuvre poetique P.P. Njegoš* (Paris, 1974); Jovan Deretić, *Kompozicija Gorskog vijenca* (Belgrade, 1969); Vera Javarek, "Petar Petrovich Njegoš (1813-1851)" *The Slavonic and East European Review* 30 (1952), 514-530; Vido Latković, *Petar Petrovich Njegoš* (Belgrade, 1963); Vojislav Nikčević, *Mladi Njegos: Pjesnikovi putevi ka sintezi* (Cetinje, 1978); Miodrag Popović, "Petar II Petrovic Njegoš" in his *Istorija srpske njizevnosti: Romantizam* (Belgrade, 1978), 201-318; Žika Rad Prvulović, *The Religious Philosophy of Prince-Bishop Njegoš of Montenegro (1813-1851)* (Birmingham, 1984); Alois Schmaus, *Njegoševa Luca mikrokozma* (Belgrade, 1927); Isidora Sekulić, *Njegošu: Knjiga duboke odanosti* (Belgrade, 1951); Nikolaj Velimirović, *Religija Njegoseva* (Belgrade, 1911).

⁴² For the English translation see P.P. Njegoš, *The Mountain Wreath*, translated and edited by Vasa D. Mihailovich (Charles Schlacks Jr., Publisher, Irvine, California, 1986).

⁴³ Selections from the literary debate are found in Ivan Krtalic, (ed.), *Tko je napisao "Smrt Smilgge Čengića"* in *Polemike u hrvatskoj književnosti*, 2nd Series, Vol. VI (Zagreb, 1983). See Milorad Živančević, "Njegoš i Mažuranić" in *Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor* 29 (Belgrade, 1963), 299-303.

⁴⁴ The autograph is in the National and University Library [*Nacionalna i sveučilišna biblioteka*] in Zagreb, *signatura* R 4092. It is listed in *Ivan Mažuranić: Ban Pučanin* (Povijesni muzej Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1990), #33, p. 71.