

The Dark Side in Njegoš and Milton

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Of all the characters in European literature, that of Satan is perhaps the most problematic. He is evil personified; rebellious and proud, powerful and impotent, deceiver and deceived. Any writer attempting to portray his revolt as a meaningful threat to God's rule runs a very serious risk of downplaying the omnipotence of the deity himself, and of falling rapidly into religious (that is: ethical) dualism. This article seeks to examine the dark side in two such epic poems from two different ages and religious traditions, taking a comparative approach in the hope of shedding some light on two ostensibly similar stories.

Despite the accusation of a number of critics that Njegoš's *Luča Mikrokozma* ('The Ray of the Microcosm') is simply an unoriginal imitation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*,¹ what one finds in the *Luča* is not 'Milton-with-a-gusle',² but rather a highly original Montenegrin poet, owing debts to no one and everyone, and conveying a systematic³ – albeit confusing – religious dualism more akin to Origenism, Bogomilism, or German Idealism, than to a slightly heretical seventeenth-century Puritan. Taking a comparative approach to these two poems reveals the uniqueness of Njegoš's style and of his methods of adapting existing ideas and motifs to his religious philosophy, which is quintessentially Slavic rather than occidental in its preoccupations and influences. It also reveals a rarely discussed side of Milton, and highlights *his* creative responses to the age-old problem of evil.

1 This view has been argued by such critics as Svetislav Vulović, Pëtr Alekseevich Lavrov, Jasa Prodanović, Milan Resetar and Jovan Skerlić. Noted in Milovan Djilas, *Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop*, trans. Michael B. Petrovich, (New York, 1966) p266. Unfortunately, none of the works mentioned are available in English.

2 A *gusle* is a one-stringed fiddle, with which most Yugoslav epic poetry is accompanied. Harry Levin, 'Preface', in Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, (Cambridge, Mass., 2000) p xxxii.

3 Despite suggestions by such scholars as Prvulović that 'strictly speaking, there is no system of thought in Njegoš' (Žika Rad. Prvulović, 'Njegoš's Dialectical Idealism,' *Journal of Theological Studies*, 7 (1) 1956, p59), it is assumed in this essay, following Djilas, *op cit*, p298, that Njegoš's religious philosophy is at least consistent and can therefore be treated as if it were a system.

Influences on Njegoš

The fundamental problem encountered when one first begins to search for influences on the poetry of Petar Petrović Njegoš (c.1813-1851) is that it is extremely difficult to know what he read, as not only was much of his library and correspondence destroyed, but the surviving library has seen so many additions that it is not possible to know which books actually belonged to our poet.¹

Njegoš was largely self-educated, and, in addition to his native Serbo-Croatian, he spoke Russian, French and Italian, with a slight knowledge of German.² Although Njegoš's own copy has been lost, he read Milton either in French³ or in Russian;⁴ his *Notebooks* reveal a close knowledge of Lamartine, Victor Hugo, Homer, and the *Tale of the Host of Igor*;⁵ and from his dedication in the *Luca*, he undoubtedly also knew the poetry of the 'Serbian singer,' his tutor Sima Milutinović-Sarajlija.⁶ Beyond this, few links can be established with certainty between Njegoš and other textual sources, although few would dispute that he at least also knew Plato, Origen, Dante, Gundulić, Mažuranić, and the Slovak writer, L'udevít Štúr, to whom he addressed some of his verse.⁷ His knowledge of Serbian history is excellent; that of the natural sciences was fairly limited;⁸ and his role as bishop would have required a reasonable understanding of Christian doctrine and liturgy. Most historians assume that he knew of recent philosophical developments only through general textbooks, as well as from journals such as the *Srbski narodni list*, to which he himself contributed.⁹ Savić-Rebac has maintained convincingly, however, that many of Njegoš's ideas came to him through oral sources and folk traditions, and as such cannot be linked to any particular text.¹⁰ John Shawcross suggests that

¹ Anica Savić-Rebac, 'Introduction,' *Harvard Slavic Studies*, 3, 1957, p114.

² Djilas, *op cit*, pp45-6.

³ Savić-Rebac, *op cit*, p114.

⁴ Vera Javarek, 'Petar Petrović Njegoš (1813-1851)', *Seer*, 30 (75), 1952, p316.

⁵ Djilas, *op cit*, p46.

⁶ Petar Petrović Njegoš, *The Ray of the Microcosm*, 1-2, trans. Anica Savić-Rebac, *Harvard Slavic Studies*, 3, 1957, p151.

⁷ Savić-Rebac, *op cit*, p110.

⁸ Djilas, *op cit*, pp46-7.

⁹ *Ibid*, p271.

¹⁰ Savić-Rebac, *op cit*, pp117, 124, 126, and especially pp142-3.

there are two basic ways to approach literary debts: one external through allusions and demonstrable knowledge of one author by another, and one internal through verbal, contextual, or structural reminiscences, if not downright quotation or adaptation.¹

Njegoš very rarely alludes directly to other writers by name,² and generally uses ideas rather than specific motifs taken from earlier works, always giving his own spin to any given idea, at times rendering it almost unidentifiable. Despite this difficulty, it is Njegoš's intellectual borrowings that will most concern us here as it is here that he is at his most original and most exciting. Each of his ideas can be found in numerous sources, however, making it impossible to pinpoint one source for any particular concept. Verbal reminiscences are also difficult because of the problem of translation; even the most direct quote can be unrecognizable when translated from English to Russian to Serbo-Croatian.

So, it is structural reminiscences which provide the most easily accessible means of locating Njegoš's influences, although these too are confused and idiosyncratic. The narrative of the poem takes the form of the soul's journey to heaven with the help of a spirit-guide: the ray of flame immortal; ... [through whom] thou rememberest still what thou hast lost.³

The most obvious allusion here is to Dante's *Paradiso* where Beatrice guides Dante through ten heavens to the throne-room of God, just as Njegoš's ray, and then his guardian angel, takes him through seven heavens until they reach the 'region of light',⁴ where he sees the 'throne sustaining mount',⁵ which almost resembles Dante's 'rose',⁶ except that it is composed of rubies and adamant rather than the thrones of saints, and consequently probably owes

¹ John T. Shawcross, *John Milton and Influence: Presence in Literature, History and Culture*, (Pittsburgh, 1991) p5.

² The only exceptions in the *Luča* are Sarajlija (1-2, 165), Pythagoras and Epicurus (137).

³ Njegoš, *op cit*, I.214-216, p157.

⁴ *Ibid*, II.495, p164.

⁵ *Ibid*, II.571-580, p166.

⁶ Dante, *Paradiso*, Cantos XXX-XXXIII, trans. Mark Musa, (Bloomington, 1984) pp352-94.

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more to the popular motif of the sacred mountain, found in religious traditions worldwide,¹ than to Dante's vision.

However, the *Paradiso* is far from being the only literary example of a spirit-journey to heaven. Particularly notable alternatives that Njegoš is likely to have known include the *Revelation of St. John* where the apostle is taken to heaven with an angelic guide and given a revelation of past and future events;² and the *Celestial Hierarchies* of pseudo-Dionysius, upon whom Dante based much of his structure.³ Another highly significant alternative is the first-century Gnostic text, *The Vision of Isaiah*, popular with the Bogomils of medieval Serbia, in which Isaiah is taken through seven heavens by an angel and shown the angels' war with Satan.⁴

Njegoš and Milton

While these texts provide structural reminiscences for Cantos I and II of the *Luca*, they contain nothing like the narrative of the Fall contained in Cantos III-VI, and here Njegoš clearly looks to John Milton for inspiration. Both poets begin at a point chronologically late in the narrative and use visions and retellings to relate earlier events.⁵ Both relate a similar narrative based on Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 12:7-9, although Milton places much more emphasis on the Garden of Eden story than does Njegoš. Both also work within the tradition of the 'Christian epic' and display all its conventions: a cosmic scope, long speeches, a great battle, and a salvific action dependent upon submission to the divine will. This epic tradition, which in its pagan form can be traced back to Homer and Virgil, usually contains, according to Joseph Campbell, a cyclical formula, in which

a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back

¹ For a general overview of the sacred mountain motif, see Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask, (New York 1959) pp12-17.

² Revelation 1:9-13, 4:1-6. All biblical citations and quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, (New Jersey, 1978).

³ Mother Alexandra, *The Holy Angels*, (Minneapolis, 1987) p155.

⁴ Reprinted and translated in Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, (New York, 1991) pp449-58.

⁵ Javarek, *op cit*, p520.

from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.¹

This formula is much clearer in Njegoš than in Milton, but certainly places the *Luca* in the epic tradition of which Milton was also a part.

Important too is the use that both make of traditional models. Demaray argues that Milton was revolutionary in his merging of traditional iconographic typology, based on Biblical and pilgrimage models, with 'original methods of empirical depiction learned from the literature of discovery'.² Milton abandons medieval models not only in his use of geography and journeys, as Demaray demonstrates, but also by his introduction of original theological speculation, passing beyond established theology with his emphases on Arminianism,³ the annihilation of evil,⁴ and some heretical angelology.⁵ Milton's boldness is imitated by Njegoš whose purpose in writing the *Luca* is more the exposition of his own metaphysical speculations than the traditional purpose of the Christian epic, which was to provide an imitation of an action noble, great and perfect, narrated in the loftiest verse, with the aim of giving profit through delight,⁶ although this traditional purpose is also present in his poem.

If both use and abuse traditional structures and models in their poetry, then Njegoš and Milton also utilize similar poetic techniques, having 'a striking similarity of tone and sense'.⁷ although not to an extent that could suggest a reliance of one upon the other. Both use a ten-syllable formula, but while Milton's verse is in iambic pentameter, Njegoš uses the trochaic pentameter typical of Yugoslav folk ballads.⁸ Yet even here Njegoš asserts his

¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (1949); quoted in Zdenko Zlatar, *The Slavic Epic: Gundulić's Osman*, (New York, 1995), p290.

² John G. Demaray, *Cosmos and Epic Representation: Dante, Spenser, Milton and the Transformation of Renaissance Heroic Poetry*, (Pittsburgh, 1991) pp6, 183.

³ Dennis Richard Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy*, (Cambridge, 1982) p82.

⁴ Leonora Leet Brodwin, 'The Dissolution of Satan in *Paradise Lost*: A Study of Milton's Heretical Eschatology,' in James D. Simmonds (ed.), *Milton Studies VIII*, (Pittsburgh, 1975) p166.

⁵ Robert H. West, *Milton and the Angels*, (Athens, Georgia, 1955) pp162-7.

⁶ Torquato Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, [1594], p14; quoted in Zdenko Zlatar, *Slavic Epic*, p136.

⁷ Javarek, *op cit*, p521.

⁸ *Ibid*, p520.

individuality, frequently placing the stress on the ninth syllable, whereas decasyllabic line trochaic meters usually predominate in the folk tradition. The effect of this is that the *Luća* is far more amenable to recitation than to singing,¹ suggesting that Njegoš ought to be considered a literary rather than an oral poet. Albert Lord argues that Njegoš was psychologically out of the oral tradition of composition and, as such, uses unique formulas and lines rather than relying on the multiform patterns of traditional singers.² This brings him closer to Milton than to the folk tradition with which he was familiar.

For the primary characters in his drama, however, Njegoš looks to his Montenegrin roots rather than to Milton, in whose narrative Raphael and Uriel play dominant roles, possibly due to Milton's unusual interest in the book of *Tobit*.³ As is typical of Orthodox angelology, Njegoš relies completely upon Michael and Gabriel, who were equal in rank to Satan before his fall,⁴ to act as the opposites of Satan, rather than placing Christ himself in this role. This is a defining feature of Bogomilism,⁵ one of the many traditions that appear to have influenced Njegoš. Eve is also very prominent in Milton's narrative, while Njegoš, once again revealing a Bogomil influence, which was very negative towards the feminine, reproduction and fornication, accords her a mere two lines.⁶

Justifying Satan

¹ Djilas, *op cit*, p330.

² Lord, *op cit*, pp132-133.

³ This unusual interest of Milton's is possibly also the reason for his replacing Gabriel with Raphael as the Hermes-like messenger to mankind. See Beverley Sherry, 'Milton's Raphael and the Legend of Tobias' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 1979, pp78, 230.

⁴ Njegoš, *op cit*, III.906, p175. For more on this convention in Orthodox angelology see Cyril Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome*, (London, 1980) p154.

⁵ Zdenko Zlatar, 'Archangel Michael and the Dragon: Slavic Apocrypha, Bogomilism, and Dualist Cosmology in the Medieval Balkans' *Encyclopaedia moderna*, 2 (38), 1992, p267.

⁶ On Bogomil attitudes toward the feminine and the corporeal, see especially Euthymius Zigabenus, *Dogmatic Panoply*, p25; reprinted and translated in Janet Hamilton and Bernard Hamilton, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World c.650-c.1405*, (Manchester, 1998) p194.

One presumes that Njegos also follows the rule established by Milton that the true speak truth and the false speak falsely,¹ although the essential falsehood of Satan's speeches are never demonstrated by either poet apart from the fact that his speeches lead him to destruction and hence must be fallible. This ambiguity makes for certain difficulties, since in both poems Satan makes 'revelations' which undermine the legitimacy of God's rule. Now, while criticism of God is necessary to Milton's theodical purpose, it is never fully resolved for God is not given the right of reply or clarification. Milton's ambiguity (or perhaps, more correctly, his silence) forms the basis of the thesis, first argued by Shelley and more recently by William Empson, that Milton's God is a forceful usurping tyrant who places Satan in an unbearable situation since he, God, whom [Satan's] *reason* hath equaled, [his own bullying] *force* hath made supreme above his equals.²

Satan argues that in Hell he and his angels (now demons) have perished 'as far as gods and Heavenly essences can perish' and are not really creatures since 'we know no time when we were not as now'.³ So, with no evidence of creation, it is thus only logical to assume that angels are 'self-begot [and] self-raised by our own quickening power'.⁴ If they can fight God for one day, then 'why not eternal days?':⁵ God cannot defeat them, meaning that he is now 'fallible, it seems, of future we must deem him, though till now omniscient thought'⁶ and a fallible God is, of course, not God at all. Satan seeks to claim his 'just inheritance of old';⁷ that is: from the time before God overthrew a more democratic order based on 'reason' so as to impose his own tyrannical rule. At times, God's own words even seem to affirm Satan's accusations. He says of Satan that, 'no bounds prescribed, no bars of Hell, nor all the chains heaped on him there, nor yet the main Abyss wide interrupt, can hold [him]',⁸ and, moreover, he fears 'lest unawares we lost this our high place, our Sanctuary, our Hill'⁹ thus implying that not even

¹ William Empson, *Milton's God*, (Cambridge, 1981) p22.

² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I.248-249, A. W. Verity (ed.), vol. 1, (Cambridge, 1934) p16; my italics.

³ *Ibid*, I.138-139; p13.

⁴ *Ibid*, V.859-861; p159.

⁵ *Ibid*, VI.424; p176.

⁶ *Ibid*, VI.428-430; p176.

⁷ *Ibid*, II.38; p38.

⁸ *Ibid*, III.81-84; p75.

⁹ *Ibid*, V.731-732; p155.

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God himself regards his 'high place', his sovereignty, as his natural right, but instead sees it as tenuous and as something that has to be tenaciously fought for and maintained.

Shelley considered that in alleging 'no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil', Milton had violated the 'popular creed',¹ although C. S. Lewis dryly noted that the 'truth and passion' of Milton's account 'were never, in essence, assailed till pride and rebellion came, in the romantic age, to be admired for their own sake'.²

The question for us then is whether Njegoš's reading of Milton comes closer to that of Shelley or Lewis. Njegoš certainly knew of the Romantic movement through the works of Hugo, Lamartine and Byron,³ and it is not improbable that he had access to Shelley. A revealing passage from *Stephen the Small* suggests that Njegoš, in keeping with more Romantic ideals, admired rebellion, whatever its cost.

All in vain, if we were burning candle,
Still we never could be any other
Toward the foe of our true faith and freedom,
Let us rather strike the foe of freedom,
While there still is breath in any of us,
Who shall die, in glory shall he perish.⁴

Here, the warriors are fighting *with* God against tyranny, and for their nation, but it takes only a little imaginative empathy to move from Stephen's to Satan's position.

The history of Montenegro is that of the struggle for freedom against Turkish rule, just as Satan struggles, in Njegoš's particularly revealing turn of phrase, 'to enjoy the gift of *equal rights*'.⁵ Certainly, Njegoš portrays Satan as a monarch⁶ whose reign is a real threat to God's.⁷ Satan claims to be uncreated – merely woken 'from everlasting sleep'⁸ – so as to fight for the restoration of a

¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*; quoted in Empson, *op cit*, p16.

² C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942); quoted in Empson, *op cit*, p19.

³ Savić-Rebac, *op cit*, pp132-3.

⁴ Njegoš, *Stephen the Small*; as quoted in Djilas, *op cit*, p385.

⁵ Njegoš, *op cit*, IV.1095, p180; my italics.

⁶ *Ibid*, I.424-429, p162.

⁷ *Ibid*, III.775-77, p172.

⁸ *Ibid*, IV.1069-1070, p180.

time when 'on every throne there sat a crowned prince'.¹ God is pictured as weak in Njegoš; we hear that the 'gloomy powers' once ruled everything except 'the sacred mount sublime',² and God at one point admits to his ignorance of Satan's future decisions³ – although as this expressed ignorance is a poetic device also used in Biblical texts,⁴ one can excuse Njegoš here.

Arguing this tenuous thesis for an affinity between Njegoš and Shelley, however, requires the assumption that Njegoš admired Satan, accepted the coherence of the accusations he levels against God in *Paradise Lost*, and, as a result, then made him the hero of his *Luca*. However, in the light of Satan's eternal punishment,⁵ and the endless praises addressed to God,⁶ this would seem unlikely.

Religious and Ethical Dualism

Njegoš's philosophical system goes far beyond even that of Milton's Satan, suggesting that Milton is not the source of Njegoš's dualism, although closer inspection reveals the similarities to be more than may appear at first glance. Both deny an *ex nihilo* creation, presenting God as a creator (Milton noted that the verb 'to create' implies 'to make of something'⁷) who fashioned the world out of formless primal matter,⁸ which was ethically neutral.⁹ Instead, both assume creation to be *ex deo*: Njegoš's God 'extends' himself as he creates,¹⁰ claiming that 'Myself am through myself, and nothing else can ever itself alone exist';¹¹ and Milton's God

¹ *Ibid*, IV.1110, p181.

² *Ibid*, III.785-791, p172.

³ *Ibid*, V.1339-1343, p187.

⁴ See, for example, Jeremiah 3:7, 19.

⁵ Njegoš, *op cit*, III.1006-1010, V.1600-1609, pp178, 194.

⁶ *Ibid*, III.760-767, 843-850, VI.1828-1845, pp171, 173-4, 200.

⁷ Milton, *De Doctrina*, pp305-6; as quoted in Danielson, *op cit*, p39.

⁸ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III.708, V.472-3 pp94, 147; Njegoš, *op cit*, IV.1041, VI.1763-1775, pp179, 194, 198.

⁹ On the ethical neutrality of Milton's prime matter, see Danielson, *op cit*, pp40-41. The ethical neutrality of primal matter in Njegoš is disputed among Slavacists, although in light of Njegoš's general conception of the nature of evil, discussed below, the argument of Djilas and Žika Rad. Prvulović that matter in itself is not evil seems fairly certain; see Žika Rad. Prvulović, 'Njegoš on the Origin of Evil' *Seer*, 32, 1954, p4; Djilas, *op cit*, p293.

¹⁰ Njegoš, *op cit*, III.807-808, pp172-3.

¹¹ *Ibid*, III.852-853, p174.

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‘produced all things not out of nothing but out of himself’.¹ This position requires Milton to posit an origin of evil outside of all created things, which come from God; and as he cannot claim that evil came from God, Milton is forced to limit God, who declares:

Within appointed bounds be Heaven and Earth;
Boundless the Deep, because I am who fill
Infinite; nor vacuous the space,
And put not forth my goodness, which is free
To act or not.²

Dennis Danielson summarizes the situation thus:

to allow the seeds of good to grow and bear fruit beyond himself, God had first to make a ‘beyond’. Moreover, if all this is conceived spatially, and if the ‘beyond’ is not to be surrounded by God, then it, like God, will be infinite. As God is its origin, however, no dualism follows.³

Njegoš’s ‘gloom’ is also separate from God, and is a product of events outside of his control, but, as shall be shown below, this does not require dualism *per se* (the negative connotations of which involve the product of sin occurring in time).

Satan ‘produced the spirit and the name of evil’,⁴ but not the bare fact of ‘gloom’, which has existed since the cataclysm that ‘destroyed the greatness of primeval heavens’.⁵ Presuming the historicity of the cataclysm described by Satan, any dualism here is mitigated at best,⁶ as God pre-dates the cataclysmic event that produced the ‘gloom’. Satan is the author of evil in Milton, and in Njegoš he transforms the singular undivided ‘gloom’ into a plurality of agents in active opposition to God. Milton’s Satan begets Sin and Death,⁷ whereas Njegoš’s Devil has merely ‘put on

¹ Milton, *De Doctrina*, p310; quoted in Danielson, *op cit*, p43.

² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, VII.168-172, p198.

³ Danielson, *op cit*, p48.

⁴ Njegoš, *op cit*, III.929, p176

⁵ *Ibid*, IV.1112, p181.

⁶ For classifications of religious dualism, see Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy*, (New Haven and London, 2000) pp4-5.

⁷ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II.749-789, pp 60-1.

Black garments',¹ thus subordinating himself to the dictates of the flesh.² Rather than begetting gloom, 'Satan's injustice has led out the black and evil world into the upper air'.³ Anica Savić-Rebac has argued that this 'emanatism' is a distinctive feature of Bogomilism, from which she believes Njegoš derived the idea,⁴ but Njegoš could just have easily arrived at this position himself reacting to nothing more than Milton's monism. When examining the co-eternity of evil, it must be remembered that neither poet's devil is completely evil: Milton's devil has initial misgivings⁵ and is almost melted by Eve's beauty,⁶ while Njegoš's Satan at least has sensibilities regarding a kind of quasi-nationalistic 'honour'.⁷

Evil, sin, death, and chaos in Milton are a result of disobedience. Raphael cautions prelapsarian man that 'God made thee perfect, not immutable'.⁸ Sin is the result of a conscious, free decision to disobey God.⁹ Milton specifies that Adam ate 'against his better knowledge, not deceiv'd'.¹⁰ Sin usually occurs in the intellectual realm; only Eve is prompted to sin by her sensual nature.¹¹ Duality in Milton exists initially between God and his creation, or between

¹ Njegoš, *op cit*, III.922-923, p176. This makes for some interesting resemblances with the Zurvanite devil, Ahriman who received a cloak that 'hath the very substance of A4z [that is: of evil]' (*Selections of Zātspram*, 34.35, text Z 5 (a); in R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, (New York, 1972, p351). Such a connection is not as tenuous as it may at first sound. Francis Dvornik makes a convincing case for the Iranian origins of many Slavic religious ideas, and Dragomanov demonstrates that Zurvanite ideas spread at least among the Kurds, if not further west; see Francis Dvornik, *The Slavs: Their Early History and Civilization*, Survey of Slavic Civilization, vol. 2, (Boston, 1959) pp47-9 and M. P. Dragomanov, *Notes on the Slavic Religio-Ethical Legends: The Dualistic Creation of the World*, trans. Earl W. Count, Russia and East European Series, vol. 23, (The Hague, 1961) pp52-6.

² Njegoš, *op cit*, III.947, p176.

³ *Ibid*, V.1369-1370, p188.

⁴ Savić-Rebac, *op cit*, pp126-7.

⁵ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I.126, IV.42-113, p13, 100-102.

⁶ *Ibid*, IV.388-392, p111.

⁷ Njegoš, *op cit*, V.1268, p185.

⁸ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, V.524, p149.

⁹ Vincent P. di Benedetto, 'Scripture's Constraint and Adam's Self-Authoring Freedom: A Reading of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*,' *Milton Quarterly*, 25 (1), 1991, p3. In relation to Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II.749-761, p60.

¹⁰ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IX.998, p267.

¹¹ *Ibid*, IX.784-793, p261.

God and the 'Deep' where 'God's goodness is not', and it is not until the Fall that, in R.A. Shoaf's words, the 'original dual with God was changed into a duel with God'.¹ Prior to Christ's action in casting Satan into the 'Deep',² this region was completely neutral in ethical terms. Milton may 'conceive of an absolute darkness and an absolute light,³ as Beverley Sherry suggests, but prior to the fall it was a duality completely under the control of the God who 'separated the light from the darkness'.⁴ Like Njegoš's 'gloom', this 'Deep' only gained negative connotations once it became Satan's resting-place from which he vowed to forever oppose God.⁵

In Njegoš, the angelic Adam and his host are described as having, even prior to the Fall, a 'credulous inconstant will and mind' which erodes their freewill, thus rendering their faculties incapable of choosing between good and evil.⁶ In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, angels, and prelapsarian humans subsist in the grace of God, their freedom lying in 'the power either to abide or to progress in goodness, or to turn towards evil'.⁷ But with his Western European understanding of human nature and will, Milton rejected this as determinist, arguing instead that 'good angels are upheld by their own strength no less than man himself was before his fall'.⁸ As a kind of compromise between these two positions, Njegoš adopts an occidental understanding of free will, but with a far more pessimistic view of human reason than Milton. He sees reason as fallen even prior to its being clothed in the 'garments of skin'⁹ which override reason by appealing to the 'fleshy' nature. Thus, original sin, for Njegoš, occurs in the noumenal realm, and is independent of matter, resulting as it does from a defect in angelic reasoning.

Rather than begetting evil, as Milton's sin does, in Njegoš' work sin 'vivifies' – for want of a better word – the 'gloom', marshalling

¹ R. A. Shoaf, *Milton: Poet of Duality*, (New Haven), p3.

² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, VI.864-874, p189.

³ Personal communication (email) with Dr Beverley Sherry, 3/11/2001.

⁴ Genesis 1:4.

⁵ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I.159-165, p14.

⁶ Njegoš, *op cit*, III.971, p177.

⁷ St. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk. II; as quoted in Mother Alexandra, *op cit*, p165.

⁸ Milton, *De Doctrina*, I.ix.98-99; quoted in West, *op cit*, p163.

⁹ Genesis 3:21. On the ramifications of being clothed in 'garments of skin,' see Panayiotis Nellis, *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person*, trans. Norman Russell, (Crestwood, New York, 1987) pp44-63.

it in opposition to God,¹ and creating a dualism that is anti-cosmic, but which does not pre-suppose matter to be evil purely in and of itself. Following the original cataclysm, matter existed in stasis, or as Njegos puts it, 'in heavy sleep under the clouds of chaos, buried in the depth of gloom'.² Its motion was 'senseless'³ in much the same way that movement in Dante's *Inferno* is.⁴ Matter was merely 'atoms only without form or aim, that neither name nor motion knew till then, nothing but frigid sleep and silence dead',⁵ and, as such, simply remained in a state of unmanifest potentiality which God could re-form and illuminate.⁶ Were matter itself evil, as some accounts of Njegos suggest,⁷ then it would clearly not praise God and welcome his victory over Satan as it does.⁸

Satan's great lie was that matter could 'be' by itself, that it had any value apart from the noumenal which could only come from God.⁹ For creative activity apart from God can only result in 'dead and woeful shapes'¹⁰ that are more transitory than real. Satan put matter on as a cloak and led it out, subjecting himself to its dictates. Evil, according to the Greek Fathers, results from an imbalance between the noumenal and the phenomenal, which leads to a dependence upon, and hence a state of being controlled by, the physical realm.¹¹ This is the paradigm through which Njegos explains the quandary in which humanity finds itself. When banishing Adam to earthly bondage, ironically trapping him in the very 'oozy chains of earthly bodies'¹² that Adam had himself coveted, God decrees that

On both sides

The tablet of his soul shall be engraved

¹ Njegos, *op cit*, V.1369-1370, p188.

² *Ibid*, III.779-780, p172, cf. III.820, IV.1069-1076, 1159, pp173, 180, 182.

³ *Ibid*, III.794, p172.

⁴ Christopher Ryan, 'The Theology of Dante,' in Rachel Jacoff (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, (Cambridge, 1993) pp143, 147.

⁵ Njegos, *op cit*, V.1526-1528, p192.

⁶ *Ibid*, I.414-420, III.773-780, IV.1041-1043, pp162, 172, 179.

⁷ See for example some conceptions cited by Djilas, *op cit*, p293.

⁸ Njegos, *op cit*, II.608-610, V.1526-1534, pp167, 192.

⁹ *Ibid*, I.250-252, III.852-853, pp158, 174.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, III.805, p172.

¹¹ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trend and Doctrinal Themes*, (New York, 1987) p135.

¹² Njegos, *op cit*, VI.1646-1647, p195.

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With two commandments of contrasting laws:
On one in sacred lines the mild command
Of justice, on the other side the mark
Of the seducer, drawn in features black,
The hellish token of Satanic bond.¹

To escape 'the embrace of the dark power'² is clearly the goal of mankind in the *Luca*, and the Incarnation provides the means to do so: Christ came to 'illuminate with the immortal law of sacred justice their obscured mind',³ so that humanity could transcend its bondage within the flesh and return to the immortal light. A rare passage in *Paradise Lost* has Raphael arguing this same outcome:

Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,
Improv'd by tract of time, and wing'd ascend
Ethereal, as we...⁴

However, bearing in mind Milton's well-known emphasis on the essential unity of body and soul,⁵ it is difficult to know what to make of this passage.

Dualism is incompatible with orthodox understandings of the Incarnation, which suggest that God is so like man that he became man.⁶ For the sake of logical consistency, Njegoš's Christ must be Apollinarian; he is simply the 'beloved Word, arrayed in cloth of human flesh'.⁷ Thus, the origins of this dualistic (in the spirit/flesh sense) of Njegoš's soteriology can more easily be traced to Eastern sources such as Plato and Origen; it is clearly not derived from this single exceptional instance of Milton's suggestion that 'Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit'.

Pre-Existence and Rays of Flame Immortal

¹ *Ibid*, VI.1689-161694, p196. cf. I.76-82, p153.

² *Ibid*, I.237, p157.

³ *Ibid*, VI.1732-1733, p197.

⁴ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, V.497-499, p148.

⁵ Milton, *De Doctrina*, 1.7; quoted in Shoaf, *op cit*, p3.

⁶ R.A Shoaf, *op cit*, p7.

⁷ Njegoš, *op cit*, VI.1729-1730, p197. On Apollinarianism, see Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church*, Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, Mass. 1988) pp163-5.

The Dark Side

The central difference between Njegoš and Milton lies in Njegoš's conception of pre-existence which provides him with the framework for speaking of the 'two commandments', or, as Dubbink suggests, the two 'minds', *um* and *hitrost*, the former being the philosophical mind and the latter 'the mind of men living in the world'.¹ This idea found its earliest expression in the modern period in Henry More's *The Immortality of the Soule* (1659),² although there is no evidence that Njegoš was aware of any of the work of the Cambridge Platonists. Amongst his relative contemporaries, though, ideas about pre-existence were held by the German poet Friedrich Klopstock (1724-1803),³ and the Russian theosophist Vladimir Odoevsky (1803-1869) also taught similar doctrines regarding free human spirits being trapped in matter as a consequence of the Fall.⁴ At least as significant is the discovery of a copy of Dumont d'Urville's voyages in Njegoš's library, which contains Eastern teachings on pre-existence and the physical world as 'punishment'.⁵

Njegoš had a penchant for ancient authorities, however, so it is likely that he may have looked to Plato and other Orphic myths for these ideas, which permeate his poem completely. Certain Orphic myths contain the concept of a pre-Creation cataclysm,⁶ which is absent from most other literature aside from some obscure speculation on Genesis 1:2.⁷ A number of Platonic texts also

¹ J. H. Dubbink, 'Some Contributions to a Future Commentary on the *Luča Mikrokosma* of P. P. Njegoš,' *Dutch Contributions to the Fifth International Congress of Slavists*, (Sofia, 1963) p22.

² Robert H. West, *op cit*, p84.

³ Djilas, *op cit*, p269.

⁴ Andrej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought From the Enlightenment to Marxism*, (Stanford, 1979) p78.

⁵ Djilas, *op cit*, p269.

⁶ The textual sources for myths containing this motif are Euripides' *Melanippe*, Apollonios Rhodios' *Argonautica* (I.496-511) and the *Rhapsodic Theogony*. Larry J Alderink, *Creation and Salvation in Ancient Orphism*, (Chico, California, 1981) pp38, 42. Following Savić-Rebac, *op cit*, pp 124-5, it is likely that Njegoš used Orphic ideas that came to him through *non-literary* avenues, however.

⁷ An alternative translation of this text is 'now the earth *became* formless and void' which could give rise to speculation of a pre-creation cataclysm, but this would seem too insufficient to be counted as a likely source considering how well-developed the concept is in Njegoš.

contain the idea of the body as a 'tomb' or 'prison' of the soul,¹ but as this image is also found in Dante and Hugo,² one wonders how important Plato was for Njegoš. However, later than Plato, and probably more important for Njegoš, was Origen, in whom many of these ideas were united. Origen taught the successive destruction of previous worlds,³ the pre-existence and transmigration of souls,⁴ the final salvation of all spirits,⁵ guardian angels,⁶ and *creation ex deo*;⁷ and his clarity and scope makes him an ideal source for Njegoš, who made use of a large number of his ideas.

The other important motif in Njegoš which has no parallel in Milton is that of the 'ray of flame immortal',⁸ which is the angelic soul trapped in a human body, and which, in its transcendent form, becomes Njegoš's guide through the heavens. Javarek describes this ray as simply being the human mind.⁹ However, the Ray refers to itself as 'the bright idea',¹⁰ thus immediately evoking the Zoroastrian image of *Fravashi*, which in one sense were the departed souls of heroes, able to assist the living, and in another sense were the heavenly 'ideas' of things on earth, recalling the notion of Platonic forms.¹¹ Dante describes Beatrice too as being 'like a ray'¹² which draws him toward heaven, and which emanates from God.¹³ Similar images are also contained in pseudo-Dionysius,¹⁴ Sarajlija's poetry,¹⁵ and Mani's *Kephalaia*,¹⁶ so it is

¹ Plato, *Cratylus*, 400c; *Gorgias*, 493a; *Phaedo* 62b quoted in Alderink, *op cit*, pp60-2.

² Savić-Rebac, *op cit*, p122. cf. Dante, *op cit*, IV.49-56, pp44-45.

³ Origen, *Origen on First Principles*, II.3.1-7, trans. G. W. Butterworth, (New York, 1966) pp82-94.

⁴ *Ibid*, I.4.1, II.8.1-3, pp40, 120-127.

⁵ *Ibid*, II.10.5-8, pp 142-6. Compare to Njegoš, *op cit*, III.809-810-836, p173; which is possibly denied by III.1008-1010, p178.

⁶ Origen, *op cit*, I.5.1, p42. Compare to Njegoš, *op cit*, I.335-338, p160.

⁷ Origen, *op cit*, II.1.4, p80.

⁸ Njegoš, *op cit*, I.215-216, p157.

⁹ Javarek, *op cit*, p524.

¹⁰ Njegoš, *op cit*, I.261, p158.

¹¹ Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism: The Early Period*, vol. 1, (Leiden, 1989 revised edition) pp118-29.

¹² Dante, *op cit*, I.51, p3.

¹³ *Ibid*, VII.70-78, p84.

¹⁴ Mother Alexandra, *op cit*, pp157-8.

¹⁵ Djilas, *op cit*, p271.

¹⁶ Savić-Rebac, *op cit*, p130.

impossible to highlight a single source as Njegoš's primary inspiration for this concept.

One notable element of the Ray's role that is missing from these sources, however, is that it is through the Ray 'that thou rememberest still what thou hast lost',¹ which is a notion that strongly recalls the figure of the spirit guide in the Cathar text *Liber supra Stella*.² Savić-Rebac supposes that Njegoš might have learnt about Bogomil ideas – and presumably Cathar doctrines as well – from the German scholar Kopitar, with whom he spent two months in 1844,³ but the connection remains speculative at best.

Connected with the Ray is the question of Njegoš's idealism. Both Djilas and Prvulović label Njegoš an 'idealist',⁴ although Djilas concludes that Njegoš could not have had any contact with modern philosophy, for he proceeded from inspirations and myths and, of course, his own personal experiences, and not from the attainments of scholarship.⁵

Dubbink agrees that Njegoš draws upon idealist concepts, but argues that 'Njegoš, in his solitude and illness, experiences the physical world in which he had to play a role for his country as the most real thing',⁶ rather than considering the ideal as being more real than the physical, as Plato, for instance, did. However, while Njegoš's pessimism may indeed dwell on the physical rather than the spiritual, nonetheless God's action in depriving 'belling Adam and his legion of every thought of their *celestial home*, the slightest shadow of that *memory*',⁷ would seem to indicate that Njegoš does conceive of an ideal (and, what's more, originary) realm that he cannot see, even when experience belies that fact.

A comparison with Milton reveals just how strongly Njegoš was in fact influenced by Kantian idealism. Milton's narrative occurs on earth, with constant references to the phenomenological world. Knowledge is always empirical, and salvation occurs in and through the body; in short, Milton is a materialist.⁸ Njegoš's poem, however,

¹ Njegoš, *op cit*, I.216, p157.

² Savić-Rebac, *op cit*, p130.

³ *Ibid*, p126.

⁴ Djilas, *op cit*, p293; Prvulović, 'Dialectical Idealism, ' p64.

⁵ Djilas, *op cit*, p293.

⁶ Dubbink, *op cit*, p24.

⁷ Njegoš, *op cit*, VI.1638-1641, p195; my italics for emphasis.

⁸ Savić-Rebac, *op cit*, p123.

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is situated almost exclusively in heaven,¹ and salvation occurs by following 'the immortal law of sacred justice'.² Compare this to Kant's conviction that

the essence of things is not changed by their external relations... [and] morality is the relation of actions to the autonomy of the will, i.e., to possible universal lawgiving by maxims of the will.³

For Milton, as for Dante, justice comes from God alone,⁴ while for an idealist such as Njegoš, there exists an 'ontological concept of perfection' not derived from any divine will.⁵ Njegoš happily accepts the latter alternative, proclaiming 'sacred are eternal laws, all beings obey them'.⁶

Conclusion

Milton's epic is a crucial expository tool for Njegoš's *Luča*, not just because of their similarities, but also because the ways in which Njegoš reacts against Milton – or unintentionally differs from him – often reveal surprising and unexpected influences, preoccupations and stylistic idiosyncrasies that might otherwise be ignored. Comparing Njegoš's dichotomy between the physical and intellectual worlds with Milton's conception, for example, demonstrates that Njegoš's system is primarily a product of his own philosophical speculation, and does not fit neatly into any existing religious system, dualist, monotheistic or monist. Taken together, their presentations of the dark side reveal its enduring nature in the religious imagination of both the Western European and Eastern Orthodox Church, as well as exemplifying the recurrent difficulties faced by Christian poets attempting to empathize with the Satanic forces whilst still maintaining the absolute sovereignty of God.

¹ Only VI.1776-1845 are situated on earth.

² Njegoš, *op cit*, VI.1731-2, p197.

³ Immanuel Kant, 'Foundations on the Metaphysics of Morals', IV.439, in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy*, trans. and ed. L. W. Beck, (Chicago, 1949) p96.

⁴ Empson, *op cit*, 22; Dante, *op cit*, XIX.86-90, pp227-8.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, 'Foundations', IV.442, p99.

⁶ Njegoš, *op cit*, I.474-475, p164.