

## Similarities in the Treatment of the Prostitute's Image in the Prose of the Albanian Authors Migjeni and Keko

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### Abstract

*There is a certain similarity within the treatment of the prostitute's image from the Albanian authors (Millosh Gjergj Nikolla) Migjeni (1911-1938) and Teodor Keko (1958-2002). They are two writers, two ended literary works now with the authors' deaths, distanced in the life time but estetically close to each other and with similar points of view for the argument that will be treated. So: •Despite the specific techniques of the research, the distinction, the exceptional aiming of the literary within this marginal figure of the multitude of the invisibles, despite the differences that spring out of the preference for their limit in the Albanian society, the design up to the refine, the atmosphere and the selection of the most prominent moments from their life have enough similar points of view. •Both authors are similar for the literary magic with which they pry into the human soul. The incision of the prostitute's image, are similar features and different in the outlining of the woman in existential suffering. •Both authors appeared with the redemptory oil candle of the spiritual perfection. They raised their hand against the hail of the human judgement upon these creatures that contrast with trite. The special atmosphere they created around this image makes them unique. •Both authors, apart from the common bed of the research for the subject of the prostitution, go deep within the relationship of this image not only with the society but also with the male's image. •Migjeni's sadness is obvious, that of Keiko's is private. He always tries to hide behind the supposedly optimistic character's expressions, but the final account of this is: lots of pain. •Keko tries to find in this image the beauty of the positive, the greatness of the moment and the perfect hope for better days. In this way shall be realized the divine veil, the saints' names he uses and the artistic purgatory he raises to give the opportunity to get clean. •Both are similar in the merge of the revolt and the feeling of love for the life that they transmit. They remind us that without this creature (without Woman) life would immediately cease and according this point of view misery, destruction and contempt that follow their life are never deserved. Even when the choice is theirs, Keko and Migjeni justify their existence in the multitude of the human enlivening. •The original mission of the prose that mainly treats the prostitute's image even though it is distanced in time is the protection of the judged female. •Both authors dismiss on purpose the Albanian canon codes and promote a new code, the strongest one, the code of codes that is so similar to the Christian mercy; that of the unlimited acceptance of the wonderful creature of man with his/her handicaps.*

**Keywords:** character, main image, judged figure, beauty of the positive

### 1. Introduction

It is odd the kind of similarity within the treatment of the prostitute's image between the writers: Migjeni and Teodor Keko despite their distinctions. It is defined as above for the simple reason that these two literary works, now ended with the authors' deaths, distanced in life time, at this point remain almost in the same point of view.

For the sake of the argument that will be treated we think to say a few words about the authors. Founders of literary works with profound tragic notes, both prose writers focus in the deep realism; Migjeni (1911-1938), is defined as critical realist, existentialist, whereas in Teodor Keko (1958-2002) the critical realism of the beginning of creativity takes upon itself full features of verism. But Migjeni is studied and valued a lot from the Albanian critics, whereas for Teodor Keko as less studied there is a lot to be said.

Just like Migjeni, T. Keko's art firstly has realist tendency. He is known for his loyal reflection of the Albanian society of the 80's-90's, two systems, two different worlds, miserable people in need, anger of discontent....Just like Migjeni, T. Keko gets deep in psychological analyses of his characters and not only about the characters but also about the social features of the Albanian reality. In T. Keko's short prose like: "Happiness in black veil", "The death messenger", "Foreigner" etc, social analyses are found to that extend that his art turns into a social thermometer, having no doubt now about his in the psychological realism line.

The same as Migjeni, this author's art (T. Keko), apart from the attempt to have materials from the reality, has the

tendency to be based on a simplified reality, through a detailed scientific description of the world, the psychology and the opinion, of the Albanian's specific culture of the 80's-90's period, which would be similar to the explanation of the human being in a triple unity; race, environment, moment that will be found at the naturalists of the XIX-th century (Flöber, Dickens). We find nothing from the opposition positive hero-negative hero or Dickens' moralizing vocation in none of the above authors.

The naturalists' art has got the tendency to focus on the full view of the reproduction of the objective of life by following the principal of the observer's non-interfering in the institution of the artistic observation. At the same time likes to treat the image of non typical characters, unimportant, occasional cases, sporadic scenes, filled with banal expressions of the daily usage and this is found in both authors' works. The characters of Keko's prose are ordinary people in need: people attending bars, staying on pavements, unemployed, wild people having bad habits, drunk people and to cut it short a multitude of those who (during Migjeni's time) have been for a long time people rarely considered in second position but never the main part in art. By this feature Keko's prose deepens the naturalism toward verism. The Italian verism (XIX century) comes as part of naturalism, but has elements of the critical realism. Its representatives, Verga and Capuana, tried to picture the reality with all of its ugly and banal features. Their principal was: art must have the power of being art. It should bring human documentations, but it is not enough for the event to be on documents, should be real. 'It should be told in that way that the reader would not have the impression that is seeing the event through 'the writer's eyes', he must hide, not showing himself in what he is telling in a subjective manner'. Just like verists, Keko, gives a view of the ignored, forgotten, despised, left aside reality from the politics area and researches as a scientist the consequences that bring ugly features or distinctions of the lonely characters' fates and always unhappy.

Characteristics like: the suburban characters in a dilemma and existential sufferings are found even in Migjeni, they are his favorite, but Migjeni does not use the simple and vulgar language, part of the verist poem used so professionally and widely from T. Keko. For T. Keko, the simple language means simply the banal language of streets, because within this speech there is art in finding the proper word in giving the correct meaningful display and this speech matches perfectly to the truthfulness of the character. Tragic fates pass by the prose readers' eyes of the above authors. But let us get back to the main argument that will be treated.

To the fatal literature which was written by these authors, Migjeni and Keko, the special interest for the so called 'small people', the usual ones, the invisibles, the suburban ones, could not leave aside the **image of the problematic woman**.

In the 30-s, when Migjeni wrote the prose 'The history of one of those', made part of the literature the image of the *loose woman*, was a feature in the limits of the scandal. But it was not seen with less surprise the treatment of nakedness with a daily language (a characteristic of the verist art) that makes no impression to the phenomenon prostitution, but to the trampled fate of the author Teodor Keko. The image of the *unclean* woman is rarely seen in the beginnings of this author's prose, to become later main part of the artistic confession and concern when he entitles one of his short stories 'The Prostitute'.

It is now known the admiration for the female by Migjeni. According to the critic Mensur Raifi in his studied work *Migjeni's and Noli's alternatives*, lonely Migjeni, witness of various deaths in family, always taken care and brought up by female images, has a special respect for women and has the tendency to justify the female-character in all of her actions, *why the society forced her justly or unjustly*.

He sees her as unlucky in her sufferings, where the sensuality gets mixed up with the humiliation. The image that Migjeni presents is that of the unaccepted. But to the author, even when she commits adultery and becomes unwillingly the prostitute, even when she innocently surrenders to the male's lust, even when she chooses to practice it as a profession without going through his mind what kind of judgement he is going to face by a vicious public, she is justified. She is always justified.

To the critic Arshi Pipa, Migjeni (...) *introduced the sluts as heroes of mankind, as symbols which get filthy the majority of society's misery*, but somewhere in the short prose "The history of one of them", Migjeni says that she promises *a melody of harmony*, by reminding us the erotic spirit and the sweet oblivion that man buys at the prostitute.

It is exactly here that Migjeni stops and T. Keko continues. He lights the image of the *problematic* in a new aspect, unknown to the Albanian reader. Woman is found within it, undone femininity and the soul which even though has suffered enough, in the deep pit, has been able to keep some values. This kind of description goes out of the reader's expectation.

If Migjeni makes irony of the society, by asking *do you deny of knowing Luke? Pretending you are honest...*, Keko surpasses this kind of attitude. He minimizes the negative side for this ignored part of society by not giving importance to the shallow judgement, but to the inquisition of femininity and the treasure of spirit. This kind of woman is a world that needs to be discovered by all means. Keko has no intention to discuss or to find in the image of the prostitute the banal

side of life. Keko finds in her image the philosophy of goodness, the positive esthetic of the beauty and in general to complete his cat-chat (the artistic feature of finding the beauty in the ugly), places it next to the prostitute's image, the spoilt beauty, the woman covered by the image of family, the greedy one that has embraced the image, which often he does not name her.

Migjeni, who is thought to be a T.Keko's reminiscence in the treatment of this image, strongly focuses at her insane misery. He can only look at her through the tragic destiny. His word even he makes philosophy, shows a cold, correct logic which leaves no chance to have any doubt. His word transmits pain his word tears apart the reader's feelings. There is no hope for the image of the street female to Migjeni.

Keko has got the tendency to line up in his short stories facts, an extraordinary multitude of breathless tragic details. And after all of these *she* who does not understand in the end what happened, now rolled down in the street by destiny, too young, very beautiful, unprotected, innocent, often vulnerable like a butterfly, with no escape, obliged to obey. She is the centre of pain and sensuality. It could be said that the treatment of this image has clear romantic character and only in this way the magic seen in the most part can be explained.

T.Keko spoils it mercifully the pain of the *problematic*. "As suddenly" (in every prose), he pays attention to the detail of her eyes; they are always sad and lost. She exposes her body, while in silence she tosses away her virtue. The main character like *an angel* of the short story "The prostitute", brought up poor and with no affection, ends up with the horrible name of whore. She has given away pure feelings, has loved and has trusted, has done nothing to repent in this life, she is more loyal than the family *puppets*, there is so much goodness and virtue in herself, would ask nothing more than the human common sense, but she cannot have it.

*We made no money, and what we had was taken away from us, and we got stuck to the name prostitute...*

Through these images T. Keko makes the reader to have no trust in the social moral and at the same time makes him/her be responsible for the relativity of his valuable feature. The ugly beauty and the beautiful ugly. The acknowledgement - denial are put close to each other in order to come up to difficult logical judgement of what is and isn't good enough. These extreme logical shifts arrange to question the concept *Virtue* and easily access to the converting into features that discard each other. The incorrect feature appears right and the right one appears incorrect. In this case we have limit matching, 'evil' becomes 'good'. The standard traditional prejudices, which we are used to, fade away. To Keko the polish that the society puts on is disgusting and this is the moral to a series of his prose. One of his characters, Edi, realizes that *true whores were very serious and arrogant beings on the street. People who had no idea of what happiness and loyalty were.*

Keko becomes contradictory of a guilty without any guilt, of the non deserved marking. In the volume "The twelve disciples, one prophet and some people" (1997), the author tries to build up some reality almost biblical to the image. He surrounds it with the Christian mercy, lights it up with a divine glory, **he uses saints' names not accidentally**. Some of them are pictured not accidentally as steams and dreams not belonging to the earthly *filth*. Keko puts on favorite images not only sympathy but also human respect, creates **an artistic purgatory** where he gives the opportunity to get cleaned. Not accidentally the decisions and the actions of any of them stimulate the reader to think about moral perfection.

Matilda, *this almost little lady beaten up so badly in order to accept to get out on the street and being fed for two weeks only with bread and water, until she surrendered like a little lamb*, drowned in sadness, has managed to have some kindness deep in her soul. Edi realizes that this *angel standing in front of him had nothing in common with whoredom, with that sickness that he had tried to build up with his friends.*

If Migjeni leads us to realize that his image remains only between the ignorance and empirical experiences, the majority of Keko's characters are educated females, using laconic language (sharp tongue as people would name), where even a phrase of the monologue or a single word exactly defines the situation. There is always the image of a male next to them toward whom they feel superior with their sharpness as well as spiritual values. Ilda, the character of the story "Two Albanians in Dysendolf" judges that her ideals and the trust in goodness are disproved by the gloomy reality of the rotten thoughts dressed up with a fake moral.

If to Migjeni, according to Arshi Pipa, *whores are heroes of mankind*, about Keko's images we can say that they are heroes of the sacrifice for the man they love and their poor families. Their *profession* is the shameful one, but holy are the attempts made to live, because life and the attempts to hold tight are holy.

The prostitute's image in Migjeni is accompanied by empiric nature, intuitive sharpness, whereas the prostitute's image in Keko not only is often educated but also aware of her beauty but has never been given a chance in life. Within these female characters, Keko, introduces the ideal of the dreams for better days. So much desire for normal and creative life, so many expressions hidden behind the sadness of their eyes. There are talented ones among them, but the

crazy reality and the ridiculous poverty of their country tore off the wings of the butterflies wondering in their spirit. They are *many*, says Migjeni in the 30-s, and the great number of them in Keko's literature of the 90-s, directly opposes the idea that these women's reality and fate has become better.

Meri wants to live, is in need of some living conditions, *successfully graduated art management*, looking for a job but there isn't any. Everywhere she goes the bed is shown to her. So what can Meri do? To survive she starts payable sporadic relationships. Meri's monologue, character in T.Keko's short prose, immediately reminds us of the prose "The forbidden apple", Migjeni: *An unemployed thirty year old man, staying in front of the advertisements of the cinema- it is a working day...*

Iris, another of T.Keko's characters, who has been called as the whore since she was 12 years old, *knows Greek and English, speaks Italian well, but cares about all of these?...*

Unlike Migjeni, the prostitutes' images of Keko's short stories are a lot and even different from each other. They are different profiles of the same human makings and this enriches the truthfulness and makes their outline even more interesting. Some of them are lost, lonely, very intelligent, some..and all are deceived.

Many others are images led by pragmatism, as well as Keko in his life. Some of their actions have come due to passing moments and it is difficult to keep them in the reader's mind, but in this Keko's spontaneous action we see a part of their beauty shining. He *searches* these moments. They are similar to many photographic snaps, endless snaps: a special movement, a swinging walk, a shaking of hands, good look, a graceful tilt of the head, a sudden look that pierces through and reads the mind, tinny tears professionally hidden in the eye, shoulder shred, a wonderful bow of the spine, eyebrows frowning forming lines of wrinkles, a forced smile, the laughter, sadness, lost etc, etc, all these wonderful details that state the femininity of the creature Woman, which time and situations will never make it cease. In delicate moments their spirit shines by making possible to the reader the understanding of wonderful insight of human sentiments.

All of these are described through a lively, fast pen and they wake up the pleasure of the characters' truthfulness. The images are full of grace, a painful magic. Keko expresses tendency to get deep in their spiritual feelings, so deep that some of the treatments of the images look like flow of impressions written down very quickly. It is impossible for the reader to not get the author's desire to have harmony in the spirit of these women who are seen by him not only with sympathy but also as individuals that should be studied in the multitude of the human variety. Apart from the eye a great importance is shown even to their often described voice. Their sounds, exclamations look like they give life even to non human objects. Descriptions like: *beautiful, extremely beautiful and worn out, nice smell and graceful like coming from a good family, beautiful like an angel, curved, soft skin...etc, etc* are often found in the prose.

*They* are all suffering goddess of Eros, who man seeks for union without prejudice, a multitude of sad dreamers, in whom the hope for salvation and a man's shoulder to lean on sleeps.

We would not be surprised by the names of saints the author uses if we see it from the angle of the powerful desire for life that each of these human creatures has. Their efforts to survive are holy even though only few of them have religious vocation (only one of the characters, Matilda, for a moment thinks about God's protection), while their dream is the desire for a better life. Through this fine point of view T.Keko gets the priority toward all of the Albanian authors that have set this image as part of their own art. Never before this level of society is seen so widely, so deep, so outnumbered, so seriously, so present as in the volume "The prostitute" and "12 saints, a prophet and some people". Unlike Migjeni, Keko has illusions for the prostitute's image for her rehabilitation. This is seen in the happy endings or at least hopeful that he sometimes sets in his short stories. As a writer who seeks to plan a better future, he suffers a certain romanticism. We are dealing with a touching romanticism seen in some of the prose, until we come up to the work "The prostitute", where the author **sanctifies the suffering soul** by reminding the reader of the biblical parables and Maria Madalena's fate and why not even Christ's words *Rise woman and sin no more!*

T.Keko, tries to picture **the salvation thought** in the reader's mind about his characters. One of his characters has put behind the past and works in an office. And in another occasion, she becomes part of a powerful foreigner's love who tries to come more often in this country. So an ordinary experience moves on to a political experience which starts from the memory of love.

Even Migjeni would desire a better destiny for his character, but he himself does not believe that the choice would be possible, and that is why he puts his character in destructive and extreme misery. Keko dares more. He fades away the ethic of the society and like a modern judge of this noisy democracy, makes the **artistic attempt** to save this image in the majority of the cases by challenging the evil and hoping for a better reality.

In Migjeni we see a psychological treatment of the image. There are also paragraphs that would be considered as a clear philosophy with a fine and elite vocabulary. There is too much laconism and subtext. Quite the opposite is found in T.Keko. With an ordinary vocabulary he explains and poses firmly in the fact and aims his credibility. It is not too much too be said that as he examines the reality of time, the immediate social polarizing, he goes through thorough analyses

about this image and the social mentality related to her. A disoriented society in transition, traditional values shaking for they have lost their balance. A society emphasizing the moral and it is not moral itself. In this kind of reality everyone is a little bit of prostitute when only *Them* are finger pointed.

Matilda is one of the most interesting characters that the author has created. A superb creature from nature. She is characterized by the positive sense and special sensitivity. She needs some relaxing time, to meditate, she has artistic talent, would love to go toward the perfection. Her female shapes melt and are in harmony with the old antique houses or the objects of her clients' houses. These objects look like very similar to her classical nature. She is bound between these objects and the real world, makes peace and harmony. She looks at the human spirits with a gifted intuition, reads deep down in them where the others cannot, gets involved in their pain, suffer with them. The author frames in her the feature of two existing worlds, in which what is found in the spirit and the reality are the limits of a line that only get distanced from each other. Matilda is the image that does not reflect any need for company, does not do anything else but lives deep within herself, thinks and reflects among a multitude of human noise and bustle. She lives with a constant way of thinking and continuous dream locked deep in the soul. The pimp talks to her and does not understand the true spirit and the desire to get back to her poor country, to start her studies, to help *her father, mother and wondering brother*.

Some of the characters are very special spirits that distinguish from the ordinary women from the deep world and critical spirit toward reality. They represent a philosophical spirit that analyses and foresees. In fact they are Keko's critical eye that as foreseen makes *the autopsy to reality*.

Keko firmly seeks the changing of the way of thinking about this level of society. One thing is very obvious: Keko does not agree with the contempt toward them and at the same time even with the judgement. The facing of the opposites makes it more emotional the confession about them. Keko describes the physical and inner beauty, the abuse and the tragedy. The opposites and the mystery of the self isolation of the treasures secretly burned, form the interesting silhouettes of these women which are not found so intensely in Migjeni.

Keko sees their world in new perspectives and point of views. In an abandoned, crippled, marked with contempt and forgetfulness world, the existential sublimity of the creature often reaches up to the limit of the existence. Too many of the characters death comes into their mind, meanwhile in their lives life and death in many occasions get together in a lightning speed. The whole structure of prose that mainly focuses on this image awakes within the reader the feeling of anxiety, sadness and irritation. Part of this anxiety is even the men's presence. And it is this specific detail that emerges the feminine horror to the reader. These female images that live as scared beings in a masculine world, they transform it from the normal one, a reshaped and overthrown world where the woman is not the worshiped one but the paid one. However she lives. The desire for life is stronger than the shame, that is why Keko has the tendency to look at it as a **sacrifice for life**.

The author appreciates more the spirit and the human character than knowledge and the reader realizes this when the actors are images like politician or people who are prominently positioned in the society. Keko is tired of the human appearance which often results to be unreal and that is why he has the tendency to promote the control and spirit. The author's goodness toward these creatures carries the reader away and without noticing he becomes part of his artistic interests of the author's human devotion. The positivity the author uses to see these images, in each case makes the marking and contempt look absurd.

All of the above make us think that we are dealing with a different description of the character by Teodor Keko.

To my opinion in Keko's prose we find three main tendencies for the treatment of this image:

- Female as a cult! The author blesses the renewal of life and the mission that ends through her. The author blesses the impact she has in man.
- The female part of the tragic and the ugly part of life
- The female hostess of peace and unfailing purity.

However, despite his efforts, only few of them find tranquility of salvation. They are abandoned by males, even though they are superior in their thoughts about them. The lines of these female images remain the lines of love without answer. Despite the author's good will the endings of the prose are not sweetened even when the character is given a better luck.

Getting back to Migjeni, the antonymic attitudes of the nature of the paradox, bad humor, bad language, are situation that fulfill his attempts to get deep in the woman's image as a *public* woman.

*One crystal winter day, when the northern wind was blowing by freezing the dew, Luka went down to the city (...)and the city from far distance looked wonderful. He took of his coat and put on some light linen to make a living easier than up in the highlands.*

*Sometimes even Luka would be captured by the endless sadness. He sympathized what we call spirit...*

As far as the ending is concerned Migjeni seems to be more rational, he can see his own image only through misery and degradation. Its ending is a physical exhaustion and especially moral. To Migjeni it is very beautiful to be true a happy destiny in the Albanian reality, or at least a reality with the hope of *the woman whose reproductive instinct is related to the material interests*. The irony and its tragedy burns up to the root. There is no hope, there is no salvation! After the meeting she had with the tin man, everyday Luka sees the nakedness of her misery. She sees how her life is ending little by little just like Migjeni everyday sees in the mirror how the smile is ending when he foresees his death.

## 2. In conclusion

\*The clear parallels between the literary works of both authors even though far apart in time are very obvious. Despite the special techniques of the research, distinction, of the exceptional marking of the literature in this marginal image of the invisible multitude despite the differences that spring out of the preference for their *limit* in the Albanian society, the design up to shaping, the atmosphere and the selection of the most outstanding moments in their life have many similarities.

\*Just like Migjeni, even to Keko, the collective thinking of the Albanian men has not changed a lot, with a cheating shining the polish still shines.

\*Both authors are very similar to their literary magic with which they penetrate the human spirit. The shaping of the image of the prostitute, are similar and different shapes in the outlining of the woman in existential suffering.

\*Both authors got introduced to the reader with the saving oil lamp of the spiritual perfection. They raised their hand toward the storm of the human judgement upon these creatures that are in contrast with the frame. The special atmosphere they created round this image makes them special and unique.

\*Both authors apart from the common bed of the treatment of the subject of the prostitution get deep in the relation with this image not only to the society in general but also to the male image and the close friends around as well.

\*Migjeni's sadness is obvious, declarative. Keko's sadness is private. He continually tries to hide behind the supposedly positive expressions of the character, but what remains is: too much pain.

\*Both are similar to the revolt spirit and the feeling of love for the life we live. They remind us that without this creature (**without Woman**) life would immediately cease and seen from this point of view misery, destruction, contempt that accompany their life are never deserved. Even when the choice is theirs, Keko and Migjeni confirm their existence in the multitude of the human life (there is air and sky for everyone). The founding mission of the prose we treated from Keko and Migjeni, even though far apart in time is the protection of the judges female. Their aim is very clear. They dismiss on purpose the codes of the Albanian canon and promote a new code, the strongest, the code of codes, that is so similar to the Christian mercy; that of the unconditional acceptance of the wonderful creature, of the human being with all of his faults.

\*Both of them remain a testimony of fulfillment of the emptiness and the free space in the Albanian letters, in the treatment of the prostitute's image not simply as an ordinary situation of life but a deepening in the existential space of the being.

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