

*The City on the Border and Borders of the City*

*Summary*

In the relevant poems of Milan Milišić analyzed in this paper the city is not necessarily a topos. It is, first of all, a microcosm with three parameters important for identifying its metaphysical dimension – intellectuality, sensuality, and ontological sorrow. Therefore, while singing about a specific city, Dubrovnik, Milišić also sings on the universal City. What is more, singing about a city, Milišić interprets the city by placing its microcosm in a certain context and thus limiting it. However, for any empirical feature of the city to be understood, interpreted, and poetically presented to the reader, it is necessary to identify and mark its determining and descriptive codes. When it comes to Milišić's poetry, the determinants are the notions which determine the key points of the city and thus locate the signs of life in it. These determinants are then closer defined by descriptors – words and phrases which interpret them and thus determine the city as a macro-determinant. Therefore seemingly incoherent elements – bits and pieces, unconnected and scattered – in Milišić's verses appear to be connective tissues which on the micro-level, at least temporarily – and admittedly, sometimes only ostensibly – provide the whole picture of the urbification field. It seems that the interpretative model can also follow these formal units for in this manner, by examining the meanings of each of them, we can reach the core of the poetic image of the city. The most significant determinant of the city in Milišić's poetry turns out to be the border. Milišić's lyric narrative of the border moves between the traditional and personal (emotional). His poetic contemplation in all of the analyzed poems is founded on identifying the crack as a basic descriptor of the border, as a sign of instability, but also as a diversifying line between two spatially and temporarily neighboring and yet separate worlds. In cultural terms, each border is a sign of partialness and in this sense it is also a symbol of two experiences, two essences. If the constituting elements of a city are themselves cracked, separated, divided, bordering, then it is not only a city on a border (which has been a several-century-long historical, but also sociological reality of Dubrovnik), but the city itself is border-structured. Thus, quite naturally and inexorably, the "spent city" is reduced to a line. This line almost ontologically cancels all the varieties and manifoldness lying in the foundations of the city as a natural and cultural area. The city is, in its pattern of existing, an assembly of differences ("a total of different lights"), in which people live "opposite each other", in which its citizens with their different living circumstances are together in "deserted places", rely on each other and cherish "polish of thoughts". That city had a natural connection with its reverse side, the un-place of night, when its shapes and outlines disappeared, but it – like an animal – could still be felt in the pulse of its inhabitants. That city is gone. It still exists – but is different and other. The line has been drawn – and the city is divided by a border. The poet's eye notices this break, this crack in stone slabs, in walls, as a "ribbon of dirt", and in people themselves, who "come out shuddering from the hardly permeable area". Line as a border has made it difficult to come out of cramped little rooms, old corridors and narrow, tight, claustrophobic streets into the life of the square, Placa, multitudes, touches and connections. The broken, endlessly long line has netted the whole space and the city has thus remained with a border separating it from itself.

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