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KATICA KULAVKOVA'S TRANSCENDENTAL HERMENEUTICS OF VIOLENCE

In recent decades, posthumanism has collected overwhelming evidence against the long-established system of anthropological determinants and differentiating traits of humankind that are supposed to set it apart from the animal kingdom, starting from the Aristotelian “social animal,” through a purely biological factor of our erect posture, an alienated hand holding a tool, Arnold Gehlen’s “creature of deficiency,” Jacques Lacan’s accent on language that replicates the structure of the unconscious, Giorgio Agamben’s insistence on the connection between human language and “negativity,” and others. The phenomenon of violence tends to remain among the features whose quality of being directly anthropogenic is instinctively rejected and which are regarded rather as epiphenomenal to the early social organisms and nascent civilizations; moreover, popular opinion still holds violence as an animalistic rudiment that seems to have been firmly set down to the word “animal.” Katica Kůlavkova insists that “[v]iolence is not a feature that humankind inherited from animals but an *endemic, anthropogenic* feature of humanity” (Kůlavkova 2007: 29). She notes, after Michel Foucault, that ultimate forms of violence, like sadism and “ritual demonstration of an indefinite power of punishment” (Kůlavkova 2007: 29), have been found only in human behaviour. Humankind’s partial denial of the anthropogenic quality of violence is registered in the mythological imagination by the images of monstrosity: humans who are prone to “violence-for-the-sake-of-violence” are turning into monsters—neither animals, humans, nor divinities, but hybrid demonized creatures (Kůlavkova 2007: 28-29). Violence’s embeddedness in humankind’s primitive collective memory of myth is the fact that testifies to the violence’s constitutive role in the emergence of humans and

civilization. In this regard, Kulavkova acknowledges René Girard's notion of "*la violence fondatrice*" (generative violence), developed in *Violence and the Sacred* (Girard 1979 [1972]), as an important point of departure for interpretations of violent acts in both ancient and modern texts. Interpretation as *understanding*, when it comes to our comprehension of the generative factor of violence in myth, in Kulavkova's view, is a key to our self-understanding as a species. She states that "[t]he way in which violence is projected in myth is simultaneously a way of interpreting it" (Kulavkova 2007: 33). Therefore, she adheres to the idea of a unique quality of literary cognition, which, in Ryszard Nycz's words, can be described as "inseparability of the method and the outcome of cognition" (Nycz 2006: 6), and which, in the case of Kulavkova's transcendental hermeneutics, goes far beyond mere cognition: the experience of understanding the myth is characterized by a ritual and cathartic structure able to effect a change in the interpreter—something that she demonstrates in a series of her hermeneutic projects regarding violence in Aeschylus, Homer, and "The Book of Genesis."

Kulavkova's hermeneutics of violence immediately places her work within the existing tradition of literary anthropology, which as a term was inaugurated in Wolfgang Iser's essay "What Is Literary Anthropology?"—as a discipline about the anthropological dimensions of literary production and experience. Regarded as one of the key anthropogenic factors, violence in its literary representations—from myth and up to the theoretical narratives of modern anthropology—may become in this context an object of anthropoetics, which, according to Nycz, means not only an "anthropological analysis of the main concepts and structures of a work of literature" but also an analysis of "the literary imagination of anthropological knowledge itself" (Нич 2007: 10). In this context, the concept of violence as an originary event of culture begins with Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo*.

In his hypothesis of the primary cultural event, Freud, like others after him, goes beyond the existing empirical data about the primitive tribes that consist of "bands of males," "composed of members with equal rights and [that] are subject to the restrictions of the totemic system" (Freud [1913]: 164). He inquires about the very origin of totemism as a restrictive mechanism because he believes that restriction lies at the foundation of culture. Freud imagines a primal human horde led by a powerful and jealous patriarch-father who kept all the women for himself and drove away his sons as soon as they attained maturity. The situation lasted until one day the evicted brothers came together, killed their father, and consumed his body. The act of cannibalism allowed the brothers to acquire a portion of their father's strength and power, which, no doubts, he had possessed in their eyes. However, the figure of the dead father was slowly becoming even stronger than the living father had even been: the act of violence, collectively committed by the brothers, provoked a sense of guilt and remorse. In consequence, the symbolic (cultural) prohibition replaced the real one:

What had up to then been prevented by his actual existence was thenceforward prohibited by the sons themselves, in accordance with the psychological procedure so familiar to us in psycho-analyses under the name of 'deferred obedience'. They revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem, the substitute for their father; and they renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to the women who had now been set free." (Freud [1913]: 165)

The taboo of totemism thus lay the foundation for social organization and religion.

Freud's hypothesis reenacting the originary scene of primal violence introduces two important factors that were taken up by subsequent theories of the emergence of humankind: a collective participation in the event of violence and an imitative behavioral motivation. The jealous patriarch perishes as a victim of what Girard (in *Violence and the Sacred* and other works) would later call a "mimetic crisis" (Girard 1979: 143): the model (the father) and his imitators (the sons) competed for the same appetitive object, and the sons would never have had courage to kill the father individually—only when they came together as a group. Girard, whose theory is highly regarded in Āulavkova's essays on violence, also proposes that the protohuman society, driven by a natural mimetic instinct, reaches a crisis when a collective mimetic act of appropriation zeroes in on one and the same attractive object, appetitive or sexual. This situation provokes a shift of the focus from the object, which therefore becomes abandoned, toward the rivalry itself. Instead of a massive bloodshed, however, the violence of the entire group concentrates on a single victim, the scapegoat, whose murder releases the tension and restores the order that was disrupted by the mimetic crisis. Like in Freud's originary scene (the murder of the patriarch), the "emissary victim" fulfills the first cultural, symbolic function that turns the horde of animals into a group of humans: the victim's body grows in importance as a vehicle of transformation from violence back to order and thus becomes a sacred object—the first and ultimate signifier.

The founder of Generative Anthropology Eric Gans makes Girard's theory his point of departure in *The Origin of Language* and his subsequent books, but starting from *The End of Culture* and on, he criticizes Girard for an absolutization of the mimetic effect and abandonment of the appetitive element of the horde's desire for the object. Gans's "minimal hypothesis" conjures a scene in which a primal group of hunters freezes above the body of a kill in fear of violence that is about to break out among the members of the group who now suddenly become competitors. Their hands, outstretched halfway in the direction of the animal's body and unable to move, are fixed in an "aborted gesture of appropriation" (Gans 1985: 20) that now becomes a gesture of representation—a gesture that designates the appetitive object as a sign of prohibition, called upon to prevent violence. Thus, while Girard posits the moment of humanization in the focal shift between the desired object and the emissary victim, Gans maintains that the object itself transforms

into a sign in the first, already human, gesture of representation. According to Iser, the aesthetic moment in the originary scene is henceforth embedded in the course of human history, and literature becomes the only strategy of reading culture because, on the one hand, it is opposed to the fruitless discourse of the “explanatory” theoretical language, and, on the other, “its fictionality... prevents it from turning into myth. ... In this respect a generative anthropology turns into a literary anthropology” (Iser 2000: 168-169).

In the introduction to her book *The Balkan Code: A Scandal in Culture*, Ķulavkova explains her approach to the first traces of human culture:

The protosymbolic transformations themselves represent the memorised proto-transformations, and their memory resembles a secretive, unreadable, hermetic, fading trace of a long-gone art of the linguistic/artistic sign. Hence, my approach of reading certain past transformations has, in fact, been mediated by language’s figurative projections into many other semiotic forms of ancient symbols. These symbols constitute the primitive semiotics of the universe, seemingly naïve, partially deformed, but always on the lookout for a symbolical reading and interpretation of the signs of history. (Ķulavkova 2012: 11)

In Ķulavkova’s opinion, the history of violence is the history of human civilization itself, and in the early cultural accounts of violence there lay many answers to the question of the human origin and character. She is mostly interested in investigating the vicissitudes of mythical stories in literary narratives, like a variant of the “*Promethean prototype (pre-model) of violence*” (Ķulavkova 2007: 33) captured in Aeschylus’ play *Prometheus Bound*.

The story of Prometheus illustrates the two main paradoxical strategies of interpreting violence that Ķulavkova distinguishes in her essay “Violence and Civilization”: the first is when the various forms of violence “are installed as dynamic factors of civilization; and the second is when governing structures in power and centres of power identify their *political otherness*—including avatar, humanistic, reformatory, scientific and artistic forms of otherness—as violent, on the basis of which they penalise them with cruel and radical punishment” (Ķulavkova 2007: 23). Prometheus as an agent of enlightenment is undoubtedly a symbolical figure representing an advance of culture and civilization, yet—paradoxically—his selfless and beneficial act only secures him a life-long torture decreed by Zeus, the figure of political power. Prometheus’ crime is not of a moral or ethical nature but that of a political and juridical one—to act in opposition to the dictatorship whose rule is based on its strength rather than anything else. Like any political opponent, Prometheus is a threat to Zeus’ authoritarian regime, and therefore his actions are interpreted as violent with respect to the foundations of the tyranny. As Ķulavkova puts it, “Prometheus perpetrates *symbolic violence* against the law of tyranny which is established as order” (Ķulavkova 2007: 36). The essence of political violence is its claim to legitimacy and the right to proclaim as violent anyone who contests the ruler’s or the victor’s ver-

sion of reality; thus, the punishing violence of the state can appear only as a response to the primary "violence" of the perpetrator. Āulavkova states that "[v]iolence is so inseparably connected to the primary human condition that it necessarily imprinted itself upon archaic visions of humanity, especially in myth as one of the most impressive and most enigmatic image-narratives" (Āulavkova 2007: 33). And if the ancient, "mythical structure of violence is political," then it is political violence that should be considered among the key generative elements of humankind. Therefore, Āulavkova's statement that "Prometheus is a ritualistic *eschatological victim* of the birth of humanity" (Āulavkova 2007: 37) can be regarded as an anthropological counterpart of Girard's "emissary victim" hypothesis.

Mythical narratives preserve not only ancient, archetypal images of political violence but also examples of posttraumatic therapeutic strategies of psychological survival for victims of violent acts. In this regard, Āulavkova focuses on a highly problematic, paradoxical tale of Philomela, Procne, and Tereus. As the myth has it, Philomela first becomes a victim of rape, by Tereus, her brother-in-law and her sister Procne's husband, and then also an object of his violence, as Tereus, assisted by Procne, cuts out Philomela's tongue to prevent her from divulging the truth. Āulavkova notes a puzzling reaction of the gods to this incident: they "turned Philomela into a bird out of charity and a desire to save her the hardships of being a woman (person) without a tongue" (Āulavkova 2012: 13), and they likewise "transform Tereus and Procne into birds, so as to punish them for the committed crime" (14). The same type of transformation serves as the gods' response to the diametrically opposite situations: what looks like a gesture of charity with respect to Philomela may be interpreted, in the case of Tereus and Procne, as an act of retribution. Is the charitable transformation a punishment of the victim? Is the punishment of the perpetrators by way of a similar metamorphosis an act of forgiveness? This hybridity of charity, punishment, and forgiveness brings about a number of mysterious dualities that mark both the fluctuating nature of the gods—"the proto-mighty, the proto-tyrants, and proto-saviours, all wrapped into one" (Āulavkova 2012: 14)—and of the artistic word itself, with all the ironic deviations that govern the relationship between language and meaning.

The most important anthropological question that Āulavkova poses in regard to the myth of Philomela is the extent to which one type of violence done to a human, the cutting off of her tongue, is greater than another type of violence—turning her into a bird:

The Philomela myth suggests, at the symbolical level of the narrative, that the gods have known (since the beginning of time) that any person would consider existence without his or her tongue to be painful and would thus be trapped in excessive traumatic and obsessive recollections of the crime. (Āulavkova 2012: 15)

Another question concerns the interpretation of remedy that Philomela receives by being transformed into a bird: is it a complete obliteration of her human memory, called upon to stop the constant repetitions of the traumatic events through recollections, that is, a divine euthanasia, or is the fact that she has been turned into a nightingale, a singing bird, an act of restoring her capacity of speech? Kulavkova suggests that by transforming Philomela into a nightingale, the gods compensate for her loss of the tongue and give her language back, or restore her ability of self-expression, in a transcendental, or parabolic, sense. She concludes that “in the case of Philomela, the power of speech has been depicted as a supremely human characteristic, hence the maxim—to be human is to be able to speak” (Kulavkova 2012: 15-16). By no means the metamorphosis signals a remedy by oblivion. In Kulavkova’s view, the significance of memory, almost equal to that of speech, is hinted at by the idea of writing, which is always in the background of the story. Birds’ language, or the language of song, is the language of poetry, which is able to transcend itself in the form of writing when the mutilated, “castrated” tongue incapacitates its oral expression. In this myth, violence becomes a factor of yet another symbolic transformation: it exercises the memory of a traumatic experience to effect the emergence of a written text as a new cultural phenomenon.

The text of the myth itself is the best testimony to the transformation that the oral form of expression has undergone. Since both the victim and the perpetrators are turned into birds, there is no other vehicle for transmitting the narrative of their story but a metaphorical, symbolic writing. For this reason, the myth of Philomela can also be read as one more origin story—of the birth of literature, in its etymological sense of “written with letters,” with all its ambiguities and dualities of meaning, starting with the possible interpretations of the transformations experienced by the characters and ending with the paradox of the primacy of writing over oral expression, suggested by the deconstruction theory. Literature betrays the secret story of violence (the rape and the sister’s treachery) that by all appearances was meant to be concealed forever, sealed by another act of violence—the physical deprivation of the ability to speak. In his essay “Literature in Secret: An Impossible Filiation,” Jacques Derrida refers to a similar phenomenon: literature’s secret consists in betraying secrets. He discusses an event of aborted violence, the *Genesis* story of Abraham and Isaac, in terms of the originary scene of the emergence of literature. The singularity of the relationship between God and Abraham requires from the latter an “absolute *desacralization* of the world” (Derrida 2008: 154), an exclusion of any “third party” between himself and God, understood (according to Kierkegaard) as the “generality of the ethical, political, or juridical” (Derrida 2008: 155). The secret between God and Abraham—God’s command to sacrifice Abraham’s only son, Isaac—should be kept secret from everybody, including Isaac’s mother and Isaac himself; the purpose of Isaac’s journey with his father to mount Moriah should be

concealed from Isaac, but likewise the purpose of this inhumane sacrifice, mysteriously requested of Abraham, is kept secret from himself. As Derrida writes, "the secret to be kept would have, at bottom, to be without an object, without any object other than the unconditionally singular covenant, the mad love between God, Abraham, and what descends from him" (Derrida 2008: 156). But the very covenant itself is already a text that will be passed down and interpreted by the future generations of Abraham, a testimony to Abraham's story that becomes literature in the moment when the singularity of the secret becomes exposed as an object of interpretation: "In the case of what descends from him, however, the singularity is sealed but necessarily betrayed by the inheritance that confirms, reads, and translates the covenant. By the testament itself" (Derrida 2008: 156). Literature is born as an event of transcending the secret, similarly to Philomela's myth, in which poetic discourse emerges out of a violent act whose intention was to seal the secret of another violence by silencing the testimony forever.

In *The Balkan Code*, Āulavkova also discusses the story of Abraham with reference to Derrida's essay. Her point of departure, however, has a different anthropological focus—an unimaginable drama of temptation that presents Abraham with an impossible choice: "Temptation is a situation in which one must choose between two things without which one cannot fully remain human, as the choice is inconsistent with the principle of humanity" (Āulavkova 2012: 138). The aporic grotesqueness of Abraham's temptation is that he has to make a choice between God and the son by exercising his free will, without any pressure of a natural catastrophe or incident or any other present and real danger that may affect one's ability of sound judgement.

There is temptation when one can awake one's own will and stand in the shoes of someone forced to choose between becoming or not becoming a murderer, putting one's own child to death or not, betraying one's god or not, changing one's god or parting with him. (Āulavkova 2012: 139)

The temptation stemming from one individual choice can generate multiple cultural meanings, one of which is a possibility for the son to assume a "fatherly" authority himself, that is, to reject the tyrant father and establish his own law based on the ethical principles of humanity rather than on an unbroken singularity of the secret covenant.

Āulavkova takes up Derrida's discussion on the mystery of the secret and its connection with literature. She dwells on the double secret involved in the situation of Abraham's sacrifice: God's true intentions which He keeps secret from Abraham while commanding him to sacrifice his only son, and Abraham's true and real readiness to sacrifice Isaac, which the father conceals from his son. During their journey to Mount Moriah, Abraham reveals to Isaac the purpose of their enterprise, the sacrifice, but fails to disclose the identity of the victim. The interpretation of the story gets more complicated if interpreted from the perspective of the hermeneutical circle. Abraham's

free choice to stay obedient to God and betray his human instincts and familial obligations is finally offset by the fact that God, the ultimate director of the scene of the sacrifice, in the end makes it look—at least—like He never intended for his servant to sacrifice his son and only tested his loyalty. Does our knowledge of the story's resolution exonerate Abraham in his failure to advise Isaac of what was prepared for him? Abraham tells Isaac a half-truth, but can he tell his son the whole truth if he himself ultimately does not know it? And when Isaac asks, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*: 41), does Abraham lie or tell the truth when he answers, "God Himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (41)? Subjectively, Abraham tells only a half-truth, concealing his true intent behind a euphemism, but objectively Abraham tells the truth because God does find a sacrifice for Himself, and it is not Isaac. Abraham cannot objectively tell his son the whole truth because it is not revealed to him, either, by his own fatherly figure, God; but he can definitely tell Isaac the truth of his honest intent (maybe betraying, this way, his secret with God). Does Isaac also tell only a half-truth to his father when asking the above question and not following up with it, not confronting him with the obvious facts in the face of a pending crime?

This situation, full of ambiguous exchanges, silences and ellipses instead of a detailed description and spirited dialogue—all the features that, in Erich Auerbach's view, set the poetics of *Genesis* apart from Homer's epics (Auerbach [1946]: 3-23)—compels Kulavkova to consider the narrative from Derrida's perspective, as an originary scene of literariness:

Violent rather than natural death is the cause of secret and ambiguous talk. In both cases, the situation forces discreet and ambiguous talk, which, on the other hand, is the germ of literature. God says one thing and thinks something else. Abraham says one thing and thinks another. Their statements are allegorical. Literariness sprouts from reality, from the dialogue between God and man, when the sacral and the existential mix. (Kulavkova 2012: 141)

The absolute secret, which cannot be betrayed in words, can find another channel of self-expression in gestures, absences, and other signs, which—as Kulavkova points out—become a proper object of hermeneutics: "The semantics of absent or unsaid words is the essence of hermeneutics (ἑρμηνεία – ancient Greek for to express, clarify and interpret something that has not been said clearly)" (Kulavkova 2012: 142). Since a betrayed secret has its own form and language, it can be interpreted as any other type of discourse.

The acme of Kulavkova's interpretation of the Abraham and Isaac story are the psychological repercussions for both characters, and the role of language and hermeneutics in the story's cultural impact. We should at least allow for the possibility that Isaac is fully aware of what is going on. Why does he not complain or protest? Kulavkova explains Isaac's refusal to admit his awareness publicly by his state of shock and denial: "Shocked, he refuses to

believe his eyes. What he sees contradicts his perception of common sense, humanity and ethics" (Āulavkova 2012: 144). In the ominous silence of the journey to the place of the sacrifice, Isaac reads the truth in the non-verbal signs of his father's behaviour:

Isaac's allusive question is a form of interpretation. The answer exists and is known but it is behind language. The answer comes short of the word. It must stay an enigma and knock on the gates of language. The language says no, I will not express you." (Āulavkova 2012: 144)

The language of the narrative capitalizes on the lack of volubility and wordiness:

Language develops in itself that power to express something without it being said, to express through linguistic images and shifts. Language multiplies itself on the soil of this awareness of its capacity to express without saying much and hiding the meanings in codes. It has shown this capacity in a number of discourse practices: sacral, mythic, biblical, poetic, secret languages. Language accepts the prohibition to speak openly as its own convention. This convention generates the languages that have enigmatic composition. The hermetic nature of the being becomes a hermetic nature of language. The enigmatic nature of the being becomes an enigmatic nature of language" (Āulavkova 2012: 145)

By interpreting the signs and the lacunas of the narrative, hermeneutics relativizes the absolute secret, making it a shared secret, a concrete existential and historical experience, thus revealing the origins of human culture and civilization.

Apart from the originary scene of literature and hermeneutics, as Āulavkova argues, one major cultural consequence of the Abraham and Isaac story is a "desacralization of the father" (Āulavkova 2012: 148). After the happy resolution, when God indeed finds a lamb for the burnt offering, Abraham and Isaac return "as if nothing *unusual* has happened" (Āulavkova 2012: 149)—the narrative does not apprise us of their state of mind, of any uneasiness that might be creeping into the relationship between the father and the son. However, it is easy to assume that Isaac is trying to come to terms with the unutterable truth of what was going on when he saw his father holding a knife above him, and that Isaac's trust and faith in his father and in human fatherhood as such is forever shattered; "the Son will never be entirely a son. Isaac was marked for ever by his doubt in his father's love" (Āulavkova 2012: 151). Moreover, Abraham probably also realizes the changes that his son's soul is undergoing, and irrespective of Isaac's forgiveness, the father can hardly alleviate his own anxiety at the irreversible destruction of the most human bond between a parent and his offspring:

Doubt will gnaw the father and his son: the father – because he will be afraid that he has been demystified by his son; the son because at some point he will want to find out the truth. Doubt will be a way of communication between the

father and the son. Doubt as an existential and ontological uneasiness. Abraham's nightmare is a nightmare of humanity." (Kulavkova 2012: 148)

Yet, is there another possible component of this nightmare? What if God were a second or two late to interfere? Is the impossible command able to sow a seed of doubt in God's fatherly ethos and demystify Him in Abraham's heart?

Anthropological and cultural scenarios of violence carry, from a hermeneutical perspective, symbolic or aesthetic meanings with far-flung cultural consequences, be it aborted violence, like in Gans's originary scene with the hunters or Kulavkova's interpretation of the Abraham and Isaac story, or redirected violence toward a chosen substitute victim, as in Girard's mimetic crisis hypothesis. Kulavkova's transcendental hermeneutics captures additional cultural and psychological dimensions of violence that seeks to justify itself, often successfully, by ethics, morality, justice, aesthetics, heroic ethos, honourableness, etc., and it is those, rather than explicitly motivated types of violence, that pose a real "threat to humaneness" (Kulavkova 2012: 201). One of the instances of this type of violence is the famous slaughter of the suitors and torture of Penelope's maidservants in *The Odyssey*.

In the epic discourse of the poem, the violence is justified as the hero's revenge for his wounded honour; it is executed meticulously, in accordance with Odysseus' ethos of the cunning man of ruses and calculation (disguised as a tramp, etc.), that is, in a stylized, or aestheticized, manner. The epic articulation of this reprisal, which consists of responding to evil with a greater evil, makes *The Odyssey* a celebration of "ritual revenge, the ritualization of evil, as if evil were natural—and revenge an issue of moral value" (Kulavkova 2012: 202). The goddess Athena, who facilitates and patronizes the acts of revenge, functions as a "parable of a state law that regulates the sanctioning of violence, and which demonstrates that violence is a constant of the human civilisation" (Kulavkova 2012: 202). In the case of this particular revenge, Kulavkova emphasizes that the suitors, and especially the "disloyal" maidservants, were not only murdered but also tortured in a sadistic way, with cruelty exceeding any possible necessity. The fact that Odysseus takes care to immediately erase all the traces of the massacre and that Athena makes certain that Penelope does not witness the scene, sleeping in her chambers throughout the duration of the murder, points to the hero's awareness of the gravity and un-heroism of his (and his allies') actions. Especially striking is the torture of the maidservants, who are just slave girls with no rights in society, and who do not receive any chance to confess their story or otherwise protect themselves. Girard includes slaves to the preferable spectrum of human victims that are sacrificed by various societies: they are a much easier target than the suitors because slaves are "exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants... between these victims and the community a crucial social link

is missing, so they can be exposed to violence without fear of reprisal" (Girard 1996: 81-82). The excessive character of violence in *The Odyssey* and its ritualistic aesthetics make it somewhat similar to the phenomenon of sparagmos, which Gans, in *Signs of Paradox*, describes as an act of violence that "far exceeds the required for the rational division of the object," and he adds that "this excess is the measure of the specifically human phenomenon of violence" (Gans 1997: 134). This statement squares with Āulavkova's conclusion about the anthropogenic and trans-historical character of violence, according to which Book XXII of *The Odyssey* is a "projection of the *civilizational constant of violence*" (Āulavkova 2012: 208).

If those archetypal, originary scenes of violence, recorded in ancient literature—the stories of Prometheus, Philomela, Abraham, and Odysseus—testify to the existence of an innate and indispensable anthropological feature or even fulfil an anthropogenic function, that is, contribute to the emergence of humanity as we know it, what can an interpretation of those texts yield to us other than a purely cognitive, anthropological exercise? How does it differ from the originary anthropological hypotheses (by Freud, Girard, Gans, and Derrida) that posit violence as a generating force of civilization in terms of the emergence of representation, signifier, guilt, taboo, literature, and so on? Āulavkova's analyses suggest an existential dimension of interpretation that stems from Heidegger's understanding of interpretation as an ontological basis of *Dasein*, its fundamental mode of existence, as well as from the hermeneutical approach of Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur (Kalaga 1996). It is not exactly that trend of "hermeneutics" which, as Gianni Vattimo testified at the end of the 1980s, came to represent in America "more or less all of Continental European philosophy" (Vattimo 1988: 400), including Foucault and Derrida. Āulavkova underscores the transcendental, or psychagogic, function of interpretation. Similarly to the ritualistic properties of violence, interpretation gains ritualistic qualities; however, unlike violence, it acquires a ritual-cathartic form that can also be detected in artistic texts themselves but reveals itself only upon interpretation, and its effect is to lead "the soul from one into another state (of consciousness)" (Āulavkova 2011: 198). The cathartic element of interpretation as *ritual* "operates through recognition and mimesis, through a realization that we are neither alone nor unique in Sin, Infatuation, Powerlessness, Death ... Catharsis paves the way to articulate the unconscious and suppressed contents. Catharsis is the ritual of release..." (Āulavkova 2011: 198). In "Violence and Civilization," Āulavkova conjures a rich metaphor involving the "angel of history" and the "demon of arts": "struck numb" by the unutterable, violent reality, the angel resorts to the demon of arts to tell him the "real truth" (Āulavkova 2007: 38). The artistic, symbolic images of reality rely on "the transcendental functions of language" (Āulavkova 2011: 198), which alone have the ability to transform us psychically and spiritually.

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KATICA ĀULAVKOVA'S TRANSCENDENTAL HERMENEUTICS
OF VIOLENCE

The essay discusses Katica Āulavkova's contribution to the interpretation of the phenomenon of violence from the perspective of literary anthropology and transcendental hermeneutics. The author focuses on her analyses of violence in myth and ancient literature, including the stories of Prometheus, Philomela, Abraham, and Odysseus. The essay places Āulavkova's hermeneutics of violence in the context of anthropological hypotheses that either use myth or theorized originary scenes to illustrate anthropogenic factors and qualities posited as universal and indispensable markers of humanity and civilization (theoretical constructs of Sigmund Freud, René Girard, Eric Gans, and Jacques Derrida). Āulavkova shows that violence's embeddedness in humankind's primitive collective memory of myth is the fact that testifies to the violence's constitutive role in the emergence of humans and civilization. Āulavkova's method of transcendental hermeneutics goes beyond mere literary cognition: the experience of understanding the myth is characterized by a ritual and cathartic structure able to affect a psychic and spiritual change in the interpreter.

Keywords: violence, transcendental hermeneutics, literary anthropology, myth, Katica Āulavkova

