

**PASSION AND PAIN IN THE VISUAL AND POETIC EXPRESSIONS
OF MILENA PAVLOVIĆ BARILLI**

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Abstract: This study analyses the connection between Milena Pavlović Barilli's (1909-1945) painting and poetry and the harsh circumstances she encountered throughout her life.

Her childhood was difficult as her parents lived separately and in two countries. The unstable family environment significantly shaped her personality. Her education was intermittent and required travel to different countries. Barilli spoke three foreign languages before she completed primary school and wrote poetry in all three. However, in her native Serbian language, she wrote only her first and saddest poem. Her first lyrics resonate throughout her poetry.

Her work was deeply influenced by her nomadic lifestyle. The exposure to various national and artistic traditions led to an oeuvre which bears traces of several artistic styles. The most distinctive influences on Barilli's work were Metaphysical and Surrealist poetry and painting. Living far from home and her closest family, she often coped with feelings of nostalgia and the fear of rejection, which significantly influenced her poetry and her visual art. Apart from her lifestyle, Barilli's work was shaped by her encounters with poets and painters in places where she lived.

The paper examines how Barilli's life experience and artistic influences contributed to her distinctive artistic space, which is expressed in her multimedia work.

Keywords: Barilli, painting, poetry, nomadic life, Metaphysical art, Surrealism.

1. Introduction

The poet and painter Milena Pavlović Barilli wrote the above lines when she was only seven years old. Still, they foretold her whole oeuvre in which she would translate her inner turbulence, passion, and sadness into colours, lines, and words. Born into a world of Modernist fascination with travel, movement, experimentation, introspection, and the thirst for knowledge, Milena participated in almost all her age's intellectual trends, from Metaphysical painting to Surrealist art and poetry. From the start, Milena was drawn to the fantasies of otherness and the borderlines of existence. Her life was marked by the feeling of non-belonging: she was a stranger in her native country as she spent most of her life afar. Perhaps because of her style of living between two equally distant homelands, always on the run, her feelings of nostalgia and melancholy were incurable. However, her multimedia work reveals her connection with locations and people. One of the critics observes, "Milena was capable of 'living' simultaneously in all these worlds and freely hovering among them" (Denegri 2010, 206).

2. Life, Painting, and Poetry

"Life on the run" began for her family before she was born. Her parents, Danica Pavlović and Bruno Barilli, a Serb and an Italian, met in Munich at the beginning of the twentieth century where both studied music. In 1908 they married and a year later Milena was born in Požarevac, Serbia. After a couple of months, she and her mother went to Rome and back to Serbia. In subsequent years she would many times travel back and forth. Her schooling was divided among Italy, Serbia, and Austria. Her biographer and an expert on her work, Miodrag Protić, stated that "[h]er two worlds were sometimes united, while at other times they appeared quite different and in clash. When she was in one of them she felt nostalgia for the other..." (Protić 2021, 24). Distance and nostalgia for the Other stayed with Barilli during her short existence and behind all her creative work.

At the age of twelve Milena spoke four languages. After attending art school in Belgrade, she enrolled at The Art Academy in Munich. Later she would confess in an interview that "the first major effort that [she] had to make in order to feel my art as truly close to me was to get rid of the conventional forms that were imposed... in class of the Academy in Germany." (Protić 2021, 29-30). For all these, she remained in contact with her German teachers learning with time to live with the "inexplicable agony that painting inflicts in me" (Barilli quot. in Stanković 2009, 41).

After her first exhibition in Belgrade in 1928, and many futile attempts to find a job in Serbia, she left Serbia for good in the spring of 1930. In the next decade, she would exhibit in many European towns until 1939. when she would leave Europe for America forever.

In the 1930s she would travel, live, and work in many European countries - Italy, Spain, England, France. At first, she would travel with her mother, who was concerned about her ill health; later she would spend more time with her father, a renowned composer, writer, and journalist. Her relationship with her parents seemed to be tender and loving. However, she was always on the move as if chasing something. She longed for Serbia, her landscape, and people, stating, "the sky is never so blue elsewhere", as she would write to her mother (Stanković 2009, 56). Still, she would not return. "My art and my homelands have always been at odds", she would write on another occasion (Barilli quot. in Milenković 2012, 101). Her feeling of silent, almost unspeakable melancholy marked her deeply.

The French painter and poet, Andre Breton, who fathered surrealism claimed that Milena's work was surrealist (Stanković 2009, 63). On the other hand, her relationship with metaphysical art commented on at length by critics is distinct in both her painting and poetry. During her decade in Paris and various European capitals, she met many important artists and critics of the time. Her work finally gained general acclaim.

However, as if Europe had become too narrow for her to explore, she moved to America several days before the war broke out in 1939. After acute loneliness at the beginning, she started working and exhibiting again. Milena's creative work, regardless of the medium, exposes her feelings of solitude and yearning. Her Metaphysical and Surreal paintings and poetry thrive on her desire to go beyond the world of quotidian images and reveal the mystery of the Other (Waldberg 1971, 28-33).

2.1. Painting

All phases of Milena Pavlović Barilli's painting career reflect her nomadic lifestyle and the general spirit of non-belonging. Her work cannot easily be placed under the banners of dominant artistic movements as it could be associated with many styles, poets, painters, and genres, ranging from High Modernism to commercial art. On the one hand, she originated in the Balkans, on the other, she was raised and educated in the West. The clash of those diverse powers defined her life and work. Throughout her life, she was trying to figure out how to unite her different personalities – her Balkan roots with her Western

education and upbringing, navigating the abiding struggle between „I“ and „You“. This constant tension both constructed and deconstructed her philosophy. Placing her work in a particular movement would be extremely challenging. Perhaps she considered non-belonging her special feature as if she did not want to belong anywhere. Her work is close to Art Nouveau, and metaphysical painting, yet she would always return to her personal space, full of tenderness and feminine sophistication.

During the first period of her career, we could define her artistic endeavour as the play of light and shade. She grappled with finding her creative expression in this period. Barilli has not yet fully grasped the precise tone and has not chosen the career path she would pursue. Following her time in Belgrade, Barilli continued her studies in Munich at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste. There, in „Munich School of Fine Arts“ she remained from 1926 to 1928 working with renowned professors of the time, such as Franz von Stuck and Hugo von Habermann. Although Milena later reports that for her Akademie in Munich was a suffocating experience in which her talent could not thrive (Stanković 2019, 41) the collaboration with German professors, especially Franz von Stuck, played a significant role in her later development. Irina Subotić writes that her inclination towards old masters of Renaissance and Antiquity stems from her Munich years (Subotić 2010, 31).

Barilli started drawing portraits, marking the early phase of her art. The faces on the portraits were the people from the immediate surroundings – family members, friends, and colleagues, but also film stars like Conrad Faith and Rudolph Valentino. Besides, the spirit of the age favoured the visual presentation of film stars and their lifestyles. Concurrently, Milena created a series of drawings featuring female figures where their styles in fashion dominated. (Frfulanović Šomađi; Savić, 2019, 200-206). Colour, detail, and Art Nouveau trends with intense decorative elements, along with mystery, prevail on her canvases in this phase. We could say that these works are close to the works of applied arts since they not only demonstrate Milena’s artistic identity but could be used as sketches for making female clothes. (*The Woman with the Monocle*, 1927).

She also painted a different kind of portrait where individuals appear as „neutral“ masks, even when they interact with viewers. It was as if she observed them from the outside. Perhaps this was the reason why these portraits were never traced to realistic representation. What she was after was just the purity of the visual experience (Jovičić; Bašić, 2015, 395-400)

When she left her country for good Barilli embarked on a new phase in her artistic development. She began to produce works of enigmatic titles and contents. Gestures, and ruptured sculptures, identified the unknown with the emptiness of feeling. In her paintings, she created an enigma without expecting an answer. Objects that give body to the spiritual intensity on her canvases were painted in cold colors, and marked by strong design as well as the precision of form. When in 1931 she settled in Paris she discovered new paths of creativity. ascended on a new road of creation and development. The majority of her paintings show bodies without hands, some of them growing wings instead – the image that she uses in her poetry. On canvases, she uses blue hues with soft pink and grey shades and a distinct drawing. The blue background stands for the infinity of the sky why characteristic winged clouds appear a lot in the time span from 1931 to 1939. The winged creatures of both human and inhuman origin that populate much of her landscapes in this period in both her painting and poetry indicate both a promise of protection and a warning of the inevitable, resembling pagan deities that impersonate the labyrinthine nature of the Universe. The same motive appears in De Chirico's paintings and surreal art in general. As if with the art of this period she confessed her feeling of reality and her dreams.

De Chirico's metaphysical landscape continued to be a strong influence on Milena's work in the third phase of her development as an artist. She was also deeply influenced by the philosophical work of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Along these lines of thought, her work of this period is full of melancholy and mysticism. It is also often dreamlike and symbolic. In her beautifully unreal artistic space, "real" life remains hidden among common objects.

In all the works of her metaphysical period, she creates a visual space where the floor, the wall, and the sky are horizontal compositions that bring in the feeling of tranquility. Buildings with classical facades, with statues and intense shades in the foreground, support the illusion of space while the gaze is led into the depth of the picture. Many times the architecture becomes the main topic of her pictures, while the composition serves as a complementary element to it. There, Barilli comes back to the perspective of the Renaissance that she had long abandoned as a practice. She becomes interested in emotions and the passage of time, in a certain dramatic setting, often accompanied by an atmosphere of gloom, chaos, and intense drama.

During this period, Barilli truly appeared as an artist beyond the scope of the age. She could be better placed in Florence of Uccello and Botticelli. At that time, Barilli lived in New York. As she earned her living,

she faced the influence of the market rules on her art. It became commercial. The majority of her work in that period was portraits of prominent members of New York society. These portraits were quite different in style from her previous art of portraits. They show idealized figures in fantastic surroundings that resemble Renaissance pictures, often with the background telling a story that refers to the portrayed figure. (Subotić 2000, 27).

It was because of the unfavourable conditions for women artists and intellectuals in Serbia between the two world wars that she was forced to leave Serbia for good. Her unrestful spirit led her to move to Paris, Rome, and finally to New York (Janković 2001, 111). Displacement and duplicity which define her life were also a source of freedom as Zoran Blažina rightly marks out, “when she was disguised as a stranger, she was able to make her own choices (2010, 292).

Final and the most colourful period of her painting is the one that takes place in the United States. During this period she mainly created portraits. She concentrates more on the form. The faces become recognizable by their distinct features: an oval and flat shape, cylindrical neck, large almond-shaped eyes, as if in a trance, a crooked nose like a spatula that divides the face in two, and a small mouth.

Her extremely steady line which supports the controlled design endows her work with harmony, tenderness, serene beauty, delicacy, and strength. The second layer comprises a new space, which makes the viewer believe that she/he is in the front of a new painting. Religious themes are now more frequent and described with the ever bigger passion in both colour and design.

Barilli showed an inclination towards a different aesthetic, as early as 1927. The approach of the new decade coincided with great changes in her life – moving, and changing places, schools, and people. She was drawn by *haute couture* and the “new-woman” look and produced her first illustrations of Hollywood stars. Her sudden turn to fashion appeared to be a revelation of a new artistic language. The illustrations she created in the cities where she lived in the thirties, like Paris, London, and Rome, balanced centuries of artistic tradition with the flavor for high-fashion and glamour (Silver 2008, 217-229).

In the essay titled “The Apatria Room” Zoran Blažina searches for the origins of her commercial art through her dramatic and unsettled life. “Europe was in Milena’s room from her earliest days” as she “had a burning desire to master the art of make-up and styling and copy and design garments in imitation of the models she had seen in illustrated magazines” (2010, 290).

Contemporary reviewers and critics recognized Barilli's extraordinary artistic style. Frank Crowninshield, an art and theatre critic, and the art editor of *Vogue* magazine, states in his preface to the catalogue of Milena's first exhibition in the United States in 1939 that Milena's work combines modern trends with European traditions (particularly the Italian Renaissance and De Chirico) contributing in a unique way to the world of fashion. Crowninshield deeply admired Milena's work. In his forward to the catalogue he claims that "wholly exceptional phenomenon in the world of American art" (in Žarić 2017, 67). He believed that fashion could be presented as "the true work of art", so Milena's work "strengthens his efforts to establish fashion as an art form" (Crowninshield in Žarić 2017, 55).

Barilli incorporated in her work the designs of many contemporary artists and designers like Paul Poiret, John Redfern, Jean Patou, Lucien Lelong, Edward Molyneux, Coco Chanel, Madeleine Vionnet, Jeanne Lanvin, Elsa Schiaparelli, and Cristóbal Balenciaga (Žarić 2017, 69). She also collaborated with fashion illustrators and photographers in the centres of high-fashion in Paris, London, and New York (Koga 2012, 323-327).

Although she was praised for her work by leading designers in Paris, London and New York, her glamorous new life concealed private grief. The emotions that surround her relations with her parents and her native land are fully expressed in her poetry.

2.2 Poetry

While Milena's visual art reflects her dual vision, vividness, curiosity, and passion for life, her poetry reflects her inner struggles, exploration of existential mysteries, and search for meaning in her unusual circumstances. Ultimately, her poetry appears to be a deeper, truer reflection of her painful journey.

Milena wrote her first poem when she was six years old.

When the sun rises
and birds sing
then, then the summer comes.
But I will not, will not welcome it,
I will not welcome it in this
world. This world
is just a dream,
a nice dream!¹

¹ All the poems in this paper were translated by A. Jovanović

Rome, Saturday, November 12th, 1916²

Here, she outlines her poetic world: the contemplation of human enigmas, the sense of finality that threatens happy moments - when “the sun rises” and “birds sing”, announcing summer - and the eternal human quest for meaning. The contrast between opposite feelings – happiness and sadness, hope and knowledge, “I will not be here to welcome it” is resolved in the intellectual realization, smart acceptance of the inevitable, “this world is just a dream”. This poem foretold Milena’s poetic method in which the images and ideas will be juxtaposed and the unspeakable will resonate in the gaps between words and lines.

In search of the origins of Milena’s poetics, critics explored Milena’s early life in “an emotional provincial and folkloristic spirit and breath, in which memories... are wrapped in paper cones of spite and malice.” (Milenković 2012, 100). Folktales and the objects from Barilli’s immediate surroundings are often referred to by critics as a vital source of her imagery.

Her native land and the hungry villagers, Homolje and Zvižd with their dark legends and magics, the Danube with the winds of Europe that passed through provincial streets, the smell of milk and harsh cloth, the rich archeological sites of Roman Viminacium with their broken statues and sarcophagi... could leave the ... invisible traces on Milena’s soul... (Milenković 2012, 100-101).

“Statues”, “caryatids”, and “columns”, are placed in the wilderness, among the forests, amid even stranger landscapes, crisscrossed by “waters as mirrors” as if they are remnants of some other world emerging suddenly out of the depths of time and history.

Analyzing Barilli’s work in the essay “Milena Pavlović Barilli’s Pictorial Poetics and Viminacium Landscape.” Jelena Anđelković Gašpar and Emilija Nikolić address “the possibility that the Viminacium landscape, the archaeological area near the Danube in Serbia, inspired [her] art.” (2019, 77). The paper states that, in the metaphysical and surreal phase of her art, a disturbed relationship between objects is noticeable, and images are transferred from the realm of reality into the realm of dreams, hallucinations or enigmatic narratives... (Anđelković Gašpar; Nikolić 2019, 82).

Truly, the images invoked in Milena’s lines, like “the children of the marble caryatids with black and silent profiles” hide “enigmatic

² Barilli’s first poem, written in Serbian.

narratives” contained in their eternal silence. A “disturbed relationship” with reality is shown in incongruous descriptions typical of a macabre vision or a nightmare. The children in the poem are “lost in abominable darkness which is more solid than lead, or iron” and “eternally small and dead” (Barili 2012, 11; it: III). Her agony presented as an eerie landscape shapes the lines:

My hands burn
The face
And the hair
In the flag of fire.
When will this torture end?
Everything is empty
The ash hovers in the air.

My last gaze fades in the quiet of the sky
Which reflects waters of all seas. (Barili 2012, 25; it: X)

In many poems, as well as on canvases, Milena exploits the symbolism of hair. Feminine, sensual, and chthonic aspects of hair symbolism agree with the atmosphere of Barilli’s poetry. “Hair” is often juxtaposed with the image and symbolism of the forest with its mysterious undertones. In the first poem of the French cycle, Milena writes:

I untied the long hair with
thousands of locks.
That was a hard job
That I could not complete
Because the hair was intertwined
With bows of the trees
as I was running through. (Barili 2012, 43; fr: I)

Critics lengthily explored De Chirico’s traces in Milena’s work. Milena was “comfortable with the transcendental atmosphere where dreams are married with wakefulness, in search of the truth or a mystery behind the reality” (Subotić 2010, 28). This yearning for the knowledge of the mysteries of existence, which she “transposed into the idealized and the imagined, oneiric and extratemporal,” relates her work to De Chirico’s who also “invokes the inexplicable” (Ibid). In the same line Ljiljana Petrović claims that “Milena’s works search for the eternal, transcendental, divine...” (2010, 268).

Milena is a painter of long distances. With her everything is... scattered everywhere in the infinite Universe and such, too is Milena’s fate, said Antonio Annianta at the opening of her

exhibition at the Jeune Europe gallery in Paris in 1932. (Kragulj 2010, 88).

In his essay "Image and Silence" the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben follows the ancient Greek poet Simonides, claiming that, "painting is silent poetry (poiēsis siōpōsa), while "poetry is painting that speaks". Images contain both what is said and what is muted about the depicted objects while words do not have this privilege to express silence - words are only the titles of things, writes Agamben (2012, 98).

In Milena's poetry, silences speak out loud. In her economic lines, the meaning often stays in the gaps of the discourse. Her poetry draws both from the metaphysical and the surrealist style - her metaphysical conceits paint the dream landscape of her poetic world. The intellectualism of metaphysical poetry shapes her lines - the incongruous images are juxtaposed one next to the other and the conspicuous gaps that readers are invited to fill.

Pavlović Barilli's poetry is an informal language of painting... in her poetry [she] paints with verses... Pavlović Barilli in her poetry looks more like herself than in her painting. Her verses are fragments of her authentic and uprooted soul. Devoid of the compromises characteristic of her painting (Blažina 2010, 306).

Blažina justly links Milena's poetic style to T.S. Eliot's, claiming "regardless of whether in T.S. Eliot's sense or not... her poetry is indeed a cipher... for decoding her personality" (Ibid)

On a corner of a white cloud
The unclear sadness sleeps
- in an eternal melody,
silent and dreamed about in the shudder of the stars.
Only a dark cry of forest
Shakes her silver hair
lost in the gaze of distance. (Barili 2012, 7; It: I)

In this poem, without the title, the surreal landscape with clouds and "sleeping sadness" is wrapped in an "eternal melody". Its unreality is underlined by the dark forest whose cries surprise the equally unreal viewer, already distant and lost. Emotions of nostalgia, sadness of non-belonging imbue much of her poetic world, and are often presented as distance and the distinct absence of the owner of the gaze, as if she or he has already receded from the picture. The same concept of a receding gaze can be found on her canvases.

Barilli wrote her poetry in three languages - French, Italian, and Spanish. In Serbian she did not write, apart from her first poem. Her

escape in other languages has the form of an escape from the language, that is an escape from the specific, fixed social obedience to words. As in her life, in her poetry she travelled through a multitudinous linguistic/cultural space. In that, Barilli resembles Samuel Beckett, who ceased writing in his native language as it was too painful to look back on his native land which alienated him as it did with Milena. Beckett thrived on the same suspicion with words as Milena did. As Samuel Beckett wrote:

Is there any reason why that terrible materiality of the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like for example the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence? (1983, 171–172)

In the same vein, Barilli states that, words are not what we care about. (Barilli 2012, 21; it: VIII)

Like Beckett Milena sought to “bore holes in language” until pure meaning should “seep through” (Beckett 1983, 171-172). She explored silence and absence. As many writers in the first decades of the twentieth century, Milena felt displaced and expelled from language, nation, and tradition - constantly on the move and sadly, never belonging. The words that named things were not enough to express “the terrible materiality of the world” in the wake of the Second World War, so that authors, painters, and poets searched for the “safe” land and explored “the unfathomable abysses of silence”.

Milena’s agony was obvious even in the “colours” of her poetry which are “black, white, silver, and grey” (Pešikan Ljuštanović 2020, 116). Barilli’s spectre is “subdued, and monochromatic... which underline the dream-like dimension of her poetic landscape” (Ibid). This insightful analysis, which interprets Milena’s poetry through its association with colours, highlights the pictorial nature of this poetry. However, her pale dream landscape implies sadness, while the prevailing emotional suggestion is the confusion of the dream world (2020, 117). It also underlines the unique origin of her art in her feelings of loneliness, alienation, and distance. These emotions produce also her frequent complaints of the futility of life, like in the lines:

when will this torture end? (Barilli 2012, 25; It: X)

to sing in silence so as that the life could end sooner.

(Barilli 2012, 65;sp: I)

Life is long like an unknown river. (Barilli 2012, 75; sp: V)

The lines invoke T. S. Eliot's impatience with life's emptiness from his poem "The Hollow Men": "Life is very long", says Eliot. Truly, the context of Barilli's poetry is the same as Eliot's, De Chirico's, and Beckett's – the poetry, which bears traces of the uncanny, antique, and Other. Barilli's poetic voice is always in its Otherness, as if of a gaze of a stranger implying the unattainable life:

But I could have been
 a little blonde girl
 in a flower garden,
 ...
 I could run, run
 Faster than my heart... (Barili 2012, 45; fr: I).

Her whole work is marked by the feeling that her life is, in fact, somewhere else. The metaphysical eye gazes at the objects of "the quotidian" and produces poetry that is intellectual, picturesque, and concise as in the conceits, where the seemingly incongruous objects are brought together:

The hunter came from afar
 He knew all the difficult books
 And he did not carry a gun,
 But only he could read the most difficult books.

On the golden plate which he carried on his chest, there was written:

THE LAW OF THE FORCE
 THE LAW OF THE COMPASS OF FORCE
 MATHEMATICAL LAW OF ACCURACY
 VIBRATION OF FORCE
 ENERGY OF FORCE
 THE LAW OF PULSATION OF FORCE. (Barili 2012, 71; sp;

IV)

In a bizarre image of a "hunter" associated with the wisdom of "difficult books" and, at the same time, violence, or "force" in the least expected place: the "compass". The comment on the bitterness of the world is subtle and created by the incoherent elements of the trope. The unavoidable cruelty of hunting is inescapable as the inevitable force of natural laws, accurately "read" by the needle of the compass, and the methodologies of the exact sciences, such as mathematics. In this array of fragments, one perceives the Beckettian cacophony, which gives voice only to silence as an alternative reality.

Pešikan Ljuštanović calls this poetic plunge into geometry “the most striking and the most mysterious part of Milena’s poetic Cosmos” (2020, 130). Pešikan Ljuštanović claims that “like a demiurge [the artist] so defies the chaos, and imposes the order, but as a mortal being, he remains imprisoned in the centre of that abstract, and fragile sphere, crucified between the ‘eternal law of pulsating power’ and the inevitability of decay” (Ibid).

Barilli closes this poem with another conceit:

With the interior marked with dates
And palms impregnated with knowledge,
We travel. (Barilli 2012, 83; sp: VIII)

Although life is harsh and pointless, “we travel”. The surprising images “our interior marked” and “the knowledge imprinted on our palms” we succumb to the inevitable, and “travel”. Our body, our nature, marked with dates, the passing of time is “impregnated with knowledge”. Our interior knows what we are trying to forget – the dates, the merciless aging, and the transience.

In another Spanish poem Barilli states that,
Only wise men understand my words
For others
time brings ashes. (Barilli 2012, 71; sp: IVa)

There are no residues of the past, no “remains” of the day, only “the indefinite unclear voices” echoing from the labyrinth of the past as the days navigate life, “like shadows” and “water”, devoid of significance and meaning.

Like indefinite unclear voices
Days navigate my life
Like shadows,
Like water.
But I stay there to dream beside you
Because your breath is the only magnet
That I encountered on the road.
Now I rest. (Ibid)

In her Italian poems, Barilli speaks of metaphysical landscapes, like those that we encounter in De Chirico’s paintings.

Half-nude columns
Sleep at the base of a stone.
Everything else is a layer
Of finest dust. (Barilli 2012, 31; it: XIII)

A clear indication of time as dust prompts the idea of some indefinite past in which the statue that now “sleeps” was erected, half-nude, in the style of the Ancients. The description of a dead world completes the image of silent arches, free from the long-dead echoes.

Amidst two warm rivers.
The echoes of arches
Are dead.
A thousand-year-old women
Spread linen nets
Over sulfur forests. (Ibid)

The woman from the next lines who spread “linen nets” like doing some home chores, or a ritual, again and again, over centuries, to no avail. Since things are, like in most of Barilli’s poems, already receding like those “absent bodies” devoid of their own steps.

And there are steps
But bodies are absent. (Ibid)

In the closing lines, this distance is confirmed by placing another image of “locked but distant arms”.

And between arm and arm,
distance is unmeasurable. (Ibid)

The poem “ocean children” opens with a horrific image “children”:

Poor children
Of the Ocean
With watery hearts
With icy fingers (Barili 2012; it: III)

Their “watery eyes” and “icy fingers” are lost “in the internal darkness”, which is “more stable than lead and Iron”. The terrible image of children who are “eternally young and dead” culminates with the idea of children carved in stone “with black and silent profiles” (Ibid).

A perfect example of Milena’s surreal world is:

Ten ladies in black
In black up to their fingertips
Dance
In the light of ice
Moving away with each step.
On their burning lips
The blood of childhood resides.

They disappear
In crystal foam
rising black and thin arms. (Barili 2012, 27; it: XI)

Ladies in black, although dancing underlines their unreality and spookiness. Besides, they are already receding, as “in the light of ice”. What is this light like? Cold as ice, unpleasant, as if illuminating darkness. Distancing themselves, they still carry marks of pain and deprivation (“blood”) on their lips, which are “burning” and painful. Fading away, they dance the last dance “black and thin arms” – unreal, starved, or unclear, dying.

In another Spanish poem, Barilli imposes her insatiable feeling of nostalgia onto some indefinite landscape.

With straight and ancient
Wings,
With huge black pupils,
you were.
There forever remained
My roofs, my forests, my lighthouses under your spread
wings
And my gaze in such emptiness.
The space has enhanced unbearably (Barili 2012, 69; sp:
III)

3. Conclusion

Barilli fully embraces the Modernist approach of transferring the inner landscape into art. By depicting her inner world, she captures the context, again a characteristic feature of Modernism and its various movements. Her numerous references to mythological beings and classical art resonate similarly to the High Modernist authors, inviting the more meaningful world of the Ancients into the present civilization.

The most direct reference to Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land*, an iconic work of Modernist poetry, appears in the lines:

The trembling witness of sacred silence
Stepped out and said:
I am sexless. (Barili 2012, 85; sp: IX)

Apart from the eternal gaze of a “trembling witness of sacred silence”, the liminality of Tiresias, always on the border of binary principles - male and female, silence and song, past and future, blindness and all-seeing - is invoked in many of Barilli’s lines. We encounter the recurring image of “a thousand years old” creature,

sometimes a man, sometimes a woman, or an eagle, unstable and volatile like Tiresias, constantly traveling between two contradictions. The same was the case with Milena Pavlović Barilli, continually gazing at some Otherness - other nation, culture, language, stranger, and parent. Melena's paintings and poems call the reader and audience to follow her gaze towards the Other, reflecting her unfinished struggle to relate to reality and her own self.

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STRAST I BOL U LIKOVNOM I POETSKOM IZRAZU MILENE PAVLOVIĆ BARILI

Ova studija analizira vezu između slikarstvo i poeziju Milene Pavlović Barili (1909.1945) i surovih okolnosti koje su obeležile njen život. Imala je teško detinjstvo rastrzana između roditelja koji su živeli u odvojenim državama. Porodična nestabilnost doprinela je u velikoj meri formiranju njenog karaktera. Milenino školovanje je bilo sporadično i zahtevalo je neprestana putovanja i promene sredine. Barilijeva je govorila tri strana jezika do kraja osnovne škole i kasnije je pisala poeziju na sva tri jezika. Na svom maternjem srpskom napisala je samo svoju prvu, i ujedno najtuđniju pesmu. Tihovi te prve pesme odzvanjaju kroz čitavo poetsko stvaralaštvo Barilijeve.

Nomadski način života uticao je umnogome na njeno delo. Razne umetničke i nacionalne tradicije koje je upoznala i u kojima je stvarala ostavile su traga tako da njeno delo nosi obeležja raznih umetničkih stilova. Najupečatljiviji je uticaj metafizičkog i nadrealističkog slikarstva i poezije. Živeći daleko od doma i najbližih često su je mučila osećanja nostalgije i straha od odbacivanja, osećanja koja su u značajnoj meri obeležila kako njenu poeziju tako i likovnu umetnost. Osim načina života, na delu Barilijeve ostavili su traga

i susreti mnogobrojnim pesnicima i slikarima u sredinama u kojima je živela i stvarala.

U eseju se ispituje na koji način životno iskustvo i umetnički uticaju doprineli stvaranju specifičnog umetničkog prostora Barilijeve i kako su predstavljeni u njenom multimedijalnom opusu.

Ključne reči: Barilli, slikarstvo, poezija, nomadski život, metafizička umetnost, nadrealizam