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MATIJA BEČKOVIĆ

A SPARROW

The sparrow is incredible

An unbelievable occurrence
Phenomenal guy
But those who know his ancestors
Should not be surprised

There's not much to see of him
But he's a man
He has balls
He's daring
The smaller he is
The more intense he is
And greater from the inside
Than the outside

Consider just
How he resists winter
This bundle of feathers
Torrential rains coming down on him
Full force of the north on him
Piercing winds blowing
Bare bayonets descending

Yet he welcomes them bare-chested
He accepts the thrown gauntlet
He shows all his cards
Rises to the challenge
And shrugs off cosmic forces

Hatchets have frozen over
Machines have chilled
Coal smells like ice
Teeth chatter
Frost grabs you by the horns
Bites the nose between your eyes
Knocks off your ears
Slides into your underarms
Enters your core

Only he
Who barely exists
And who no one really counts on
Rises from under the snow
Removes the white cloak
Pounces on the tombstone
And with ice on his wings
Goes out into the open
To wage war with the monsters
Throws himself at all obstacles
And grabs the bare blade

Thunder cracks
Behemoths shiver
Steel heroes squeal
Rattletraps screech
Contraptions squawk
Ogres shriek
Rattled by animalistic fear

Only him
All that you see of him
An out of body spirit
Has his sense of self
You couldn't hit him with a pin
But he has character
He has the cheek
He has the chest
He has the coal eyes
He fights ruthlessly
Not allowing impure force
To cross his live body
Like it's nothing

And becomes the only
Bright spot in space
Despite what anyone says

The bald eagle is terrified
The hawk's claws are shaking
The raven's beak has fallen off
The vulture went gray overnight
Swallows flee
Cranes escaped
The nightingale twisted its tongue
The owl spoke with its eyes
In the darkest hour
Gray falcons
Not seen even in the weeds
No gulls or swans
But there are more white feathers
Than there is snow

Only he gloats
Flashing like dew on an axe
Not shifting his eyes
Concealing his wounds
He'd rather die than peep
He doesn't admit defeat
He doesn't accept the truce
He remains at war
He persists and rebels
He stands up like a man
Preparing his shot
Baring his teeth
And communicating only through gunpoint
He might have conceded
If it weren't for his late mother
Who raised him in her lap
If he takes one step back
He takes two forward
He fights to the end
And will not die until death arrives

Walls of snow descended
Snow-covered boughs squashed the mountain
God's grainshave razed the cliff

Completed the peaks and the troughs
Shaves the surface
Attacks the bare timber
Scratches the wasteland
And cuts the eyes with the bow
All the pine tree's rings freeze over
Icy grenades hanging in the air
A chamois sniveling under a cliff
The frost folded the sky and grasped it in its fist
Quashing the earth into a rail
Beckoning it to stretch out its submissive neck

Only he
Bristling and sprightly
As brown as a nut
A hard shell
A living embankment
Keeps the pace
And doesn't retreat easily
Unless he has to
Move a little
But even then he outpowers himself
And in the greatest mayhem
He keeps the peace
And thinks of his honor
And when he retreats to other positions
He doesn't run away
And if he runs away he doesn't turn his back
But looks truth in the eyes

Blades are whistling
Crowbars wheeze
Logs and stumps fly by
Hooks and hoes hiss
Teeth and horns howl
Masses and weights
Baseball bats and gloves
Lids and containers
Fences and chains
Broken windshields banging
Loose tiles
Unscrewed propellers
Torn out power lines

Strong winds full of feathers blasting
Rattling sounds through the canyons
Not a soul willing to stick its nose out

Only he boasts around
Boiling and rebelling
Feeling something growing in him
That isn't seen from the outside
Gliding like a beetle
Furiously spinning
He can't settle down
His blood putting him against the wall
He doesn't know what to do with the power
And fire that is roaring inside him

The shepherd dog shivers like a lordly pup
The boar is packed with pills
The sow farrowed an ice cube
The bear and his family
Made themselves at home in a needle's eye
The wolf ran away into a mouse
The rabbit dying in his bones
The fox treaded on thin ice
The snakes don't make a hiss
The fiery dragon wolf

Voluntarily surrendered
And came out of his shelter in slippers
Tail tucked between his legs
And hands up

And here he is
Angry and proud
Not withdrawing and goading
Tossing around feathers and puffing his chest
Horn to horn face to face
Eye for eye
He is not indebted
He attacks on a whim
Quick on his feet
Even when he doesn't feel like moving
Since he was born
He bickered and brawled

Not setting down his weapon
Or lowering his flag
Until his disappearance

One week in advance
Bad weather announced its arrival
From the direction
It previously came from
And asked that no one wait for it
And when it arrived the minute he said it would
It couldn't find a soul around
Nor could it hear a beetle in the wood
It exploded and obliterated
Everything that was standing upright
And went from house to house
To check if everyone tied themselves down
To the bed or to the heater
And put tape over their mouths
Put their electric gloves on
Ready to take incoming orders

Only he
Puts his foot in the door
Uncontrolled and unrestrained
Persistent in a despondent battle
Loyal to his oath
Remains on duty
Not allowing any harm to himself
Staying his course and having his way
Everyone fearing his courage
Rumors are spreading
That he's made a deal with someone
That he has a connection from the outside
That he has help on the inside
That there's a force standing behind him
That he's rock hard
That he's a Freemason
That he's gay
That he's a Jew
That he's a mere instigator
That it's not him
That who knows know stole his identity
That he's missing an invisible part

Nobody believes that he'd crack
And that no matter how daring he is that he'd dare
Completely on his own
And without a helping hand
To go to war with the whole world
And the universe

Ramparts became dejected
Fortresses saddened
The sun hasn't risen for days
Rocks crack but not ice
The storm envelopes everything
The frost arrested and chained everything down
No one dares to say a word
There are no frost cracks
No strand of smoke
It returns and doesn't dare go outside
Freezing in the chimneys
Cradles full of ice
If a rifle went off it would not be heard
Victorious armies marching
Legions and echelons
Roistering in empty cities
Unleashed winds revelling
Clanging in empty churches
Wild parties celebrating victories
Across the whole wide world
Playing only the white keys

But that celebration continues
Only until he appears
And like a sail
Marches on the battlefield
Ruining their calculations
And letting them know
That there's no force higher than him
That victory is cheap
Since all eyes are on the one
Who does not accept that victory
That's when all the demons swarm
To take out all their rage on him
And separate him from his head
And evil spirits rise and dictate

For him to be crushed and smashed
And when the whirlwind grabs him by the throat
Throws him off-balance and trips him
And sucks him into the vortex like a straw
Into its rocks and boulders
And starts to swirl him around
But the boulders spiral into their drills
And oiled up tracks
When he doesn't know what to do with himself
And realizes that he can't resist
That the time has come for that last glass
He dives under the wheel
Appears like a knot in a comb
Hovering between life and death
Whisks away and then returns
Without hope or promise
And runs into it blinded by revenge
When he can't do anything
To hurl everything in their faces
And piss in their faces
Or spread his legs and sit
And make a mess in the whirlwind

The sky buried itself
The ground moved back
A raging cold war
The rampant white plague
And white death
The state broke down
And utterly failed
The world fails further
Without any hope
A white city highlighting white flags
Knocking the last hurrah
Long pipes freezing under tarps
Armored military units have given in
Gales blowing armor through the city
Air traffic is suspended
Rat passages are congested
The eternal flame has become a block of ice
The stars fled under the ice
Not even the mightiest sun
Dares to move a muscle

The mouse hole is in high demand
Manhole and garbage cans stuck together
The earth's globe is a chicken's egg
The windstorm hauling bloody feathers
Through the busted Heavenly gates

And it's just him
Only him
The heir of free mountains
And the high wild ranges
Remains unshamed
Primed and cheerful
On his own level
And steady like a cliff
Standing on the horn of a frozen bull
His step
Is the only ground
And unconquered territory
The alpha and omega
And his tail
Is the only unblemished
And uncreased flag
Through casemates
And icy bars
Frost and patterns of snow
On frozen iron curtains
Unslaved slaves
Watch and bless god's bird
And the nest it came from
Saying to themselves
Wherever you step
You leave a wide mark
As it did
And with tears in his eyes thinking
What a disgrace
If he hadn't come along
To save the seed of the people
And rescue the honor of the nation
And the human race

Translated from the Serbian by
Anđelija Jančićević

ALEKSANDAR TIŠMA

WITHOUT A CRY

I knew about the ceremony at the cemetery. Still, I didn't go. I was repelled by the stereotypical tone of the articles in our local newspapers, which put more emphasis on the prominent figures who will be there than the purpose of the gathering – to commemorate the victims of the occupation – and the tragedy of it all. The small write-ups that appeared on three or four occasions already produced an atmosphere of speeches and replies, wreaths, organized sadness and sublime thoughts capable of killing even the most sincere emotions. “But what can you do?” I nevertheless justified this conventional initiative, reminding myself of my own negligence, the poorly kept promise which I once made to myself at the end of the war, deeply moved by my own final salvation: that I will always remember those whom the former perilous years ripped off the coast of life; that I, if no one else, will preserve the memory of the friends and acquaintances who were among them for as long as I live. And what became of this promise? Only occasionally a cursory thought as I pass by a familiar house where I spent my time as a child playing with one of them, or upon encountering a man whose features remind me of someone who had perished, or a sudden sobering thought, in the midst of work or relaxation, although this sad thought doesn't crop up for its own sake, but rather shows up accidentally and serves more as an excuse for a little poetic melancholy. And there's remorse, of course, for the sin of forgetfulness, and an unconvincing promise that one day I will redeem myself by really-really immersing myself in a memory, evoking each and every familiar face, reliving their every feature, movement and habit – what an absurdly naïve and futile idea! And so similar to this conventional tenth anniversary, which ultimately fosters the same notion and enables virtually everyone to pay tribute by regarding it as an occasion for reflection or manifesting sorrow, depending on one's nature.

Nonetheless, even after admitting all this to myself, I did not go – only now out of fear that this commemoration might prove to be a true day of redemption, which was what I vowed to do for years, and that I would not measure up, thus allowing it to pass, never to return, without doing anything for my deceased friends. I would be overwhelmed by impressions – not those from the past, which I’m supposed to evoke, but rather the present: the crowd, greetings from acquaintances, the speeches and then the stupid preoccupation with one’s demeanor that befalls a person on such occasions. It was as though even my body was mobilized to justify these doubts. On the day of the commemoration, I was feeling so lethargic, so sluggish, that it would have been truly hypocritical of me to show up at the cemetery in such a mood, among a sweating crowd and stand there for an hour or two with swollen feet and a desire to escape as soon as possible. It was an August day, scorching, with a low-arched raging sky and sun rays dripping down like red-hot wax. Over this summer, I went swimming every day – why not go today? Even that would be better than fake remorse – by any means more pleasant, added my mischievous, mocking condemnation. The time set for the commemoration was ludicrous, 4 p.m., while the heat is still unbearable – they deserve to be ignored. “Deserve?! Who? The organizers?” There you have it: even this attempt to reduce the event to a show, a social obligation, proves that at the moment I’m not worthy of communicating with those I’m supposed to mourn.

Even so, I was still undecided. I wasn’t in the usual hurry to have lunch, eager to jump on my bike and rush off to the beach. I ate slowly, kept checking my watch, looking at the sky, surveying the weather, telling myself it wasn’t really that nice outside, that it was too hot, that it’s probably not even worth getting on my bike, considering I had only an hour or two before I had to go... then I would remember I wasn’t going to the cemetery and that my whole afternoon was free; and then impatiently looked at my watch again, at the sky and so on. Until I finally became disgusted with my own indecisiveness and abruptly, swiftly, almost angrily stood up and headed for the beach.

Suddenly everything spread out and broke free. On this jut of land, sheltered from the noise and tumult of the city, home to rows of poplars with dense treetops and lines of whitewashed wood cabins, so charmingly miniature that they just barely resemble man and his harsh certainties, and seem to be mocking his architectural severity with childlike good-naturedness; on this palm of nature, which so eagerly slipped out of the city’s humid and tight glove, everything demanded tranquillity and pleasure. The overarching sky, with its sweaty, gleaming heat, now free of rooftops, was fleeing toward deep, ethereal blueness, allowing the world beneath to breathe freely, and with pleasure. The

area, visible for more than ten kilometers along the Danube, was resting, gratefully relaxed. Srem was gently rippling on the other side, lining the horizon with its parapet of greenery; and on this side, where I was basking in the sun free from clothing, with hundreds of others, a flat sandy shore stretched out in a reverse semicircle, white and naked like a hand on a headboard. And through the bosom of this harmonious sculpture, where all the vastness and color meet, the Danube flowed silently, begirding the area with a strip of cool blueness.

As always, I had to stop and take in this so familiar image. I've never grown indifferent to it, nor have I ever taken it for granted. It was as though it revealed something new every time: a surprisingly softly-shaped bend, which drops all the jaggedness of the Fruška Gora Mountain, like a single muffled chord, into the vast plateau of the River; pronounced shadiness of a hollow, as deep as heaven's blue; a gray or blue or pink glimmer of the Petrovaradin Fortress walls; a blazing radiance of the sand which, at dusk, can be as cuddly as satin, whereas in stormy weather it growls and quivers under low gusts of wind; and finally the countless diversity of the Danube, which sometimes slides forward shyly, as if it were listening to the tumbling of the tiny sand particles, and other times wiggles restlessly in its basin like a fickle girl, or jumps around cheerfully under a golden stream the sun is spreading over its surface, or simply sinks somberly and sagely into the silence of the night.

Nevertheless, I prefer the Danube landscape just as it was on that day: bright and clear, surrendering to the sun and the peacefulness of the afternoon like some African giant who is fed, clothed and cleaned by life that nature itself radiates, and in his self-sufficiency lasts through endless years. I felt an overwhelming feeling of resignation, like before a woman, beautiful and strong, but also benevolent and devoted, a soft and somewhat melancholic feeling, but full of certainty and respect, and flickering admiration which didn't allow games and teasing, mischievous testing of boasted strength, but demanded humble surrender to self-forgetfulness.

Slowly and piously, I walked down to the shoreline, where the River continuously bathes the sand as thousands of its tiny mirrors rise and recede in an almost unnoticeable, casual, absent-minded game, leaving behind a narrow strip with a lacy edge to sparkle with unparalleled shiny smoothness – and after taking in the landscape one more time, stepped forward, in joyous anticipation of that subtle tickling feeling caused by sudden cooling of a sweaty body, into that realm of tiny waves, invisible little currents and swirls, touching and feeling first with my feet, legs then hips and chest, until that jubilating moment when I fully surrendered to the caresses as I descended down that soothing current allowing it

to carry me at will. My body, completely relaxed, like a fish, a log, a clod of dirt ripped from the shore, and just like all these things, devoid of thought, I now sailed through the water, sensing only its transparent caresses, watching with a wandering eye, over the water, from the water, the serene blueness that surrounded me, the shore as it solemnly and peacefully glided by, while nevertheless faithfully remaining close, and the heavenly cone above, with the red-hot torch of the sun in the middle – taking all this in, also completely serene, in my slanted gliding position in the midst of a good-natured element, unaware of time, myself or my desire to prolong the moment.

And the moment was long, and when I finally stopped and with a few quick movements reached the shore, to surrender my body to the sun, which seemed to have rid oneself of all its weight and, under the kisses of the River, all traces of impurity it is subjected to and secretes in moments of tension and strain; to stretch out, cooled off, feeling fresh and sweet as I faded away with quivering pleasure, on the hot, droughty sand– I suddenly recalled the event I decided to skip that day and I could not tie this Danube to the one which, not so long ago, swallowed over a thousand bodies covered in blood.

I couldn't, even though the comparison tempted me with its mixture of grotesque irreality and truth, which grabbed hold of me with such force that I sat up with a sudden jolt. No, it was impossible to imagine! It was inconceivable but true: here, right here, ten and a half years ago, over the course of two days in January of 1942, murderers stood with their victims, bloody corpses lay on the ground, and screaming people half-beaten to death drowned. Under this same sky, only screened by callous grayness, on this same sand, only hardened into lumps of icy snow, half-naked people trotted in the cold wind on Epiphany Day and, dazed by the horror, watched in this image of killing before them their own wounds, their own cries, their own torn bodies being plunged into the dead blackness of the water beneath the ice cover. However, it was just so: over the course of those two days, people were dragged from town, in trucks or on foot, to this same Danube beach, and forced to form a line at the entrance, a line which an incorrigible parodist might compare to the crowded lines formed in the summer, on Sunday afternoons, when practically the entire town swarmed to the beach – this was where these people waited in line. A horrendous line! An inhuman, nightmarish line. Imagine standing in minus 28° C in front of a green colored entrance to the beach, idyllically decorated with a lattice, shivering in the cold wind which here, away from the rooftops, turns into gusts of small white ice crystals, stinging the eyes, hands and neck. Trembling, hunched over, reaching out to your trembling child, wife, mother with a quivering hand, and listening, stricken with

horror, aghast, craving to hear and not to hear the screams and pleads, the wailing, the mindless orgy of dying on the other side of the cabins, which hid it from view. And moving closer, as if this was what you wanted, moving closer, yes, yes, the horror, because you are in *this* line, the one in which millions of people *are not*, nevertheless moving closer, step by step, with horrifying slowness, for hours and hours, and with horrifying speed, in an instant you are within an inch of the entrance, without wanting to be there, no, no, by no means, wishing with all your heart, like a snake, like a wolf, like a sick dog, wishing you weren't there, that you were somewhere far away, where the other people were, alive and safe, that you could run, escape with your eyes and blood, through the cordon of bayonets, across the field and frozen water, across the hill, across the whole country, in your trembling body, but unable to, thus remaining there to fade away before a cordon of executioners with bayonets, with ice-covered, stiff mustaches and demented eyes, your child, wife, mother clutching your hand. Moving a step closer, and then another step, wishing not to with force not even thoughts could express, for thoughts are frantically searching for a way out, a hole, surrounded by barriers, a sky barrier, an earth barrier, a barrier of people with bayonets. Moving closer, against your will, bouncing off and coming up against the hollow chests of those behind you and again, moving closer, pulling by the hand your child and wife and mother, closer and closer to the gorge where all the barriers meet to crush you. Where you are stormed by bayonets, stiff mustaches and demented eyes, grabbed and dragged away, and your child and wife and mother are grabbed and dragged away, and you are hit and yelled at, told to take your coat off, you don't understand so you are hit again, and then you understand and with trembling fingers you unbutton your coat and take it off, and then the other one, and you take your child's coat off even though it's freezing cold and the wind is beating against your back, your face, and the coats are ripped off your wife and your mother. And then they push you forward and beat you, and you pick up your child as you stumble and its fire and tears are telling you: "Maybe they won't", but you know they will, you can already see it, oh you can clearly see that they will because up ahead fires are burning, blows are struck, there is struggling and screaming, falling and disappearing – where? you don't know, until you are also seized by the final whirlpool, pain, flame and, curled up into a stone of terror, you see, finally see a way out, a hole: made in the ice, on the surface of bloodstained dead water, with skulls, legs, shoulders rising around the edges, in which they push your child, still warm, skull shattered, a lingering final cry and where you are also pushed by a blow, a death rattle, a spasm.

And now I was sitting in the same spot, enjoying the sun, sand, the Danube, my naked wet body. Was this possible? Yes, it was possible. I was lying, carried here by the affectionate strokes of the water, in the very spot where the atrocities took place, face to face with the beach entrance, with its idyllic lattice decorated with an oval-shaped opening, which was at that very moment swarming with visitors, with bikes and stuffed canvass bags, unbuttoned shirts, wearing shorts, women in light, tight dresses, a hurried mass, gasping cheerfully, eager to strip off their sweaty, tight clothes as soon as possible and jump into the refreshing waves and lay in the sun. In the area between them and me, on both sides of the sandy walkway, stood whitewashed wooden arbors – could it be that they were the same arbors in front of which men, women and children were once forced with gunstocks to remove their clothing and where their last ties to a safe life, still warm, were discarded? – and now these arbors were a gathering place for peaceful leisure: in front of one, a barber shop where an assistant, who was also wearing swim shorts, was shaving a large, older man, obviously very pleased he was able to mix benefit and pleasure, to be stroked with a cooling foam, wearing only his swim shorts and breathing in the clean Danube air; in front of another, a wooden restaurant veranda, shaded by a canvas roof, where men and women in swimsuits were sitting in white patio chairs, drinking their beer, chattering and playing cards, squinting lazily towards the glimmering water; crowding in front of the ice-cream shop were children with sunburnt, stretched out backs, clutching the money they wheedled from their moms and dads, standing on their tiptoes, watching the vendor's generous hands with frightened wide eyes, as if they were not quite sure that there would be enough for them, and then grab and dash away. – A deceiving image? Or also true? Imposed itself, smiling, encouraging conciliatory resignation, or insanity.

For, if what happened ten years ago was able to happen, then what sort of comedy were we putting on here with our voluntary disrobing, with our blissful diving in this blood-filled water, with our laughter and our strutting under this indifferent sky? What is this frantic hunger for life which fogs our vision, even here in this place of death? We are sunbathing – lying around on our own graves! and mellowed by the warmth, viewing life as some sort of gift; admittedly, a deceiving one – we readily add with sanctimonious contrition which is supposed to hide the blood-stained truth – admittedly deceiving, impermanent, only one piece of the road we have to cross, toil, an opportunity given only once and for a short time. But it isn't given, nor is the road or the toil. It's all a lie! People don't die at the end of their road, and if they do then it's to deceive the others, like with all privileges. People die horribly, at

the start of the road, children who have not yet discovered their direction die, people with direction die, instantly as if struck by an arrow, people crossing the threshold of love die, people die with incurable bitterness, with an overarching gray sky above, with the image of deranged executioners, with blows and cries, with a slaughtered child in their arms, with horror, with senselessness.

Then why the pretense? Why the sun and the blue vastness, which seems to be calling to us to fill it, with our looks, actions, imagination? Why the betraying tickling sensation on our tightened, sunstruck skin, thirsty for caresses and play, and the tame water beneath our feet? Why doesn't the sky darken into a gloomy threat, why doesn't the ground freeze into a stone of dread, why don't the cries of the dying, the slaughtered and murdered, sound out and occupy the empty, dead spaces for all eternity?

I was saying this to myself, no, screaming in my face, calling upon the horror to appear, at least in my mind, in this one body which, in a flashing moment, faced the truth.

But nothing happened. The landscape replied to my challenging look with persistent, mocking charm. Its moment is just beginning. The heat was subsiding, afternoon sleepiness scattered like fairy dust. Shadows began to stir and then rush, stretched out in their lanes. The sun pulled back its lid and released a breeze as light as a dreamy kiss, which immediately set to work, as busy as a bee, to coax a sigh of wakening in everything around it. The hills of Srem were fluttering in the restless lighting, a drop of delicate bronze fell on the fortress, the grayness of old-silver-colored waves began to fade on the coat of sand, the poplars shook off their stillness and began to swish with soft relief. The Danube stretched out, let its hair down and released hundreds of snow-white gulls. Everything came alive, eased down, let loose. People were also up and about. Sensing that today's celebration was nearing its end and that this was that sweetest moment when swimming was no longer relief or a means to cool down, or sunbathing an obligation to get a tan, and the sun and the river and our bodies were flowing into a single stream of freshness and insatiable late afternoon playfulness, they all rushed to take advantage of the last hour, hour and a half. The shore was covered with bodies in motion, the shallow waters overflowed with commotion, splashing, swimming, playfulness, laughter and high-pitched female screams like at a drunken wedding. People, innocent of the knowledge, didn't care about the dead who on this same spot once cried out. They liked their forgetfulness so much that they weren't even conscious of it. Even I, who nevertheless knew, alone, had to exert myself to cover this sight with a blotch of my truth. It was there, hard and bitter, but floating on the sidelines and moving further away

with my every gaze, which was helplessly colliding with sheer beauty and joy. I was also alive, shamelessly alive. – It was time to go home.

On the way there, I also stopped by the cemetery. “Maybe...” I said to myself under the burden of my helplessness, even conscience, though I think I secretly hoped that the commemoration was already over. But it wasn’t. By the high wall surrounding our cemetery, there were a few automobiles, and one truck. On top of it, stood a few inquisitive spectators and a group of half-naked children, standing on their toes in a vain attempt to see something of the excitingly unknown activity taking place on the other side of the wall, marked by the slightly muffled intonation of a speech. I set down my bicycle and climbed on top of the truck.

The cemetery, although small, seemed to be swarming with people. In the middle, hundreds of people in festive attire crowded around a gray and white marble rectangle, obviously a newly erected tombstone, listening to an elderly speaker as he read his composition standing behind a lectern; further away, towards the opposite wall, the crowd was less dense, mobile, edged by a group of soldiers forming two lines. Some people were crying, alternating eruptive and barely audible weeps, others were staring ahead with rigid compassion, and all the way in the back people were walking around the graves at will.

To all appearances, the ceremony was at its end. Wreaths with spread-out ribbons, like colorful crabs, were already laid down on the tombstone with harmonious symmetry; the speech was a closing one, quick, slightly out of breath, tired. Perhaps this was the reason why I wasn’t touched by it, or maybe it was because every sentence strived to tie the victims of the occupation with the struggle of mankind for progress. Because it didn’t say anything about my experience, today, on the Danube, on the true graves of the mourned.

But then, at the end of the speech, when the speaker moved away from the lectern and no one took his place, creating a moment of uncertainty as to whether the ceremony was really over, there was uncertain commotion, audible murmuring mixed with the clicking of a photographer from our local newspaper; in that moment of anticipation when thoughts and will stop, confused and without direction, there was a sudden explosion of deafening gunfire. – The assemblage jolted, let out a gasp of fear. I too went numb, suddenly reminded of the image which once again unravelled behind the salvo with crystal clarity: bodies staggering beneath the grayness of the low opaque sky, blows, helpless struggling, deep open wounds, the hole in the ice swallowing up the cries...

But no, there were no cries. It was only the gunfire of the honorary artillery, and the murmur of the crowd, convinced this was the case by the clacking rifles and clouds of smoke above the far wall, started up

again, with repentant relief, as the people headed out of the cemetery. My neighbors on the truck also started to leave; children, who were somehow already on the ground, ran along the wall, with their backs shiny and bare, kicking back balls of heavy, summer dust. I went over to my bicycle.

No, there were no cries there. Or anywhere. Once released, from the very woundedness of the only body, they flew, like soft breaths of wind, to the sky, the ground, whose strata had swallowed them irretrievably.

Translated from the Serbian by
Persida Bošković

GOJKO ĐOGO

SULTRINESS

Gloomy, gloomy, I don't know why,
dejected like a Gipsy horse.
Where does that painless pain come from?

It's a shame even to say that,
today no one comforts anyone,
not even priests take any notice of crying?
How can I remove that moss from my face?
It's not appropriate for me.

I know how to hide my stones
without it.

A healer offers me a pill and some grass
a flowerless flower
a dry cleaning of the soul.
If I swallow
My fog and its little ones shall leave,
the sticks shall protrude from the shirt.

Whom shall I take for a walk then
and how shall I meet the end of the century?

Is there anywhere in your garden, father of love,
some green sprout
that sways in the wind but does not break
on which I could lean
until this sultriness has passed.

THE DROUGHT

Dry mouth dry eyes,
springs and wells have dried up.

Forget the mouth, it babbled nonsense of all kinds
and swallowed what it couldn't chew.
It wasn't confined when it kissed
or when it clenched the wind with its teeth,
it is time to lock it up.

The eyes are something else.
They neither cry nor laugh,
no magnifying glasses or lenses can help.
I shall buy them artificial tears,
let them cry even when they laugh.

If they do not open
I shall pluck them out as Democritus from Abdera did
so as to see better in the dark.
I shall settle accounts with those helping devices
that used to lead me astray in my youth.

When I am born again
I shall be that little man from the Neolithic
whom I sometimes meet in Vinča.
Only an eyebrow above the sewn up eye
and a comma at the corner of the lips
engraved like a smile
– only to the sun, to a butterfly
when it lands on the marble forehead.

Enough for an agreement
and a disagreement with the world.

A SPRING WALK

This morning I took him out
of my subcutaneous pocket,
I would like to take a walk
with an unknown man,
I want to show him how the world is beautiful
when hellebores and dogwoods bloom –
after all, it is spring.

I don't know anything about him.
How did he sneak into my dolman?
I do not air out too often
the interior chambers.
I also misplaced the key somewhere.
But he did not die
Of the stone damp.

Like a shadow, light and bodiless,
my new acquaintance is walking with me.
Sandals made of my skin suit him,
as well as the curly hair
that I had lost long ago.

He certainly hasn't been in the military,
he has neither drunk nor smoked,
he would fly from one hill to another
if I didn't hold him by the arm.

It's good that he doesn't resemble me,
doesn't prate about himself.
I shall not part from him
until the end of my life.

But I am afraid that the one
whose skin I used to put on,
when it gets dark,
will put us both into his black bag.

A LITERARY EVENING

A clairvoyant
has offered me his lookout,
a view at the four sides,
window to the future
and bird watching binoculars.

Everything on the screen
has been clearly drawn,
a small garden, water well, pen,
some wormwood and some salt,
a heavenly blue trough
from which lap up the kids
and piglets.

In that reading book
weevils do not carve the letters,
pages are not eaten by green locusts.

I like such books,
an ode to joy,
a wide field of vision
and a hill ascended by the poet
but how can I cover barefoot
a thousand miles between us
when my feet get prickled by thistles and thorns.

THE ALCHEMIST

On a bench in the park
I can hear a bee and a flower
calling one another.

I don't understand that language
but I translate one word at a time,
my ear is animal vocabulary.

I would also like,
as a bee makes honey,
to take some pollen and saliva
and prepare a healing incantation
that will be used by all
and nobody will know
what disease that remedy is for.

And so curled up on some bench,
like that snake in books
gnawing its own tail,
I've wasted my whole life.

Translated from the Serbian by
Dragan Purešić

ALEKSANDAR GATALICA

THE MAN WHO SOLD DEATH

Death always comes to call on someone else. Never us. And when the lady with the tangled, straw-like yellow hair and boney fingers comes to stand at our bed, even then, this is only happening to our body, which goes limp, falls deeper into the pillow, as a suggestive theatrical stream of blood flows down from our lips. Our body is then taken to the morgue and the date is set for the funeral where all the living gather, convinced this could never happen to them and certain that death always comes to someone else, someone who just wasn't lucky that day...

But, this story shouldn't be told like this. It should begin at the end and not the beginning, or in such a roundabout way. Anastasius Pravica, a furrier, sold death. In his case, it didn't happen to someone else. Or it did, but either way, it was always close by and within reach. Anastasius owned a fur shop on King Alexander Boulevard, which he inherited from his father, who just like him, had a rare and unusual name. Sophronius was the name of Anastasius's father, and he also inherited the fur shop from his father, Anastasius's grandfather, Procopius. The lineage went on. Each successive generation of furriers had one son. Each succeeding heir was given a name worthy of a furrier and designated to continue the cycle.

This is also the way it was with Anastasius, an unusually strong and vital man, not at all like his ancestors in appearance who were tuberous, bent inward several times over and withdrawn in their sheltered thoughts and concealed business plans. Like goldsmiths, furriers are also somewhat secretive because their merchandise is costly and difficult to come by. However, unlike the jewelers, furriers have taken the secrecy to a higher level because their wealth is attained by shooting rare and often protected species of animals and then skinning them in

the obscurity of some abandoned Eastern European barn. The skins which then appear on the black market require a trustworthy trader, a dependable middleman and finally, skilled hands which are going to buy them in strict confidence and tailor them into gloves, fur coats or muffs.

This is why Anastasius was also reserved and when he did speak, not at all eloquent. He also lived only in winter and had blood on his hands of many red eyes, rare little animals whose furs he obtained illegally on the black markets in Hungary, Transylvania, Moldavia and on the shores of the Black Sea. Szeged, right behind the umber fence of the old cemetery; Arad, a little further down by the abandoned clover field; Nagykanizsa, in a small dead-end street behind the monument to the liberators of Hungary; Izmail, by the frozen Lake Jalpug; Constanța, over by the old roadstead – these are all the places he visited often, where he spent the night and where he was known by all bar singers and waitresses.

Anastasius would return from his trips tired and not at all satisfied. The ermine from southeast Siberia was getting smaller and wasn't as white as in the days of his father Sophranus, astrakhan lambs from Afghanistan were now only brown, almost never gray, the silver sable from Zabaikalye was practically extinct, and only blue rabbits could be found on the market. Nevertheless, the craftsman always celebrated his return with a glass of brandy. Then he would take out the tiny furs, often no bigger than the palm of his hand, from the lining of his coat and take them to the tannery. After this he would get out of his comfortable travel clothing, put on the nicest black suit and go to the front area of the shop armed with the hypocritical smile of a retailer, ready to meet his customers and – death.

The furrier offered his merchandise bent at the waist. He had a special pose for each fur. With a slight bow of the head, like a chapel master from the Rococo period, he would say “mink” and with an emphasis on the “m” show his merchandise to the right customer. With a more serious bow from the waist, like a Hungarian servant, he would say “sable”, with importance, as if saying “szervusz”, and bring out into the light a piece of fine workmanship, accentuating its delicate quality. Also bent at the waist, doubled over in a subservient bow, he would say “ermine” and ask the customer to join him in the back room. There were also situations when he would, overwhelmed, almost petrified by the rarity, mention the term “white fox”, as if saying “Lord of Sabaoth”. However, the lowest bow was reserved for the word “astrakhan”, and it was always followed by a recommendation that the connoisseur schedule an appointment, at which time the rare merchandise will be brought to the shop from a special stockroom.

Anastasius would execute all this as if he were performing in a theatre, like an opera singer who can't sing without just as poorly acting out the role. The old furrier didn't have much interest in the buyers, or the merchandise he so skillfully bargained over. Something else bothered him. Not too long ago Anastasius – who like a true merchant kept track of his merchandise even after the sale – noticed that shortly after buying the fur some of his customers simply fall ill and die. He didn't see the connection at first, or put the pieces together, but as someone devoted to reading obituaries he noticed there was something unholy about this, something dark and difficult to fathom, and that it must be related to him.

Once or twice, he went to visit the grieving families and made inquiries; he visited the priest at the cemetery on several occasions and attended the funerals of some of his customers to ask the gravediggers about the cause of death of the “loved one”. It didn't take much for him to realize that a certain fur on a specific person meant quite certain and imminent death.

Wheezing customers with lung disease, who will acquire an ugly cough in the next year, chose white fox fur; a slow and inevitable death due to the blooming of amalefic lily in their intestines, awaited those who bought the astrakhan; troublemakers and pugnacious persons whose chest will split in half because of a ruptured artery chose the sable; those with pale, transparent complexions, who will soon suffer from an invasion of white blood cells, showed most interest in the ermine; and finally, those with serious digestive disorders and long-lasting disconcerting constipation wrapped themselves in the bison.

There were no exceptions, or allowances. Anastasius Pravica was selling death itself, even though he personally felt that the furs were not the cause of someone's demise but rather a just sentence. The wheezing were simply attracted by the white fox, the cancerous with yellowish skin by the astrakhan, the red-faced by the sable, the pale-skinned and anemic by the ermine, and those with dark brows, the bison. However, the fur shop on deciduous King Alexander Boulevard was not visited only by those prone to diseases, who were clearly picking out their death. The merchant selling dangerous fur was also visited by the undecided, those prone to choosing what the reliable furrier recommends.

Because of the latter, Anastasius also learned to allocate death. He would take a good look at the customer, examine him like an experienced physician and decide on a fur which would suit them most, as if he were a tailor, measuring the final days and the final breath. In the beginning, this role was distasteful to him in all respects, but then he became accustomed to it, after all, he had to recommend something to the customers. He was burdened by the idea that someone's end was in his hands, but in time – since he was essentially as egotistical as

everybody else – the craftsman immersed himself in the role of an angel who determines both the length of a person's candle and the moment when it will finally be extinguished.

No one knew about this because craftsman Pravica had no relatives, or an heir. So the curious would come in and choose: gloves or fur collars, coats or hats. The more fortunate would change their minds and back out of the sale, and their imminent demise, due to a lack of money or indecision; however, those well-off would choose death without even knowing, and leave the shop satisfied and convinced they bought it at a good price. Anastasius carefully counted the money and requested detailed information: address, marital status, age. The following year, he would see their faces in the obituaries, dress in black and visit the New Bežanija Cemetery or the cemetery in Košutnjak. Anastasius didn't forget a single customer and he never missed a funeral. Last year's buyers were buried the current year and not one customer lived longer than sixteen months.

Did the craftsman feel remorse? No. Like some god of the lower world, he got used to the job and believed he was similar to a natural disaster, an earthquake or simply chance, the comedian. At the end of the day, we all have to die of something. A slippery road, speeding, a tired driver dozing off at the steering wheel, even an overflowing muddy river or an avalanche – all these things could be the death of someone and no one would be accused, or held accountable. Similarly, thought craftsman Pravica, furs are the death of those who buy them and he just happens to be the one selling them.

And so, new customers kept coming in. The bell on the door of his small shop rang in the shade of the sycamore trees on King Alexander Boulevard. Bison. Sable. Ermine. White fox. Astrakhan. Perhaps the same was also happening in Istanbul, Vidin, Pécs, Constanța or Padua. They probably also had a local furrier, just like this one in Belgrade, who sold death. Or maybe, Anastasius would sometimes think, he was unique. Nevertheless, he dismissed such thoughts, engrossed in his work, neither sad nor happy, dealing in final days.

Thus, over the years, his life could be characterized as being reliable, reticent and quiet. Buyers from 1997 were buried in 1998. And those from that year died in the next. Some were buried with lots of pomp and heartache, with extravagant music; while in other cases, during freezing winter days, a grave was barely dug out in the frozen soil and only a few relatives, and the reliable furrier, walked behind the casket. Virtually no one made it through two calendar years. This occurred only in cases when the customer purchased the fur in November or December, but even then, he or she was sure to die in the first months of the following calendar year.

This went on until one day a seemingly ordinary customer walked into the shop on King Alexander Boulevard. He was one of those people raised in the 20th century, who never had anyone, as if he had never been born and didn't belong anywhere. A scrawny man with a furrowed face and cold, green eyes stood at the door. This was towards the end of 1999.

"I'm new to this town," said the newcomer, "and I'll be needing a warm coat with a good-sized collar for where I'm going, so I thought I'd stop by this place. People once appreciated the advantages of a warm collar made of natural fur, but today it's practically a part of the past."

The foreigner's eyes seemed empty. He casually set down the coat he wanted repaired along with a Borsalino hat and stood there in only his black turtleneck and same color pants. He immediately became interested in the fur samples which the craftsman once again took out especially for him. But the foreigner's eyes lacked the passion usually expressed by buyers, and the impatience and excitement of choosing forbidden fruit.

Without thinking twice, he chose a sable collar thus picking a heart attack as the cause of his death. He left the coat after agreeing on the price. Next week, he came to pick up his items, paid the remaining amount and filled out his personal information. The foreigner's name was Gabriel Šimanović and he lived on Kičevska Street. He was an actor by profession. He remarked that he would be at this address for a year at the most at which time he plans to move to another city, but definitely not the other world. Then he left and Anastasius almost forgot about him. The year 2000 arrived, a turbulent year for both the citizens of Belgrade and the withdrawn and reserved furrier.

Even so, according to Anastasius's memo pad, the customers were dying quietly, in the exact order in which they bought their furs. Everything was going according to schedule, as in previous years, until the furrier's little black memo pad came to the name Gabriel Šimanović. At that time newspapers wrote about the terrible rains and floods in the south. People were dying due to extreme diurnal variations in temperature and severe oscillations in pressure around the Sava River willow forests, Danube islands and in Belgrade itself. Reading the obituaries, he came across university professors, academics at the ripe age of over ninety, dear great aunts, pre-war pilots who defended Belgrade in the dangerous red sky of 1941. There were a few small-theatre actors that switched worlds, but Gabriel was not among them.

Still, the entire situation wasn't really that disconcerting. There were instances, as already mentioned, when a customer combines two calendar years, oddly dragging out their lives, headstrong before the inevitable end. There were no rules to dying and sometimes the course death was disrupted for up to a few months. Living isn't easy, but neither

is dying. Anastasius Pravica knew all this, and the fact that during all those years the sequence of purchases always coincided with the sequence of deaths gave him peace of mind. Knowing that a theatre actor wasn't dying only meant that he was giving another week or month to those waiting in the invisible line to take their last breath after him.

But then, something unusual happened, something that will change to the core the quiet and withdrawn life of the merchant who sold death. The gentleman who bought his fur right after the foreigner with the metallic green eyes died, "after a long and serious illness". This was enough to cause disturbance and alarm in a seemingly insignificant and inconspicuous fur shop on King Alexander Boulevard.

The furrier was suddenly alarmed. He once again checked all the cemeteries in the city and, as he grumbled about selling furs to out-of-townners, which meant that now he has to check all the cemeteries in south Hungary and west Romania, he set off on a search for the green-eyed foreigner who fancies sable. The foreigner – he thought at first – simply went on the trip he mentioned and died in the silence of some foreign country, precisely in the order that cannot and must not be disrupted. He needed to find him, at any cost, so that this item in the little black memo pad wouldn't stay open and bring into question the entire order of selling death.

And so the craftsman put on his suit for selling furs and headed for Kičevska Street which still hid its bleary-eyed tenants in its backyards. He wasn't surprised when the building superintendent told him that the foreigner had moved to Szeged, where he got an acting job in the local children's theatre. However, he was upset to find out that he was still in Belgrade, without doubt alive and well, on the day the customer that came after him passed away.

Something happened, something unusual and intricate. Anastasius was now surprised like any other regular person would be. But, while frightened people would be shocked by what he considers reality, he trembled over what could be an ordinary and unembellished life. The foreigner bought sable, put on his coat and moved to south Hungary where, being part Hungarian, he got a job in a children's theatre. Now he is entertaining some chubby Hungarian kids with rosy cheeks, just like the ones on chocolate wrappers. What is so unusual about that? Nothing, people would say, but not Anastasius Pravica. The foreigner had to die and he saw no tragedy in that. The furrier didn't wish for death, he sold it, and like any good salesman he kept track of his returns and made sure not to suffer losses due to carelessness.

He returned to the shop, held the bell hanging on the door to keep it from ringing, as he always did, and thoughtfully retreated to the tannery. There he thought about how this could be the end of everything

and that in the last year of the 20th century he will once again be an ordinary furrier who sells rare skins of captured nocturnal animals. Was he upset at the thought of not being able to sell death anymore? It seemed so. He should give up, calm down. This is what he told himself at first. Yet, something compelled him to investigate this unusual case – perhaps for the last time –and make sure that the unbroken chain of death ended when he encountered the odd and reserved customer. It would have been better for the furrier had he given up and resigned himself to the fate that turned him back into an ordinary furrier, but Anastasius considered selling death his real profession for too long to simply allow these brutal changes on the life market to close his shop of death forever.

So, he headed for the train station and set off for Subotica on the morning express as it made its way across frozen fields. From there, he took a local bus across the border to Hungary and found himself in Szeged. He had no difficulty finding the children's theatre because he spoke Hungarian very well and knew quite a few people in Szeged. All the same, first he went to see his back-door merchants, behind that umber fence of the old Szeged cemetery. They promised to help him. Satisfied, craftsman Anastasius went back downtown and checked into Hotel *Hungaria*. When he spoke to Mr. Kis and his sons, he didn't tell them he wanted to find out whether or not his customer was deceased. They sold the death of rare foxes and lambs, and had no idea this could trigger a situation which would turn a furrier into someone who deals in the death of people.

No, Mr. Anastasius from Belgrade told the father and his sons that he sold their fellow citizen a poor-quality fur by mistake and that he would like to find him and make amends. He even set off on this journey with the exact same silver sable collar so that he would seem confident in himself and convincing to others. And so the Kises didn't suspect a thing, and he hoped that by tomorrow they would inform him that Gabriel Šimanović, who once lived on Kičevska Street in Belgrade – died. But, this is not what happened. Actor Gabriel really did get a job in Szeged, not in the children's theatre but rather the puppet theatre. This theatre had the reputation of being one of the best in the Real Socialism era. The puppeteers – the craftsman was told by his local associates – studied with the national and honored artists of the Soviet Union and then perfected their skills with Czech and Polish marionette troupes. At the Thalia Theatre they paid special attention to the voices, which had to be just as convincing as the marionettes. This is why Šimanović got a job here as an actor, even though they really only employed his voice...

But alas, perhaps it was precisely because he was employed for his voice and his oldfangled Hungarian family accent that he didn't stay

long at the Thalia Theatre, and instead left a good-paying job of speaker behind a curtain to move to Budapest. The people at the theatre didn't know where he was working now, but they did say that it's just as well because he played the roles of kings with Shakespearean pathos and they didn't really like him very much, either as a person or as an artist. This is why they barely knew where he moved or where he was living in the capital. Granted, they did say they think it might be on Nador Street, near Roosevelt Square.

This was enough. They exchanged hearty goodbyes and craftsman Pravica set off for Budapest on a Hungarian train composition that cut across the frozen Hungarian heath in a wide arc. The moment he got off the train at the old Nyugati Train Station, he hailed a cab and headed for the other side of town, for Nador Street. He didn't even glance at Eiffel's old steel lateral construction because all he could think about was the actor. The cab was taking him in the direction of Roosevelt Square. There, in one of the side streets, he stopped in front of a dark building with two wings, built of umber bricks in the Gothic style. The furrier hesitated for only a second before walking into a luxurious but rundown hallway with stained-glass windows on the walls with images of boatmen holding fishing rods, and dusty chandeliers with beads barely giving off a grimy yellow light.

"I'm not surprised, craftsman Pravica," said the actor when the merchant finally found his door on the second floor, "I've been expecting you, come in."

He pushed the door closed, took the chain off and opened it wide, then bowed slightly as if they were taking part in a big theatre production. The actor's apartment was messy: leftover food on the table from his last meal, Hortensia plants in dry soil on window sills, with drooping leaves, and a few coat hooks on the door with only one coat, the one with the sable collar.

"Nem is tudom, hogy mit mondjak..."¹ the merchant from Belgrade started in Hungarian, but Gabriel interrupted him immediately.

"Álljon meg, nincsértelme, hogy tovább beszéljen, hisz az út végére ért. Ide, ebbe a Nádor utcába. De üljön le, üljön le mester, helyezze magát kényelembe. Semmi rettentő nem fog történni. Mindent tudok, jollehet itt Budapesten, mint ahogyan ott önöknél Belgrádban is, idegen vagyok. Ön Pravica Anastas. Prémárus, de tulajdonképpen halállal kereskedik, nincs igazam?"² the actor replied in Hungarian. With a brisk gesture, which wouldn't stand for any excuses, he asked him to sit in the only

¹ I don't really know what to say...

² Stop, there's no use in talking any further; you've reached the end of the road. Right here, on Nador Street. But, sit down, have a seat craftsman, make yourself comfortable. Nothing terrible is going to happen. I know everything, even though

armchair. He then walked over to the furrier, crouched by his side, emphasizing the word “death” and continued to whisper in Serbian.

“You came to see if I died: here in debauched Budapest, in the arms of some prostitute, or back in Szeged, abruptly, playing the role of a young prince lost in a foreign kingdom. But I didn’t, for I’m not just another customer and I didn’t come to you by accident, to King Alexander Boulevard.”

Anastasius thought about protesting, but instead he clenched the black doctor’s bag he took with him on this trip, shocked to learn that his secret had been discovered.

“No, please, don’t get up, because soon we will walk through this door together, hand in hand, like old friends who hadn’t seen each other in a long time. You see, for years you have been selling death, thinking it always comes to others. You’re not her favorite, this lady of death only circles around your bed but when she comes to others she takes them away. Astrakhan, cancer; ermine, leukemia; bison, bowel obstruction; white fox, severe forms of pneumonia; and finally, sable, heart attack. We don’t blame you for dealing in death. You sold it as moderately and unobtrusively as you could. But there’s one thing you forgot about, and now it’s a bit unpleasant for me to have to tell you this. Did you really think you would live forever whilst selling death? No, craftsman Pravica, that was careless of you because, you see, I actually am Gabriel and today is your last day.”

The instant Gabriel uttered these words, the furrier automatically began to feel numbness in his left arm, and a silent threatening pain spread through his veins rushing to his shoulder and the ossified neck ligament. A moment later, the face of the actor, with grizzled sideburns, dressed in black pants and a turtleneck, started to grow dim. And he could hardly make out his voice.

“It was careless of you, Mr. Pravica,” he still heard, “you stuck yourself with a fur. Open your bag; why, you have the same collar, your collar, and now it’s your time to die. This is *Martes zibellina princeps*. Sable. Don’t protest, don’t weep and plead like so many others, you at least know what death is.”

Pain, enormous and unbearable, but instant, reached the merchant’s heart like a flash of lightening and then, for him the past and this world were no more. Instead, Anastasius saw a dark passage at the end of which stood a bright light. He also heard music, distant and unobtrusive in every way. The door to the apartment where he found Gabriel was open and now he saw himself taking out of the doctor’s bag a collar

I’m a foreigner both here in Budapest and in your Belgrade. You are Anastasius Pravica. You sell fur, but you actually deal in death, right?

identical to the one Gabriel had. The archangel helped him to button the collar to his coat and then they both, dressed in sable, headed towards the light like two old friends...

The attendant of the building on Nador Street didn't find the merchant's body until three days later, after the neighbors reported an unpleasant stench coming from apartment 12d. They broke down the door and, in the one-room apartment, found only the body of Anastasius Pravica, sunk deep in an antique bergère, with a suggestive stream of blood flowing down his bottom lip. They quickly called the doctors and the former merchant of death was taken to the city morgue. Based on his ID, they found out that his last name was Pravica, that he was a foreigner and later, that he had no relatives to come and take his body home. As a result, he was buried in Budapest, on a burial plot for the poor.

Two hunched over gravediggers were the only people present on that winter day, as a Catholic priest held a short service. The fur shop in Belgrade was closed shortly after and no one found out that the few last customers, who came to the merchant of death after Archangel Gabriel to buy ermine, bison, sable, white fox and astrakhan, lived long lives and wore their coats, gloves and muffs for years to come.

Nor did anyone notice that the furrier on King Alexander Boulevard died before his time. Be that as it may, the death of Anastasius Pravica was in fact beautiful, as peaceful as the first snows of winter falling upon hardened soil. So much so that he regretted spending all those years selling it to others, and now, having no one to tell.

Translated from the Serbian by
Persida Bošković

DEJAN ALEKSIĆ

NAVIGABLE WATERS

What's the use of listening to a report
On river levels, I wonder without changing
The radio station as I'm driving through the pouring rain.
The same hypnotic female voice that enchanted me
For the first time way back in my early childhood.
Perhaps that was my initiation into the world
Of poetry, the devoted listening to the voice
That was almost ritually uttering an endless
Poem of navigable waterways. But what's the use,
I mean now, as the rhythmic pattern of the wipers
Is keeping the world visible – what's the use
Of listening to a report on river levels.

Driving in the rain tires me. I would rather
Stop by the road, in this deserted area,
Attracted by the liturgy of hydrologic forecasts.
Somewhere, I can imagine that, in small fishing
Villages heavy wet nets hang under the eaves.
Old men go to play chess in a local tavern.
They hear the same as I do, but the sleepy waiter
Changes the station and finds an old folk song
About a woman's infidelity. It keeps raining for days.
The water level's rising, but the banks are still resisting.
Just like words, making the permeability of the verse
Remain true to the permeability of the soul.

I would rather stop, but I am already late
Getting to my destination. To tell the truth, being late

Leaves eschatological bruises on our
Quick days and is more than a transgression.
For the world has become punctual and predictable. That is why
I continue, as the female voice from the radio does,
As do the greasy barges devoutly carrying
Soaked piles of coal. *Baja, Mohács, Bezdan...*
Indeed, that was how poetry revealed itself to me,
Through the language of navigable waters. Was it so long ago?
And the old men still play chess, they bury their
Holy faces in their hands that smell of fish heads.
Nothing disturbs them. Not even the loud curse
Coming from the waiter because the jolly village imbecile,
Soaked and muddy, has just rushed into the tavern,
To inform the entire world that the rain has stopped.

THE SCARS

One should love one's scars, love them
With the love that gets buried with the body.

No one knows what they see, watching without winking,
Those – seemingly blind – healed eyes of flesh.
Another great secret is to which side of the skin,
Either inwards or outwards, is that ghostly look directed.

It can be said that the question is pointless;
Or that a view of the world does not depend on
Scars descending to the dark basements of the body.

I only know that it was in the early eighties,
In spring, and that playing with a pocketknife lasted
For hours, enough for caution to turn into routine,
And routine to unruliness, the herald of all troubles.

I remember that the pain was one whole heartbeat slow
In the fire of the nervous system of the cut place,
And that I, a moment before the rush of blood, for the skin
On the thumb opened like a fleshy lid,
Saw the whiteness of my own bone.

Those days people in our neighborhood talked, quietly
And confidentially, about a woman next door who
Had gone nuts. She used to laugh and cry
At the same time, and then no one would see her
For days, because her folks hid her from others
Worried about their own reputation.
I used to imagine her sitting by the window at night,
Sleepless, like an open wound staring at the world.

I hid my cut, too, rarely taking
My hand out of the pocket for days, afraid of the possible
Punishment for the unfortunate playing and its result.
In the evening I used to pick at the scab in secret
With sweet pain burning under the skin, like a small
Icon lamp in the new and desolate church of my body.

That wretched woman died many years ago.
There is almost no one left who could

Remember the dungeons behind her large eyes.
I left the old neighborhood, too, but the memory
Of the old play was inscribed in the skin for good.

I can see it whenever I write something down, picking at
Reality's fine layers of illusion; I see it as a picture of one
World that sank in flesh. Or is it, actually, looking at me –
The mad eye that forever refuses to fall asleep, looking in vain
For the old wound in the ancient formulas of oblivion.

Translated from the Serbian by
Dragan Purešić

ČEDOMIR MIRKOVIĆ

ABOUT ALEKSANDAR TIŠMA – LITERATURE REVIEW AND PERSONAL ACCOUNT

Extracts from observations and memories

1.

Of all the Serbian authors I wrote about most often in the last decade, as a critic and essayist, Aleksandar Tišma takes the place of honor. The majority of my published texts were about his work, either as direct literature reviews or analytical observations more general in nature. The reasons for this tendency are quite understandable: above all, they lie in my convictions regarding Tišma's literary writing, the profile and scope of his works of prose, and also, the incentive to enhance the quality, variety and reception of Serbian literature today. Others are more circumstantial: for the most part, the period of my critical and essayistic ambitions coincides with the most significant phases of Tišma's creative work. I had the opportunity, which now I am convinced was a great privilege, to participate in many discussions on Tišma's books – and I mean literature meetups, book promotions and cultural events which Tišma, as the author, attended – and judging by my journal entries (published and, more often, unpublished), I am even prepared to claim that I have participated in all discussions on Tišma's books of prose, beginning with the novel *Following the Black-Haired Girl*, written in 1969, and not only in Belgrade and Novi Sad but also in many other cities across our (I should add: former) country. Instead of citing information about my participation, on several occasions, indecisions to award Tišma, as well as the decision to publish his collection of works, I would much rather present, at least in short outlines, a testimony about

Tišma from literature meetups. Unlike many of our other authors, Tišma was unpredictable and whimsical during his exchanges with the readers: one never knew when he was going to be talkative, friendly and receptive to his audience, even confidingly open, and when ill-humored and withdrawn, or headstrong and derisive. On his travels, visits to hotels, while sitting in taverns, during meals and on his walks – in other words, activities that have always been and still are a part of the décor of the writers' lifestyle and the writers' dramaturgy in our parts – he was usually more interested in details and people who, at least at that moment, spoke more about life and in the name of life, than about literature and in the name of literature.

(I replaced my original intention of putting together an extensive book on Tišma by using texts from my reviews, essays and journal – and rounding it off with correspondence and photographs – with another possibility: using a mosaic based more on abridged notes and a catalog of views and assessments than developed argumentation and description, to convey some of my views and testimony.)

2.

During the period when Tišma's interests lay mostly in prose writing (although his two poetry collections were also published during this time: *Inhabited World*, 1956 and *The Pub*, 1961) Serbian prose was undergoing significant changes and turmoil, or at least its more easily visible layers, while his literary concept changed slowly and gradually. It would even be more correct to say that Tišma's narrative technique was only modified and upgraded. Thus, noting that our prose in the 60's and 70's oscillated between so-called neutral temporality on the one side, and direct, almost journalistic adherence to daily events, on the other, only serves to better demonstrate Tišma's direction in general. Without choosing either of the literary extremes, he was always focused on authentic, real, recognizable life in precise space and time. If we were to choose a modern author who, as they say, resolutely dived into the life and preoccupations of our region – Tišma would be on top of the list!

A very concise chronology of books of prose will reveal not only continuity but also several subtly distinct creative phases. Undoubtedly, there are reasons for this kind of overview, both chronological and thematic. In more recent times, it has become obvious that some of Tišma's texts will gradually gain a wider reading public; and with us, in spite of everything, this is still the surest sign of recognition.

The first collection of short stories, *Wrongs*, 1961, offers texts that are noticeably multifarious, and also somewhat heterogeneous – in content, literary technique and quality. Yet, regardless of whether these

stories are lyrical and meditative in nature (for example, *Praise to a Graveyard* and *Emptiness*), or fall under the psychological short story genre (for example, *A Short Drive*) or even the more uneven literary structures (like *Ibika's House*, which the author will address again at a later time) – the primary content layer in all of them is strongly connected to real life. Although he wavered between meditateness – in some ways quite similar to poetic expression – and objectivized narration, with this book the author already demonstrated qualities he will later reveal more fully. In addition to being true-to-life, these qualities also include an interest in major topics from more recent history; the asperity with which he perceives the world; and especially his talent for creating a dense atmosphere.

The author's inclination towards interpreting fateful decisions of the so-called small and threatened man, which was announced by the first collection, was even more evident in the second book, *Violence*, 1965. This collection of short stories is more comprehensive and more successful than the previous. Tišma based his portrayal of six violent acts – presented in the form of six independent entities – on events one encounters every day in the crime section of any newspaper. Only, he expanded them into types of psychological and sociological studies – convincing, both due to their general setting and social frame. In addition, he gave them a dynamic literary form and interesting narrative, while avoiding the traps set for authors who come close to the structure of crime novels. When giving various opinions, today, about the prose we named, probably imprecisely, *new* or *true-to-life*, prose that, usually, captures the heart of life through the ambiance of city outskirts and the psychology of desperate people, it would be good to keep in mind the unforced extent of the progress Tišma made – well before others – in this respect.

If you carefully read his work of travel literature, *Elsewhere*, 1969, you will not get the impression that it wandered into Tišma's opus. In this book, the writer demonstrates, in the most direct manner, his ability to take authentic and bizarre details and style them into a prose structure which, in addition to being readable and factual, possesses many other elements and qualities of modern prose expression. As he traveled across the country and abroad, the writer discovered certain characteristic traits in the behavior and narrative of people who are the hallmark of our times. His observations regarding our people are just as convincing as when, abroad, he draws conclusions based on modern intellectual logic, and soul, of our region. The significance and quality of this book lies not, as most critics have emphasized, only in the fact that it contributes to the affirmation of the travel genre, which has been neglected by our writers, but more in the fact that – at a time of basically fruitless

discussions about the possibilities that lie in turning authentic, true-to-life details into fictional stories – it demonstrates, almost casually, how common and seemingly worn out topics can be given literary freshness.

It seems like the short novel *Following the Black-Haired Girl*, published in 1969, represents a crossroads in Tišma's writing. Written using a modern and refined realistic literary technique, this novel demonstrates the writer's skills, and announces new scopes; it represents that crucial moment when numerous individual literary qualities transform into quality as a whole.

3.

Tišma's book *Following the Black-Haired Girl* – his first novel – is one of those poetically melancholic stories (in a good sense) that make us want to return to the beginning before we read the last page and try to figure out what was it that engaged our attention so intensely. We want to go back and observe, more carefully, as the story about seemingly simple things and common situations transforms into a new quality, a specific view of the world and perception of life; we want to fully understand how this suggestive narrative, intentionally unfettered by even the smallest trace of intellectualizing, develops an intellectual base which becomes one of the significant components of its total quality. By dealing with topics which cannot be described as rare – and not only in modern literature – the author of this novel gradually and steadily, but quite effectively, arouses interest and activates the mind.

The topic and preoccupation of this novel remind us a little of Andrić's short story *Jelena, the Woman of My Dream*, but more due to differences, which make one think than similarities, which induce comparison. With Andrić, the woman is an obsession, a metaphysical fated premonition, a longing which brings unrest and disquiet; her appearance during a state between sleep and wakefulness, which signifies the reason for living, is the result of intensified irrational foreboding which culminates in an almost real experience. With Tišma, the unrest and longing for a woman are caused by a concrete, real experience; but the more this experience grows distant in time, the more it loses its real contours and becomes a symbol of a particular state of life. There is nothing mystical or terrifying about the black-haired girl – and the fact that her name is Marija is of no significance! Although, at first glance, it might seem that there is, the aim of the epithet in the title, among other things, is to concretize this character. Also, she appears in only one, somewhat banal, episode which, if it were to be interpreted, wouldn't seem either interesting or particularly suitable for novelistic shaping, just like the entire plot of the novel for that

matter. The main character of the novel (also the narrator) spent a night with a black-haired girl, in bed, in a hotel in Senta. In the first year after the war, this young provincial journalist, filled with high ambitions and with numerous opportunities to look forward to, experiences strange harmony and satisfaction with a girl whom he met by chance.

The protagonist of the book never saw the black-haired girl again, and – considering he had just started paving his road in life – he had no idea that the winter experience in the small town in Bačka would be crucial to him. However, as chance would have it, Senta slowly becomes the place where the hero of the novel searches for a sense of fulfillment. The search for the black-haired girl is, quite successfully, psychologically motivated by an endeavor to reach a specific position in life. The young man's expectations are not fulfilled, his life starts going downhill, one failure after another, his life turns into empty time and languishment, and his visits to Senta become moments of revived hopes of once again seeing the black-haired girl, followed by resigned acceptance of the fact that she is no longer there. Each time he is in Senta, he experiences the same, and always different, encounters with a strange character, a blond girl named Kaća, who witnessed his encounter with the black-haired girl. The hero of the novel feels some sort of mystical bond and closeness to Senta and Kaća's wretched, twisted fate, and the contents of the novel mostly consists of their occasional, increasingly less cheerful encounters.

In the novel *Following the Black-Haired Girl*, all direct, discursive explanations and generalizations are brought to a minimum, and views on life – in the context of the novel quite interesting; observed separately, irrespective of their plausibility – emerge from the plot itself, gradually and unobtrusively. Another very interesting aspect of the book is that the hero, in spite of also being the narrator, like most of the heroes in our more recent novels, remains anonymous for the most part. Aside from for his obsession and need to find the black-haired girl and his thoughts concerning an incident which marked the end of real life instead of the beginning – most of his other experiences and intellectual preoccupations remain undisclosed. His incompleteness as a hero – which is also one of the reasons why I don't consider this good novel to (also) be an exceptional work of prose – can partly be explained and justified by an endeavor to make him the “realizer” of a specific feeling in life.

The time span of this relatively short novel covers approximately two decades, and the very interesting layout of details results in distinct rhythm, time perspective and a gradual rise in intensity. With this sort of concept – without a source of rich subject-matter, but presented as a linear narrative in its purest form – the author has to rely on the quality

of novelistic expression. Tišma is one of those prose writers who matured and developed gradually; he has the ability to take realistic information and, by stripping his narrative of all excess, build an original and harmonious whole. His ability to filtrate his narrative is evident in the seemingly casual manner in which he provides details, especially portraits, which create an exceptional aroma of authenticity. Also, Tišma's keen insight – which demanded and resulted in clear, precise expression – enabled him to notice fateful moments in an “ordinary” life and express them through such everyday events.

4.

I met Tišma shortly after *Savremenik* published my review of the novel *Following the Black-Haired Girl*, in 1969, upon his suggestion and through a mutual acquaintance.

When we met at the *Gradska Kafana* café on Trg Republike square, he didn't try to hide the fact that he was very surprised to see a 25-year-old man. For some reason, he was under the impression that I was much older. He praised my published texts, especially the review of his novel, and not a moment later, before we even got our coffee, he shocked me with a jovial suggestion: “Please don't be fooled by the current success of your reviews: if I were you, I would move abroad this very moment! I would gather all the reviews I had written so far and publish them as a book, to make them accessible – if you like, we can do this in Matica srpska – and then I would set off to test my skills and potential, and luck. I would have a go at being an actor, sailor, travel writer, adventurer, perhaps even a journalist, anything but a literary critic!”

5.

The central plot of *The Book of Blam*, which has an extremely complex novelistic structure, is based on a well-known event from World War II, the massacre of Serbs and Jews in Novi Sad by Hungarian fascists at the beginning of 1942. The main character, Miroslav Blam, who seems like just another resident of Novi Sad at first glance, is a complicated and contradictory character whose fate intertwines with many personal and collective frustrations.

Due to circumstances and intuition, not personal decisions and ingenuity, the hero of Tišma's novel manages to become a witness, only a witness and not a victim, to the notorious raids. Because of this his later life, the temporal setting of the narrative, gradually turns into a painful recap of his own experience and tragic historical events, and

by reviving and reliving both the horrible details and what preceded and followed them, he will endanger his sanity and conscience, and over time, lose his ability to distinguish the past from the present, the irreversibly concluded from the still possible, night from day, dreams from reality.

Two literary layers run simultaneously through the mosaic narrative of the life of the hero, Miroslav Blam, while also complementing each other quite effectively. The first layer represents a portrayal of the maniacal rampage during the War and the resistance to terror, and it is complemented with images of a complex, late middle-class atmosphere of Novi Sad. Due to a rare gift of lucid observation, creating realistic ambiances, concise narration and adhering to fundamental historical facts linked to his plot, Tišma offers a unique record of events that took place in Novi Sad during the War, as he implies – through authentic data and literary characters, but also numerous tiny psychological details, accessible only to the most talented writers – a universal side of *crime, guilt, violence* and *resistance*. The second important layer of the book comprises personal ordeals of the hero, whose life – gradually at first and then in a more and more fateful and tragic manner – intertwines with traces of historical facts until, finally, the personal and historical elements blend completely and merge, jeopardizing individuality to the limit in terms of meaning.

As he gradually unfolds the story, branching it out through literary associations, enriching it with profiles and fates of individuals with different beliefs – some of which are so colorful and interesting that they alone could be protagonists of a novel – connecting tragic events in general with the alienation of the individual through cause-and-effect, Aleksandar Tišma made space for broader meaning in a powerful, truly authentic manner, especially with respect to allegories in the domain of moral responsibility. By indirectly asking questions about views on crime, the ideology of crime, and the executioners – and due to his obsession (this sort of obsession will be even more evident in the books that follow) with the possibility of new, similar or even more horrific catastrophes, he gave his novel, among other things, a powerful and well-written intellectual layer and humanistic character.

The Book of Blam exposes all of the most significant characteristics of Tišma's literary practice, especially the modern concept of building a sturdy literary structure by stylizing seemingly simple, true-to-life episodes. It also reveals inner coherence and firm motivational direction and, especially, an uncompromising approach to the neurotic behaviours of our times. Furthermore, the known phenomenon that mature novels, preceded by earlier books written by the same author, most often possess a higher degree of openness than prose focused on creative experimen-

tation, proved true. This openness, which we could also, conditionally, identify with readability, is not a characteristic of substandard significance, especially with regard to books dealing with major subject-matter, and a wealth of meaning. This is one of the reasons why we definitely cannot and should not include *The Book of Blam* in any of the current, usually simplified, qualifications and classifications of Serbian prose.

6.

Towards the end of 1973, I spoke about Tišma's novel, *The Book of Blam*, at a literature debate held at the Radnički University of "Radivoj Cirpanov" in Novi Sad. Afterwards, we had dinner in a pleasant restaurant not far from the statue of Svetozar Miletić. A group of about 20 people sat at a previously reserved table. In my vicinity people were engaged in interesting conversations. First, Mladen Leskovac talked about how, just before the War, Isidora Sekulić informed him of a message from a military command in Belgrade instructing him as to what to do and where to go with his family in case of an attack on our country, and then he described a blackly humorous event that occurred at the beginning of the occupation, a meeting between the prominent figures of Novi Sad and the Hungarian occupation authorities, at the Novi Sad Town Hall. Boško Petrović recalled the morning of April 6, 1941, when he was called to act as an interpreter at a hearing of German pilots downed over Fruška Gora Mountain.

During this dinner, which lasted late into the night, Tišma took little part in the conversations; he encouraged others to talk.

7.

His book, *The Dead Angle*, published in 1973, is divided into three separate sections. Two were taken from the *Wrongs* collection, and what makes them interesting is the applied literary process: instead of supplementing and branching, which was to be expected, the author decided to scale down and summarize. Even so, the greater part of the book comprises prose which he entitled the same as the book – *The Dead Angle*. It would be difficult to speculate on the chronological relationship between this text and the rest of Tišma's books, but it is evident that in this short book, the size of an average novel, the author is once again addressing *everyday subject-matter*, something we could regard as great dramas and temptations in seemingly ordinary life situations. As if the hero of the novel, Karan, incorporates the melancholy of all his previous heroes. Once again, by skillfully creating a mosaic of quite ordinary details and gently merging the narrative with meditation, he

implies fateful dilemmas. Again man's alienation! Rare are literary works that have provided such powerful metaphors for the eternal search (and the inability to search harmoniously!) of man and woman.

8.

In most of Tišma's works of prose, the characters are strongly dependant on the circumstances in which they live or have lived: even when the actions of some of the characters are surprising, unpredictable and unusual, there is always some underlying connection to past events and experiences. Especially circumstances of war which, directly or less directly, define people by affecting equally their attitude towards life, their values and their actions. This was also the case in *Following the Black-Haired Girl*, whose main characters are, in many respects, affected by the atmosphere of the first years after the War. Similarly, in *The Book of Blam* the War is also physically present – with all the temptations, tragedies and traumas.

The novel *The Use of Man* also centers on the War, though if we make a general note of this, it might imply that, by association to some other books and authors, the writer wrote chronicles of World War II. Thus, it might be more correct to say that the atmosphere of wartime stands in the focus of this novel as one of the stages in the lives of the characters, as something that unites and is affected by both the events that preceded the War and those that followed after the War was over. In other words, in Tišma's novel, the War is not only a physical reality, but also the cause and effect of diverse human destinies. The War plays a crucial role in the life and moral judgement of most of the characters; yet, the innermost nature of some of the characters of this prose is formed earlier, and predetermined by a whole series of details, as well as different views.

Like all his earlier works of prose, this novel is also very precisely situated, both in space and time. The greater part of the plot is linked to Novi Sad and spans over a period of five, six years before the start of World War II, the war years, up to the 1950's. Emphasis on the significance of the content layer – with elements, or at least hints, of authenticity – is present in this novel as well, by way of a wide range of details. And with this, (the quality of the content!) the novel secured some of the prerequisites for arousing interest. We can make a list of the many episodes and various situations that deepen the historical factography: from the situation in Vojvodina just before the War; the arrival of German and Hungarian troops; the war psychosis in Novi Sad, Belgrade and other cities; and also, the suffering in concentration camps.

We could say that Tišma is a writer of modern realistic prose – under the condition, of course, that we free this qualification from the ballast of simplified or incorrect meanings. And many of the traits, and qualities, of the novel *The Use of Man* are the direct result of a talent characteristic of a writer of modern realism. Also, Tišma falls into the category of prose writers whose talent is evident in the profile and scope of his book as a whole, as well as the fine points: observed details, interpretations of certain actions and characters, portrayals and dialogues. Such authors make us recall some fundamental characteristics of modern prose writers, assumptions and prerequisites without which one cannot fully interpret a significant topic and subject-matter.

Great literary experience and extreme intellectual maturity enabled the author to deal with complex topics ranging from the genesis of the middle-class family and attitudes toward the aggressor, to the most subtle interpersonal relationships, with extraordinary suggestiveness. And this is why it doesn't seem redundant to first list some of the qualities of Tišma's prose – which we have had a chance to observe, in similar form, in earlier books – and then to reflect on something that, perhaps, first catches the eye: the specificity of the literary process in general.

At the beginning of the book, when the secret journal of Ana Drentvenšek, a single teacher, is discovered following her sudden death, we have the impression that we are confronted with a frequently used process (both in older and modern literature); that the gradual disclosure of the contents of these private notes will serve as a replacement for dynamics and dramaturgy. However, as it turns out the author – in introducing the journal whose content is fully revealed at the end of the book – is motivated by a far more complex concept. The discovered notes, which as it happens were not destroyed, serves more as a way to tie together all the different characters in the novel, and combine the diversities and even contradictions between their fates into a whole in a suggestive and efficient literary fashion. The technique Tišma uses in devising his plan for the novel gives excellent results: individual destinies are narrated simultaneously, but they are also stories which could stand independently as separate novels; while at the same time, all these different threads merge together, affect and clarify one another.

9.

As member of the NIN Prize jury for the best novel of the year in 1976, I made every effort to award the prize to Tišma's book, *The Use of Man*. Sreten Marić was the jury president and, in addition to myself, the members were Petar Džadžić, Muharem Pervić, Jovica Aćin, Dalibor Cvitan, Radovan Vučković, Sreten Asanović, Vuk Filipović and the

editor of NIN, Vladimir Stojšin. My motive for supporting Tišma's novel was, among other things, the fact that Tišma's earlier novel *The Book of Blam* did not receive the Prize because it came out the same year as the favored *Hourglass* by Danilo Kiš. (I should note that my literature review for *The Book of Blam*, which was published in *Književne novine*, was entitled – of course, with a polemical overtone – *Book of the Year*).

We had a difficult time finding Tišma – after the jury made its decision – and giving him the good news. It was difficult to track him down because he was away on a trip, visiting Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, but with the help of our consulate employees around the world, we finally did. He thanked us, dictated his press release, but he wasn't willing to cut his trip short. His wife came to the award ceremony in his place.

10.

The two collections of short stories published after *The Use of Man – Return to Peace*, 1977, and *The School of Atheism*, 1978 – remind us of Tišma's wide range of topics and genres. Even the title of *Return to Peace* offers a kind of symbolism: after two extensive novels which, for the most part, deal with wartime situations, in this book the writer returns once again to the topics and themes that could be described as peacetime. Some of the stories are based on a chance encounter, a thought-provoking silhouette; others are an attempt to draw a portrait, to isolate the observed image and remember it; and still others are a kind of analysis, an attempt to look into the past and discover the reasons for certain, mostly tragic, actions. *The School of Atheism*, with four outstanding stories, in a class with those in *The Dead Angle*, reminds us once again of Tišma's wide range of interests and his complex and unique way of interpreting life. Although, based on their literary solutions, the stories in these two books differ, what they do have in common is completion, hidden dramaturgy and a sense of scepticism. As far as understanding life is concerned: if we were to single out and define the key to Tišma's understanding of life and man – by simplifying of course – we would say it was, both in these two books and in previous works, knowing that the reasons for human tragedies exist long before the tragic and bitter misunderstandings occur, that they smoulder and wait for the right moment to emerge.

11.

If we were to trail the publishing order, we would discover that Aleksandar Tišma is a kind of writer whose work reveals deeply rooted

and fruitful consistency. It has to do with his adherence to specific literary concepts and distinctive topics. Following his fifth work of prose – the novel *The Book of Blam* – which drew him out of his quiet (although undisputed!) presence in literature, and especially after his seventh book – the NIN Prize winning novel *The Use of Man* – it was not difficult to see that something that once might have seemed like a sporadic or coincidental trait was actually deep and unwavering creative conviction. Shedding light on Tišma's literary profile after the fact, or retroactively, is especially interesting because he is one of those (rare in our parts) authors who are reluctant to speak about their literary principles and future plans, or defend themselves against simplified literary criticism and judgement.

12.

If *The Kapo* were a novel consumed with the story-line, interpreting it wouldn't be difficult or even take long. Vilko Lamian – a former prisoner and later a kapo or prisoner functionary, in Jasenovac and Auschwitz concentration camps – tired of concealing and afraid that his actions in the camps will be revealed, decides to find one of the two surviving witnesses of his disgrace, a former camp prisoner by the name of Helena Lifka.

The circle closes, at least partially, at the end of the book. The hero of the novel, who survived the war in an unusual way and spent the next few decades hiding in Banja Luka, driven by a profound and almost irrational need to review his life, will manage to find his victim from Auschwitz by going to Subotica and then Zagreb. Suspense is eliminated; light is shed, in fragments, on his life; reasons why the low passions of human nature are inflamed are investigated.

However, the denotations of this novel are not realized through the story-line; nor is the protagonist of the book typical. In many respects, the basic story – with several dimensions, with retrospectives, with parallelisms and with culmination points at the very end – is the setting for ambitious literary aspirations to achieve symbolism and an autochthonous position of certain episodes. Also, there are various contradictions with regard to the hero of the novel: Jewish background and converting to Catholicism; the role of prisoner and the role of tormentor; the instinct to live and the instinct to die, simultaneously; the lust for sex in the camp and the almost complete sexual apathy in freedom; the public status of a benevolent minor office worker and the awareness of one's own horrific past.

Those familiar with Aleksandar Tišma's works of prose will notice that *The Kapo* possesses the most significant traits of his earlier books.

First of all, the writing techniques from novels like *The Book of Blam* (1972) and *The Use of Man* (1976), which made Tišma one of the most prominent Serbian contemporary authors. They lie in his inclination to write about characters that are exposed to extreme temptations, about important historical events, borderline human situations, especially wartime, about the relationship between victims and their executioners, people who reassess their life to the point of self-destruction; his skill in creating imaginary layers in a familiar historical setting, psychological layers underlying behavioral processes of his characters, in gradually developing the central story, a well thought-out role for various occurrences and narrative side streams.

The new book also shows a well-known interest in the destructive side of human nature, which the author first expressed in his collections of short stories (for example, *Wrongs*, 1961, *Violence*, 1965, *The Dead Angle*, 1973, *The School of Atheism*, 1978), and in novels dominated by the bitter feeling of life. What's more, Tišma is very consistent and successful at using realistic situations as immanent and implicit human conditions.

The compositional and dramaturgical concept of the novel *The Kapo*, undoubtedly suggests certain similarities with the unfairly neglected novel *Following the Black-Haired Girl*, the book which, in my opinion, was the preparatory stage and key moment of one of the most complete creative promotions over the last few decades. In this novel, published in 1969, an almost trivial experience, a chance encounter with a girl, becomes a moment which determines events that follow, and the search for someone with an insignificant role in the life of the main character becomes an obsessive instigator, the measure of failure.

The hero of the novel *The Kapo* also has an obsessive need to find the girl, only this is a girl from a concentration camp, whom he wants to find after the war when he discovers, by coincidence, that she is a Jew from Yugoslavia. The initial fear that maybe the person whom the protagonist abused sexually might speak out, in time, turns into a need to meet with her; postponement of the meeting becomes a period of anemic vegetation, picking through heinous memories and vain attempts to feel closeness to other people; and finally the inevitability of the encounter with the witness of the crucial moments in his life turns into an intense urge with erotically charged elements.

This sort of concept, built on dramaturgical tension of a “*global metaphor*”, a metaphor regarding the need to go back as a way of grasping the main driving force and the origin of predestination, opens up the possibility for introducing diverse, mutually conditioned, thematic layers. The novel *The Kapo* brings into harmony an individual destiny with numerous colorful episodic, or silhouetted characters; evokes and

interprets, in a new way for the most part, areas we usually identify as the Jewish syndrome; with extraordinary subtleness, deals with the feeling of guilt and accepting a crime as a way of running from fear and imposed guilt; functionally enters a period of breakthroughs in collective psychosis; portrays the development of the Ustasha movement and introduces the mechanism underlying Nazism; and, generally speaking, deals with the inexhaustible contradictions of human nature and the great depths of man's downfall.

The writing skill of Aleksandar Tišma reaches its peak in the process of reintegrating the artistic role of literary episodes with the setting of Jasenovac and Auschwitz. By excluding the outer measure of brutality, and placing the episodes dealing with the mechanism of torture in the background of main narrative threads, the author manages to avoid surrendering to stereotypes and the already covered areas of abundant literary and documentary production related to sufferings in concentration camps.

His gift for writing novels is also reflected in the magnitude of the episodes, the details with a taste of juicy true-to-life authenticity, the symbolism of random characters and chance meetings, and the discreet, but magical, erotic tension. Meticulously developed characters, dramaturgy skillfully used to slow down the main storyline, partial suppression of the line between the third and first person narrative, and colorful details, make it possible to talk about specific qualities and distinguishable features of Tišma's novelistic technique. The wholeness, compactness and delivery are only partially threatened by some oscillations in style and language, which are much more evident in the first part of the novel.

Because of its completeness, density of narration using strained images, challenging subject-matter, consistent literary elements, *The Kapo* represents a kind of synthesis of his narrative writing up to that point. I believe I will not be alone in saying that this book, with its originality, meaning and total magnitude – surpasses Tišma's earlier, excellent novels.

13.

It's a shame we can't use some miracle of technology to reproduce the conversation between Aleksandar Tišma and Žika Pavlović, in Žika's car, on their drive from Belgrade to Niš, in autumn of 1988. For the most part, this was a conversation between two very experienced and successful masters of the art of prose, who exchanged numerous details from their workshops, their writing trade and their writing struggles openly, without mystification, theorizing, embellishment or

appropriate vagueness. At times, they were like two winegrowers, potters or toolmakers exchanging ideas and information: I made an effort not to interfere in the dialogue because I wanted this unusual sharing of creative secrets and details to last.

The moment we arrived in Niš – where two novels, *The Kapo* (Tišma) and *Hunting Tigers* (Pavlović) were to be presented and where my role was to talk about both of these books and the complete opuses of both the authors – Tišma expressed uneasiness, glumness and impatience. He even alluded, with outright cynicism, that the obliging and accommodating editor of the literature night probably intends to back out of the initial agreement regarding our honorariums and travel expenses. However, later that night Tišma was relaxed and in a better mood, so much so that he even told me the reason for his earlier anxiety as we walked along the quay of the Nišava. He had been visiting his mother, an old lady nearly ninety years of age, every evening, and if the weather permitted, he would sit with her for an hour or two on the bench in front of her house. But he left on this trip without telling her he would not be able to visit her that evening.

14.

In 1989 Tišma told me: “After the war, when I graduated and was looking for a job, I sold my father’s house. It was located in downtown Horgoš, in the place of today’s bus station. I used the money to buy two suits.”

15.

If we were to extract generalities about the pattern of dramaturgy and composition of Tišma’s more extensive prose writing, we would observe that in the life of the protagonists there is always a crucial moment, a detail which sheds light on their whole life up to that moment, or an event which sets in motion the psychological principles and logic of the paths taken. Sometimes the mechanism of re-examination is launched by a seemingly insignificant encounter, other times a newspaper heading, or even a subsequent encounter with those who witnessed the events from the past. This fatal or fateful episode, like a night light, induces all thought to focus on one spot, strips life of the usual illusion of the existence of numerous voluntary choices, and results in the establishment of a hierarchy among chaotic occurrences.

A more precise comparative analysis will also reveal differences in the position of these special places of dramaturgy, meaningful and important to the plot, the crucial moments entrusted with the role of

evoking past events. The novel *The Wide Door* is specific in that the crucial moments in the life of the main character serve as a kind of frame: they are found at the beginning and at the end of the book. The first pages reveal that the hero-narrator (whose name we will never find out) was sentenced to death and was now awaiting his execution in prison; at the very end of the book, we are told why he was convicted. Between these two details, there is an interesting story about the final days of war and occurrences on the outskirts of the front, about the attempts of a young man from Novi Sad to jump on the victory wagon under the illusion that the past can be erased.

The story about the coping of a middle-class individualist who favors the excitement of romance and sexual pleasure over ideological fanaticism, is given additional dramatic tension by the initial information which lets us know that this crafty way of dealing with complicated events, the camouflaging and false identities will eventually become complicated (towards the end we find out where and on the last pages we see how!). Due to a gradual and slow narrative, focused on details, in some places perhaps overly slow, the retrospective form provides a sense of uncertainty, unpredictability and suspense. The functionality of placing concluding information (prison cell, death sentence, awaiting execution) at the beginning of the novel and making an existential situation bordering on doom (the threshold of death) the focal point and motive for the narrative, is obvious.

From book to book, Tišma is increasingly consistent in underlining the intellectual contour, and not only through the discursive levels of narration and profiles of his characters, but also the main ideas of the plot, dramaturgy and composition. The protagonist of *The Wide Door* – who, as in previous novels, speaks in the first person as he recounts parts of his life – faces numerous questions (what is the truth and what a lie, where does the occasional need to sink to the bottom and linger there for a while come from?), tries to shake off past experiences; strives to conceal involvements, acquaintances and beliefs, in order to – relieved of the past and open to the future – feel the thrilling sensation of belonging to the winning side. The redundancy of his effort will gradually turn into a real nightmare; the fear of being revealed, camouflages and a double life, and on the final pages of the novel, into a desperate struggle, even an insane obsession, which compel him to commit tragic actions.

The profile of the hero and the author's objective to find links between different actions enable and "justify" the specific narrative technique – a unique symbiosis of storytelling and interpretation. In almost every sentence, the protagonist-narrator talks about what happened to him while also analyzing (observing, noting, explaining) himself, the people he meets and the episodes he encounters.

The distinctive intellectualism, which has become Tišma's recognizable signature, is present in the compositional solutions, concluded episodes, and portraitures, but also sentence form. Tišma's sentences resemble stairs leading through tangled corridors: they move upwards, descend suddenly, move sideways in an unpredictable direction, offer a resting place for hesitation and reflection, and always lead to the finishing line. They don't allow us to scroll over them; and always contain more than sheer information and simple reflection. The novel, *The Wide Door*, is founded on well executed, convincing motivational arches. They are present in the sense of authenticity, narrative methods, the multiple recurrences of the already introduced details, and the method of administering the ingredient which intensifies feelings of frustration and psychotic fear of being discovered. The impression of compactness with regard to persuasiveness and the narrative is threatened by the ending of the novel because Tišma is not able to maintain the announced motivational intensity in the final chapters. After all, this is a challenge and an obstacle difficult to overcome for many novelists who decide to hold the climax and the fateful turning point until the final lines of the book; in such cases, the only solution often lies in the structure. Thus, – in the domain of a logical, dramaturgical and persuasive ending – this might be the only more substantial criticism of this excellent, legible book, with a wealth of meaning.

Once again Tišma has demonstrated high narrative skill, in every respect. Considering his reputation and the critical reviews of his previous books – apart from the fact that we refrained from classifying *The Wide Door* as one of his best works – this remark should also be regarded as an undeniably affirmative assessment.

16.

As we are taking a walk in downtown Novi Sad, Tišma tells me: "I wouldn't want to die before Erih Koš: he knows a spicy and compromising detail about me, and he wouldn't miss the opportunity to divulge it after my death!"

17.

If we resort to the simplest classification of Tišma's books of prose, according to wartime and peacetime topics, the novel *Those We Love* would fall into the latter category, along with the narrative books *Wrongs* (1961), *Violence* (1965), *The Dead Angle* (1972), and novels like *Following the Black-Haired Girl* (1969). Unlike his most famous novels (*The Book of Blam*, 1972; *The Use of Man*, 1976; *The Kapo*, 1987), in

which the circumstances of war provoke man's most basic, deep-rooted behaviors, the prose set in the period following the war and the present, searches for universal signs in the everyday and the ordinary, sometimes even the trivial. (These shifts of interest, from situations of war to peacetime settings, oscillations between these two equally engaging challenges and the constant recurrence of both these topics, are demonstrated by the symbolic title of the book *Return to Peace*, 1977, one of Tišma's most notable narrative collections).

We have already had the opportunity, with his earlier books, to observe numerous mutual characteristics and many parallels in Tišma's seemingly different texts, and notice a closed circle of obsessive topics, as well as variations in literary models and composition. These observations, regarding an established literary world and developed, already recognizable, writing techniques, are supported by the short novel, *Those We Love*.

This novel also deals with man's vulnerability, existential downfalls and defeats; a yearning to experience a sense of fulfilment, at least on occasion; a search for some sort of support and safe refuge; body language and instincts. The protagonists of the book are madams, prostitutes and degenerates, characters pushed outside of the socially acceptable or permissible by law, people condemned to wander like drunken creatures and shadowy silhouettes. Their struggle is closely connected to societal conditionality, but their actions are also dependent on general human necessity to accept a given situation, human casualties, as something inevitable and run from reality after little or no resistance.

Experiences of a large number of characters, who are connected more by a similar fate than by the shared events, are described within a narrative structure which is loose to the point of sometimes even becoming risky. Gradually, a rudimentary world is unfolded, marked by lechery and voracity, a world that is cruel and compassionless, a world of lust and self-interest. But, also gradually, Tišma's protagonists, these people on the far outskirts of society, these heroes with wasted lives and dulled senses, also begin to manifest sparks of the most subtle human traits. Characters pushed into destitution or loneliness, removed from their natural setting, punished by fate or a series of circumstances, held captive by urges or led by the most basic needs – all these characters, in Tišma's narrative interpretation, possess traits that are most significant in literature, the aptness and capacity for tragedy and drama. Without a single trace of moralistic design, the author develops a mosaic story about lust and money, about giving in to lust for money and about satisfying lust using money, about controlling lust to make money.

In the novel *Those We Love*, those familiar with Tišma's prose will recognize the author's already demonstrated tendency to observe from

an unusual angle and expose the powerful drama and proof of man's blasphemy through smoldering erotic tension and agony transformed into lust. And as in his earlier related works (like the short novel *Ibika's House*, in which significant events and global nightmares are reflected in the atmosphere of a bordello; as well as novels and parts of novels which poetize the cult of passion and physical love), the author deals with erotic passion and sexual experiences without once resorting to pornographic images or prurience. It is as if he wishes to hint at the tragic post-fidelity and sensual incapacity of his protagonists by reducing the sexual and erotic endings to default mechanics.

In spite of being conceived and executed using a simplified compositional and dramaturgical formula, with short chapters similar to independent stories and a language subject to cold reporting of cruelty, the novel *Those We Love* is interesting prose portraying an emphasized sceptical view of the world. Even if we observe it as a narrative intermezzo compared to the novels more ambitiously based and built on a more developed structure, this book has an assigned place among Tišma's wide range of titles. One thing's for sure: this novel is in keeping with the author's outstanding literary reputation.

18.

By rereading Tišma's literary works, we will discover that even his first books, as parts of a greater and ambitious whole, today reveal new meanings which have gone unnoticed. It can also result in a more general observation. That is to say, our contemporary literature – for reasons too complex to list in passing – has been upholding a static and uniform appearance for years, even decades. Little has changed in the arrangement, new values are offered slowly and only to a certain extent. Specifically, very few changes are offered by those we consider our top authors... And if any writer has received real and total affirmation from critics and readers in recent times – it's Tišma. Perhaps his enthronement and ascent is a good sign for our contemporary literature in general?

19.

As it turned out, there was no need for me to regret or be annoyed with myself for what I did, unintentionally and without thinking, in Arandelovac, at the 1992 "Marble and Sounds" Art Festival, while Tišma and I were waiting in the *Staro Zdanje* restaurant, for the literature night to begin. What happened? As we stood on the restaurant terrace, we were approached by an acquaintance I hadn't seen for years. He was staying at the Bukovička Banja Spa. Without suspecting that this could turn

into something unexpected or unpleasant, I introduced this man, with whom I had not lost all touch after college, as my long-time friend. However, the moment we accepted his invitation to sit at his table and have some refreshments, we noticed that the man I so lightly and without thinking introduced as my friend, was rather tipsy. In a loud voice, even shouting at times, without paying any attention to the numerous guests and passersby, he began telling Tišma about some intricate happenings from his firm and township, getting in his face and pulling him by the sleeve. His face flushed, eyes bulging, forehead sweaty, hair sticky he didn't allow the avalanche of words, images, problems and names to subside as he incessantly supported his raging exposition, filled with an abundance of vulgarities, with a pathetic and almost ceremonious statement: "listen to this professor, you haven't heard nothing like this, fucken unbelievable, this will knock you off your seat". However, Tišma reacted quite calmly, listened carefully, with an occasional compassionate nod and short comment ("yes, that's not fair", "a man has to do something", "one should, sometimes"), without any attempt to defend himself from the newly acquired title of professor, or show that the double negative bothered him. And to my enormous shock, Tišma agreed, without hesitation, to meet our raging interlocutor on the terrace after the literature night and accompany him to a nearby restaurant for some local specialities and continue the conversation.

20.

An author's anniversary celebration can be a good opportunity to put together lexical formulations and underline more clearly frames of reference. Therefore, the 70th anniversary of Aleksandar Tišma (born in 1924, in Horgoš; and on that year, in 1994, living somewhere in France) is a good occasion to establish more precise qualifications and classifications of his abundant and diverse opus.

After all our experiences with the author and the gained knowledge, texts which are but mere specs in the colorful mosaic also arouse our interest. This is why we will easily find many similarities between the motifs of the first two books – collections of poems entitled *Inhabited World* (1956) and *The Pub* (1961) – and the stories and novels. However, at the time they were published, these two books primarily reflected secure reinforcement in good reading, the already numerous life experiences, but also an acceptance of prevailing poetic tones, which is to say, risks that accompany mainstream ideas and joining a choir of a thousand voices (...)

Aleksandar Tišma is one of the most translated Serbian authors. According to the reviews published in newspapers and magazines,

another reason why his work attracted the attention of big publishers was his narrative mastery, which is not burdened by solving poetic dilemmas, and his perceptive interpretations of man's current drama, as well as the seductive content of his writing which successfully combines our historical and topographical coordinates with universal messages. Ultimately, the good reception of Tišma's writing is additional plausible proof of the wealth and intensity of our contemporary literature (of the assessment that, today, it is the best thing we have to offer the world!); as well as the quality of our literary criticism, which – in the case of Aleksandar Tišma, among other writers, we can proudly say – has recognized great potential and a unique literary signature promptly and without delay, and without eyeing feedbacks from other regions and the so-called big world.

21.

As head of publishing in "Prosveta", in 1997 I signed a contract with Aleksandar Tišma for his selected works. We agreed to publish his books successively, in accordance with our financial means, and to have the first volume ready for the next book fair, in autumn of 1997. We also agreed on the order, content and title: (1) *Following the Black-Haired Girl*; (2) *The Book of Blam*; (3) *The Use of Man*; (4) *Faith and Treason*; (5) *The Kapo*; (6) *Those We Love*; (7) *The Wide Door*; (8) *Fugitives*; (9) *Short Stories I*; (10) *Short Stories II*; (11) *Elsewhere*; (12) *Poems and Records*. As a former publisher, Tišma took interest in the technical and graphical standards, and requested that we adopt his ideas with regard to the format, book covers, font, paper, and so on.

22.

Tišma came to "Prosveta" unannounced, for coffee. He told me he travelled from Novi Sad to Belgrade by bus to attend a meeting at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, but didn't have the patience to listen to the long speeches. He added, with a frown: "People over 70 shouldn't meddle in serious affairs, especially when it comes to politics!"

23.

Tišma won the "Prosveta" Wartime Book Fair Prize at a book fair held on Knez Mihajlova Street during the NATO bombing in 1999. He was pleased to hear the news of the Prize (for the first books of his collected works, which were published in previous years), and he came to the award ceremony with a written speech, befitting the occasion,

which we copied and distributed to media representatives. When I delivered his award – as representative of “Prosveta’s” bookstore “Geca Kon”, before a large number of journalists indeed – I spoke about his literary opus, with reference to my earlier published texts:

Aleksandar Tišma (1924) is among the highest-ranked authors in Serbian literature, and he belongs to a group of authors who represent our literature and culture to the world in the best and most inspiring way. His books of prose, which have received affirmative reviews and the most prominent awards in our country, are being translated into many other languages and have met with exceptional affirmative reviews in other, important centers of culture. Tišma’s works of writing, created for decades with the steady hand of an experienced master of narration, offers – with regard to artistic insight – inquiries into fateful temptations, and one of the significant questions is: how does man restore faith in humanity and, at the same time, live with the tragic events of the 20th century, among which are also the shadows of Auschwitz, Jasenovac and the Novi Sad massacre.

Tišma’s opus so far comprises diverse literary forms and models, from poetry, travel writing, memoirs and essays to short stories and novels. Even a short summary of his profile reveals openness to various genres, and suggests the belief that form is not a pre-selected genre rule, but also the result of the feeling that artistic intent and the topic lead to a suitable form through the inner logic of literary communication. Nevertheless, we should note that both literary critics and readers agree that the novels – above all, *Following the Black-Haired Girl*, *The Book of Blam*, *The Use of Man*, *Fugitives*, *Faith and Treason*, *The Kapo*, *The Wide Door*, *Those We Love* but others as well – are the most significant, or at least the most appealing, segment of Tišma’s fiction writing.

As with each of his ten or so published novels – including novels awarded the “Prosveta” Prize – the novels *The Use of Man* and *Following the Black-Haired Girl* fall under works of prose whose plausibility is based on compelling topics, inspiring metaphorical structure, linguistic autonomy, and compositional and dramaturgical consistency.

In the novel *Following the Black-Haired Girl*, written in first person, a seemingly casual incident turns into an obsession and a sense of existential failure. The search for the girl whom the protagonist met only briefly – a girl with black hair who symbolizes the genuineness and charm of adventure – develops into a poetic longing for the eternal and the spellbinding. The receptivity of this book, written in a refined and realistic style, is the result of successful stylizations, moldable characters, an authentic décor, and rich figuration.

In the novel *The Use of Man*, there is a precise temporal and spatial setting. The greater part of the plot is linked to Novi Sad, five to

six years before the start of World War II, followed by the war years and all the way to the 1950's. The unusual and tragic fates of the main protagonists, a man and a woman, intertwine with historical events, and ethical preoccupations and indirect warnings that the hidden evil and the executioners could go on the rampage again are built into the primary layers of the plot. The war is the central part of the story, not just as the physical reality but also as the instigator and the cause of various destinies. Also, some dominant ideas arise from the relationship between the two main characters, first of all those regarding the natural instinct to be intimate with other human beings, especially people of the opposite sex, but also the idea that in relationships there is always some detail, an almost mysterious reason, which makes total or enduring affection impossible.

Tišma's books, and their author's growing reputation – in recent times, Tišma has been among the most, if not the most, translated Serbian authors! – support the argument that first-rate literature (even today) has the power to test the morality of history and reality, to imply fateful threats and send profound warnings through captivating stories.

24.

On the last day of 2002, Prvoslav Marić, a film director from Novi Sad, told me that he might not be able to complete the documentary about Aleksandar Tišma: he said that Tišma was very ill, that he had stopped going on his usual walks, and that of recently he was not accepting any calls.

25.

I heard the news about the death of Aleksandar Tišma from Zorica Karanović, *Politika's* journalist, who called me (on a Sunday morning, 16 February, 2003) and asked me to give a statement for tomorrow's issue of the paper. I said:

This is also a moment to say that Aleksandar Tišma is a true literary giant of Serbian and European literature, a writer who has, for many years, represented our literature in the world in the best and most successful way. On the whole, his opus, especially his novels and short stories, encompasses literary mastery of a special kind, the literary mastery that does not waste effort on exterior and formal experiments, but rather seeks to find the most suitable and most suggestive narrative forms. Tišma's books are linked together by inquiries into fateful temptations, and one of his significant questions is: how does man restore faith in humanity and, at the same time, live with the tragic events of

the 20th century. His books warn us that evil and dark instincts are always lurking, waiting for the right moment to run wild.

I also said the following in my statement: My relationship with Tišma was both professional and personal. I wrote reviews on almost all his books, mostly in the culture section of *Politika*. I published several essays for more comprehensive coverage; accompanied him to literature nights and debates in cities across the country. I especially enjoyed working with him on publishing his collection of works in twelve volumes, in “Prosveta”. I still remember, with excitement, the inspiring and cautionary speech he gave in spring of 1999, on Knez Mihajlova Street, in front of the “Geca Kon” bookstore, after receiving the Prosveta Book Fair Prize (wartime) under open skies.

Translated from the Serbian by

Persida Bošković

JOVAN DELIĆ

WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME, O FATHER:
MATIJA BEČKOVIĆ BETWEEN DOMENTIJAN,
DANTE, SHAKESPEARE AND NJEGOŠ

Deeper than any universe of abyssal eyesight
Are the universe and the abyss of the tongue's might.¹
(M. Bečković)

In the good graces of the Serbian language

I do not know of any other Serbian poet being as much in the good graces of the Serbian language as Matija Bečković. I do not know of any other poet who has performed as striking linguistic twists and acrobatics as Bečković has, managing at the same to remain recognizable and one of a kind, while paving ways that had never been probed by poets before and apart from his endeavour.

Chirpy, elated and carried away in his youth, with the poetic voice of the lyrical and poetic protagonist in the center of the poem and the poetic realm, he was a stray bullet and also the target of stray bullets.² A literary toddler who has just learned to walk and talk, he set out to parody Nietzsche at his own expense and on his own hook, placing his own name instead of Zarathustra's in a title – *Thus Spoke Matija* (*Tako*

¹ The original quoted verse is provided (in footnotes, or, when short enough, within the main text) throughout the essay so as to enable the reader to have an insight into the poet's linguistic artistry. As to the translation of the verse, it mainly focuses on the meaning, imagery and figures of speech – at the expense of rhymes, regrettably. – *Translator's note.*

*Od svih svemira bezdana vidika
Dublji je svemir i bezdan jezika.*

² The author of the essay implicitly refers to Bečković's book of verse entitled *Metak lutalica* (*Stray Bullet*), published in 1963. – *Translator's note.*

je govorio Matija). To do so took a great deal of courage and of precious healthy madness of the poet; the risk was razor-sharp.

Odd vibes in his voice would spark out from Russian poetry. It was from Russian poetry rather than from Russia that Vera Pavladolska arrived in his life to immediately move into the Serbian poetry and become the first among the heroines of Serbian 20th century love poetry. It was with those verses that she was gone – into the grave and into Heaven. All of Bećković's love poetry is about Vera Pavladolska, making a vast rainbow-like arch – from verse marked by juvenility and eros to the farewell dirge and prayer. Vera Pavladolska is his darling, yearned for and grieved for, a dead darling and an astral one. I do not know of any Serbian poet, except Laza Kostić,³ who exalted his love from the grave to astral heights in such a successful poetic manner. Bećković should be compared to and evaluated side by side with the greatest of poets, those he himself talks to in his poems: the two Brankos, Radičević⁴ and Miljković,⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, Laza Kostić, and the eternal Dante without whom one neither descends into the circles of Hell nor ascends into the heavenly realm.

It was from Russian poetry that his daughters – Ljudmila and Olja – emerged, to take the throne of his dedication line in Bećković's books.

After he had turned over some stones in the house and boundary walls of his ancestral home and the new one, when he had gazed deep into his self, when he had seen people digging graves and transferring bones and heard Aleksa Marinkov's wail of agony for and over Montenegro,⁶ Bećković found himself in a gold mine of poetic language, where the words coming from darkness take the form of chanting, where speech has been overgrown by myth. Short poetic forms could not condense and integrate the already ruined epic tradition. Through his dialectal verse, the so-called *rovačke pesme* (the 'poems of Rovci'), Bećković materialized the prophecy/dream of one of the greatest 20th century poets and theoreticians of poetry, T.S. Eliot, that modernist

³ Laza Kostić (1841-1910) was a great (many would say, the greatest) poet of Serbian Romanticism who, as the historian of literature Predrag Palavestra writes, "bridged the two centuries of Serbian poetry – the age of Romanticist elation and the modern time of defiant individualism". – *Translator's note*.

⁴ Branko Radičević (1824-1853) was a Romanticist poet and Viennese student who supported the language-reform of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, being the first to write and publish verse in the modified alphabet and popular language. His topics were fresh, too: young people's life, (erotic) love, patriotism, joys in nature, all imbued with serenity and vitalism. – *Translator's note*.

⁵ Branko Miljković (1934-1961) "led Serbian poetry back to reflexive lyricism and sounding picturesqueness of matured symbolism" (P. Palavestra). – *Translator's note*.

⁶ One of Bećković's poems is titled "Unuk Alekse Marinkova plače nad Crnom Gorom" ("Aleksa Marinkov's Son Ululates over Montenegro"). – *Translator's note*.

poetry had to find the way of inventing a novel large form of poetry. Thus, Bećković's poems should be read in that context and light. As well – naturally – as in relation to Njegoš,⁷ the number one Serbian poet who is an eternal source of inspiration, a model and an object of praise. Considering the blend of the archaic and the modern in his verse, Bećković's poems are a remarkable phenomenon on the world's scale.

The poet could no longer speak on his own behalf only and in the first person, once he had oriented himself toward earlier layers of the language; he took the course toward the language and the voice of another man, so his verse turned into narration, into the living/spoken word of someone else. Poetry became polyphonous, like the best novels of world literature, despite the opinion that poems are monologues by definition. Similarly to those in a drama, like in the long-poem *The Epiphany (Bogojavljenje)*, voices fight and compete in poetry. Poetry has turned into a battlefield of other people's voices and destinies. Erected upon the ruins of the epic poem and the epic world, Bećković's long-poems began to resemble a novel – about Montenegro, about “the Border of Vuk the Wild” (*Međa Vuka Manitoga*),⁸ about father, mother, orphaned children. Oral genres and the genres of oral poesy penetrated into poetry: lament, dirge, curse, riddle-poem, and conjuration. Through his discovery of earlier, myth-imbued layers of language, the poet deepened the memory of his language on the whole.

His father's spirit and the man's lacking grave hover all over Bećković's poetry. In that sense, the author got close to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. His father's ‘wolflike’ name brought Bećković's verse into the very heart of the Serbian ancient mythology and close to Rastko Petrović⁹ and Vasko Popa,¹⁰ while the line *Why hast thou forsaken me, O Father*

⁷ Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1813-51), usually referred to simply as Njegoš, was Prince-Bishop of Montenegro (r. from 1830) whose literary greatness is mostly based on three epic poems: *Luča mikrokozma* (The Ray of the Microcosm), *Gorski vijenac* (The Mountain Wreath) and *Lažni car Šćepan Mali* (The False Tsar Stephen the Little). – Translator's note.

⁸ Tradition has it that Duke Vuk Vojinović ‘Maniti’ (‘the Wild’) led the Montenegrins who succeeded in defending parts of Montenegro from the Turkish invasion to establish the ‘Border’ (Medja) they took pride in. – Translator's note.

⁹ Rastko Petrović (1898-1949) was a poet, writer, diplomat, literary and art critic. Friend of the Parisian artistic elite during his university studies there, his Belgrade home later became a hub of Serbia's intellectual scene, and he was one of the co-founders of Modernism. When the communists came into power in Yugoslavia after World War II, he quit his diplomatic service in Washington, D.C. and stayed to live and die in the United States. – Translator's note.

¹⁰ Vasko Popa (1922-1991) was the poet who, alongside Miodrag Pavlović, “shaped the core of the Serbian poetry” in the post-second-world-war period (Predrag Palavestra). “By his modern transposition of the oral heritage, conjuring, games and riddles, Popa created the distinctive poetic idiom of Serbian versification”. One of Bećković's poems is titled “Vasko Popa”. – Translator's note.

was first uttered by Our Lord Jesus Christ, and has for two millennia been resounding throughout world literature.

Bećković's father, Vuk (the name literally means 'Wolf'), appeared to be a missing person at the end of World War II, as an officer of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland. That army was proclaimed as an enemy by the victorious communists, so a heavy ideological blame marked the five-year-old boy and lasted until the collapse of the communist regime. Like Hamlet, the poet was to invoke his father's spirit and his father's grave all his life, for the 'missing' father was left graveless. Therefore, the line from *The Wolf's Lament* (*Vučja tužbalica*): "If only we had your grave, / Fellow-Wolf!"¹¹ was probably not contrived, but remembered as a child's experience until it occurred as an inspiration and a voice in the poem. It is hence natural that Njegoš's line: "Parentless is the tear of mine"¹² is reclining at the 'threshold' of Bećković's poem *Woe and Alas* (*Lele i kuku*) like a home guardian snake.

The two verse lines, Bećković's – dirgelike, and Njegoš's, stand as a two-part epitaph on the non-existent father's grave, on a cenotaph, mutually complementing and revealing. One can, and even must, 'enter' Bećković's poetry via the cenotaph to his father.

The father-theme is directly connected to the theme of victim, the theme of grave, the theme of the karst pits whereinto innocent victims used to be thrown; for, the one searching for his 'missing', graveless father bends over the throats of fathomless pits. The theme is also related to the theme of bones (*kosti*) and the long-poem *The Kostiće's* (*Kostići*), the subject of which are fratricidal conflicts, the Apocalypse and the Judgement Day thematizing God.

For the lyrical character of the poem "Fatherhood" ("Očinstvo"), the stigma of an orphaned child remains for ever: despite being twice as old at the moment of writing than his father had been, enough so to be his father's father, he is still "a child and a half orphan". The fatherless child in this poem is lastingly determined by his father and left exposed "*tvome ubiOCU*" ("to your FATHER-killer"). The stigmatized poor creature gets an attached "FATHER-watcher" ("*motriOCA*"); deprived of not only parental love and protection, but of the very right to have his father, to foster his father's name and the memory of the man. The orphan feels thirst for "a drop of fatherhood". Father can only be sought in one's own emotional and metaphysical depths. Father is the spirit invoked, with no grave or ashes left behind. That is why a cenotaph is built in his honour – one of words, verse, dirge, 'wolf's wreath' (*,vučja*

¹¹ The original reads: *Da je nama groba tvoga, / Vukobrate!*

¹² *Suza moja nema roditelja.*

pletenica“). The search for father is a search for one’s own identity, an orphan’s inevitable quest.

Yet the crucifix from which the orphan cries and puts forward the question “Why hast thou forsaken me, O Father?” – that is a universal crucifix, and the question is universal, too. A personal destiny turns into myth. The orphan turns into crucified man or crucified God. In our earthly eyes, the crucified God seemed forsaken by the Father. The Father and Our Lord, the orphan and the crucifix, the earthly and the metaphysical – these are all interwoven in Bećković’s verse with the father-theme. Thus, the motif leads into the other thematic ‘branch rivers’ of Bećković’s poetry.

In the poem “Fatherhood”, the congruence between sound and meaning has been established deliberately, whereby the end of the verse line, i.e. the rhyme, plays a dominant role. Namely, in 16 out of 20 rhyming lines, the basic motif of the poem resounds, and that is *otac* (‘father’, in changing grammatic case – *oca*, *ocu*) and *očinstvo* (‘fatherhood’). The harmonious/matching sounding is produced through the words of different, at times even opposite meanings: *nepOČINSTVO* (‘evildoing’), *zLOČINSTVO* (‘criminal act’) and *OČINSTVO* (‘fatherhood’); likewise, we read the end-words *OCA* (‘by/of the father’), *ubiOCA* (‘killer/father-killer’), *motriOCA* (‘FATHER-watcher’) and *nabikOCA* (‘impalement stake’). Fatherhood/*OČINSTVO* echoes in *nepOČINSTVO* (‘evildoing’) and *zLOČINSTVO* (‘criminal act’), while the rhymes reveal the destiny of the father (*OCA*) in *ubiOCU* (‘killer/father-killer’), *motri-OCU* (‘FATHER-watcher’) *nabikOCU* (‘impalement stake’) and *iskorenioCU* (‘exterminator’). In the poem “Fatherhood”, Bećković has accomplished perfection in bringing into accordance the sounding-rhythmical and the semantic functions of rhyme.

However, the key word, OTAC (‘father’) does not occur at the ends of verse lines only, in the rhymes, but also recurs in the first lines of the first and second stanzas respectively, with an emphasized style-related function; to put it most precisely, it is the stylistic device known as the *polyptoton*: “I could be father to my father / (...) / And now he would not let father be my father”.¹³

Thereby, sounding harmony is established with the dominant speech sounds from the rhymes and the key word is accentuated in yet another way. This additional form of repetition and word-weaving characterizes a large series of Bećković’s poems, and we have identified it as the *pletenije sloves* (highly intricate style of ‘word-weaving’), i.e. as a deliberate connectedness to one branch of the Serbo-Byzantine tradition,

¹³ Mogao bih biti otac svome ocu
(...)
I sad oca on ne da za oca.

Domentijan¹⁴ from our sub-title being its metonymy (it is noteworthy that Domentijan was Dante's contemporary).

Fatherhood and sonship are inseparable. The half orphan finds consolation in his mother, Heaven and God. And he onto whom Heaven has turned to pour down its grace is not deprived of the Father's protection, no matter how badly he feels orphaned – until death. That is what Bećković's poetry vouches.

Mother is a great heroic character of Bećković's verse. Her voice is twofold, split up. *Stand your ground, my son of a hero* (*Ne daj se, junački sine*) – are her encouraging words to her fatherless child whom she wants to become "somebody" (*netko*); yet fearing for his life, she warns him of the ill fate of heroes and heroes' offspring. Motherly fears are the ultimate expression of motherly love. "I will kill you / On your life I swear" (*"Ubiću te / Života mi tvoga"*) reads the decasyllabic oath of the worrying mother addressed to her son who stopped being a child at the age of four; it is uttered by the mother who is a guardian of the language, a conveyor of the tradition, a source of tales and storytelling; she is a denounced widow of "an enemy of the people" who has raised three fatherless children (one posthumous), weaving a strand of her soul into her son's verse. The poetry of Matija Bećković bears the imprint of her soul.

When most profoundly personal, Bećković's poetry reaches its greatest universality.

Miodrag Pavlović¹⁵ is our witness from the world beyond – and we need no better surety – that Bećković's *Lore* (*Kaža*) is the best satirical poem in the Serbian poetry. It is not only its satirical side that makes it the best one, but also its spirit of fatality.

It was with great care that Bećković listened to the voices of the (Serbian) Salonika Front fighters, and his poem "Ogledalo" ("The Mirror") falls within the most deeply Christian ones I am aware of; it has been composed in that very voice. And here we witness yet another linguistic turnabout. The supreme poem telling about a Serbian soldier who has just killed an enemy watching his own mirror-image in the dead man – together with Bećković's prayer-verse, one more miracle

¹⁴ Domentijan (c. 1210-after 1264), known also as Domentijan of Chilandari, was a monk who wrote hymns and biographies; due to his distinct use of light-related symbols, he is sometimes referred to as 'the poet of light'. The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts has entered his name on the list of 100 most distinguished Serbs ever. – Translator's note.

¹⁵ Miodrag Pavlović (1928–2014) was a poet, fiction writer, essayist, playwright, translator and anthologist who "in the spiritual chord of the Balkan tradition and lively interweaving of mythical and historical sediments instituted a new type of Serbian poetry... and achieved a rare triumph of poets' sobriety, a solid amalgam of poetic and mythical thought." (P. Palavestra) – *Translator's note*.

and linguistic turnaround – establishes a relation between Bećković's poetry and the Serbo-Byzantine tradition and Domentijan, and, moreover, with Dante (Bećković insisted on the spiritual connectedness and contemporaneity of the two). The poet of Serbia and the poet of Tuscany were contemporaries.

Bećković's book of verse *The Unreal Road* (*Put kojeg nema*) is demarcated by the poems "The Shadow" ("Prisen") – as a lyrical prologue, and "The Dreamworldly and the Afterworldly" ("Snovidno i onovidno") – as a lyrical epilogue. In the opening poem, the teller of the poem would dimly see "In twilight / Someone's shadow in the light beam" that "peeked from here or there, / In light or in dark / Making out of naught / Both deeds and misdeeds";¹⁶ in the closing poem, in each of its five quatrains, he enlists the things in which he saw, and explains his grasping of, how "The afterworld gleams in this world" („Onaj svet sjakti na ovome“).

Bećković is also a poet of humourful absurd, accomplished in "The Wolfskin Buying Station" („Stanica za otkup vučjih koža“), featuring a modern-looking metal-made building with a space intended for a Wolves' Cemetery; not one wolfskin has ever been brought to this station; not one skinned wolf has ever been buried in the 'Cemetery'. The humourful absurd wraps up two non-existent roads: one along the Mrtvica River/Canyon and the other, via the village of Liješanj.¹⁷ There by, the road along the Mrtvica is a "domestic brand", the more so bearing in mind that "America prefers the Mrtvica". The even greater absurd is evidenced in our never-ending chasing and pursuing of people, wolves and flies, so that the long poem *The Scrapping Goes On* (*Ćeraćemo se još*) shines in full splendour: one of its Ćeranićes has pursued his troublesome cause as far as to Stambol.¹⁸ The seven-seals humour is the letter of guaranty of Bećković's poetry.

It has been neither the eagle, nor the falcon, nor the ruddy shelduck,¹⁹ nor the hawk, nor the swallow, nor the seagull, nor the swan, nor the nightingale, nor the scops owl, nor the owl, but it has been "a handful of feathers", a little sparrow-hearted sparrow, that has become the hall-

¹⁶ *U zarancima / nečiju prisen u zraku ... (which) Virkaše iz ponečega / Za videla i nevidela / Tvoreći ni iz čega / I dela i nedela.*

¹⁷ The name of the river Mrtvica with its famed canyon in Montenegro is associated with the adjective *mrtva* ('dead'), while the name of the Bosnian village, Liješanj, is associated with the noun *lijes* ('coffin'). – *Translator's note.*

¹⁸ There is a Montenegrin family name of Ćeranić, but in this case it means the 'scrapper' involved in disputes and rivalries to the extent of seeking justice (during the Turkish rule) at the highest instance possible, with the authorities in the capital of the Ottoman Empire, Stambol/Constantinople/now Istanbul. – *Translator's note.*

¹⁹ This bird used to nest at Kosovo Field; it recurs in Serbian epic poetry as *utva zlatokrila* ('ruddy shelduck'). – *Translator's note.*

mark of this book and the sole sad hope and solace to unenslaved slaves peeping from between the bars. It is solely this little creature, the homestead sparrow, that persists without retreat as a witness of all evil in his yard. The poems “Kosovo’s Sparrows” by Djordjo Sladoje²⁰ and “The Sparrow” by Matija Bećković keep warming up hope while the sparrowheart beats in our chest. “The Sparrow” is one of the peaks of Bećković’s poetry. How happy the poor soul of Stevan Raičković²¹ will be about yet another bird sung about in accordance with just and merit, and, moreover, by the pen of a friend.

But is this not a linguistic and poetic wonder: Bećković’s ‘rejuvenation’ in his book *When I Grow Younger (Kad budem mladji)* and his stunt immersion in the young people’s idiom and in the drama of the epic realm’s devastation. Indeed, aged 77, Bećković has become younger, and is still growing younger, being so ever-ready for a linguistic and verse-probing adventure.

*A fella once told me in one place that a book has appeared I won’t tell you which one*²² – comes from the book (*Reče mi jedan čo’ek*) which resumes Bećković’s never-ending dialogue with Njegoš, yet another poet-composed innovation and a linguistic hazard!

Matija Bećković is a factual entity on the worldwide literary and cultural scene, and he has to be read and interpreted within the context of world literature. This particularly shows in his prayer-poems.

On the four prayer-poems by Matija Bećković

The subject of this section is Matija Bećković’s book of verse *Three Long Poems (Tri poeme)*, published by „Srpska književna zadruga“ (‘Serbian Literary Cooperative’) in 2015. The first one of these – *Lord, Have Mercy (Gospode pomiluj)* – was written in 2013, the second one – *Bestow Thy Love on Me (Učini mi ljubav)* – in 2014, and the third one – *Glory Be to Thee O Lord (Slava Tebi Boze)* – in 2015, the year in which the triptych-forming long poems appeared as an edition of a major Serbian publishing house.

Bećković’s prayer verse is neither a surprise nor breaking news. We shall only mention his three poems devoted to the Three-Handed Mother of God (*Bogorodica Trojeručica* in Serbian, *Panagia Tricherousa*

²⁰ Djordjo Sladoje (b. 1954) is one of the most notable Serbian poets today, awardee of numerous literary institutions. – *Translator’s note.*

²¹ Stevan Raičković (1928-2007) was a distinguished poet, contributor and editor of reputable media and publishing houses, member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. – *Translator’s note.*

²² *Reče mi jedan čo’ek na jednom mjestu da je izašla jedna knjiga, neću vam reći koja.*

in Greek)²³ and the long love poem/prayer *Parousia for Vera Pavladolska*. Bećković's love poetry reached its summit through the long poem of prayer, *parousia*. It was love that brought the grave and Heaven together, in confirmation of its immortality and divine nature. Love is not merely an attribute of the Divine, but its quintessence – in Bećković's long poems at least. *Parousia for Vera Pavladolska* is a natural passage, a kind of bridge to be crossed from Bećković's love poetry to prayer verse. That is his Dantean line we make out in Bećković's poetry as unassumingly withdrawn: it is love, or Beatrice, or Vera Pavladolska that pave the way to Divinity. Here we have an opportunity to repeat and reconfirm our critical judgment on Bećković as being closely and deeply, yet unpretentiously, related to the two old bards: it is through the love subject, through Vera Pavladolska who guides him toward the Divine, that he is related to Dante, while his Father's Spirit which soars above all of his verse brings him into relation to Shakespeare/*Hamlet*. The fact that Bećković does not imitate either Dante or Shakespeare only confirms his own authenticity and profundity. The relatedness is not imitational, but quintessential. As is quintessential the connectedness to our most profound and earliest mythical notions (the pre-Christian ones), established by his father's name (Vuk, 'Wolf') and – by way of his long poems – to the tradition of the Serbo-Byzantine art of poetry. In addition to Njegoš and Vuk Karadžić,²⁴ these are Bećković's traditional referential guidelines. Edgar Allan Poe, Branko Radičević and Laza Kostić are parts of that tradition-building constellation.

It is thus natural that *Parousia for Vera Pavladolska* reappeared in the bibliophile edition of Jovica Veljović, as the third piece in the triptych of long poems: *Lord, Have Mercy (Gospode pomiluj)*, *Bestow Thy Love on Me (Učini mi ljubav)* and *Parousia for Vera Pavladolska*. The positioning of *Parousia* after the poem *Bestow Thy Love on Me* may suggest the idea that the prayer for love was answered long ago, having become – through *Parousia* – eternal and spiritual. What is

²³ The mention implies the reader's familiarity with the story about St. John Damascene: In the time of the 9th century iconoclasts, John of Damascus was punished for his zealous veneration of icons by cutting his hand off; he took his severed hand and prayed in front of his family icon of the Three-Handed Mother of God until falling asleep; in the morning, he awoke with his own hand reattached. The wonderworking icon of *Bogorodica Trojeručica (Panagia Tricherousa)* is the most important icon in the possession of the Serbian Orthodox Church. It is safeguarded at the Serbian monastery of Chilandar on the Holy Mountain/Mt. Athos. – *Translator's note*.

²⁴ Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787-1864) was the major reformer of the Serbian language and the father of the study of Serbian folklore, primarily the oral literary heritage. His translation of the *New Testament* into Serbian was one of the key events in the history of his mother tongue. Vuk Karadžić was a member of the academies in Berlin, Vienna, Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Göttingen, Cracow and Paris. 1987 was 'The UNESCO Year of Vuk Karadžić'. – *Translator's note*.

eternal and divine in love cannot be lost, especially if it has been transformed into poetry: "One truth has showed / That no thing therein is or can be / Which could ever be lost".²⁵

The accomplishments of pure poesy are in this matter more powerful than the consensual claims of all specialists, ultrasound devices, scanners and discharge notes: "As evidenced by pure poesy / The once mortal soul is mortal no more".²⁶

Parousia for Vera Pavladolska relies on belief in the love, grace and power of the Mother of God, without whom there is not "a breath of life in any realm whatsoever". She who gave birth to the God-man and who has known the earthly pain and joy of labours, the fear for one's infant in the moments of the Massacre of the Innocents and the death of the Son on the Cross, His deposition and entombment, the mother's tears – She is the hope of man's prayer and its conveyor to the Father and the Son; She knows of the Heaven's and Earth's love secret, and She is sung about toward the end of *Parousia* as a stronghold of the Poet's belief in love's immortal nature: "Although each breath of mine without it / Has always known better than anyone / If she is or is not there / And that there would never be / A breath of life in any world whatsoever / Without Her who is all and everything in the soundrealm / Holding all the Galaxies in Her embrace".²⁷

Celebration of immortal love is at the same time celebration of the Mother of God, like in the verse of Laza Kostić, but also celebration of poetry and poets, that is, of the first and the greatest of all poets – God Our Lord. The paradox "There is more of her since she has only shined" (*Nje više ima otkad samo sija*) lies in the pregnantly concise manner of presenting the transcendence of the deceased darling into light and sound, that is, into poesy and eternity; therefore, celebration of immortal love is identical to celebration of the Mother of God and poesy, that is, of the Creator and his Creation as poetry, which is the subject of the poem *Glory Be to Thee O Lord*: "The word from the beginning became the sound in the end / Which only celebrates life eternal / The only One immaculate and blameless / For there is more

²⁵ *Jedna istina se sama očitala
Da u njoj nema i ne može biti
Ničeg što se ikad može izgubiti.*

²⁶ *Sa dokazima čiste poezije
Ta što beše smrtna sada više nije.*

²⁷ *Mada je moj svaki disaj i bez toga
Oduvek znao bolje od ikoga
Da li nje više nema ili ima
I da ne bi bilo nigde nikakvoga
Daška života u svim svetovima
Bez one koja je sve i svja u zvučju
I sve galaksije drži u naručju.*

of her since she has only shined / Words are notes and language is melody / Only God is a poet and others but mere copies / And poesy shines above poetry”.²⁸

The poem *Bestow Thy Love on Me* is a prayer to the Mother of God, a simultaneous celebration of the Theotokos and of love. The Mother of God is love and grace embodied, “The most loved of the celestial bodies”, and love is the measure of God’s presence: “There is as much love as much there is God” („*Ljubavi ima koliko i Boga*“). That is why love is eternal: it is part of the Divine Essence, it does not die (at least not entirely), and “Love that dies has never lived either” („*Ljubav koja umre nije ni živela*“). Love determines the value of life, of poets and of poetry: “Remember the poets who do not exist / Yet are worthy owing to their love” („*Seti se pesnika koji ne postoje / A jedino vrede zbog ljubavi svoje*“). The method of *pletanje sloves* (‘word-weaving’), referred to above, which we identified in Bećković’s verse, has reached its stellar moments here again: “Bestow Thy love on me for the sake of love / The glory which has made itself glorious” („*Učini mi ljubav za ljubav ljubavi / Te slave koja samu sebe slavi*“).

The underlying substance of Bećković’s long poems is the *Book*, that is, the *Bible*, mostly the books of the *New Testament*. The poet himself makes a reference to the Holy Apostle Paul: “According to Paul if you move mountains / But do not have love you are nothing”.²⁹ Bećković invokes Saint John Damascene, whose hand and prayer made the Three-Handed Mother of God what She is, offering an association to his deceased friend, the great author Meša Selimović, empowering his thought that only on earth love salvages man from fatal loss: “Bestow Thy love on me, Daughter of Jerusalem / As has been written by Damascene’s hand / When He was born without mother in Heaven / and without father on Earth repeated the birth / That is when Heaven and Earth were wedded / And which is which they knew no more / Aware that no one was at a loss / As long as love was the beneficiary / And not the poet married in the heavenly mount / Or the Muse married on the Earth’s globe.”³⁰ But of all books and verse lines, the words

²⁸ *Reč na početku posta zvuk na kraju*
Što slavi samo žiznj beskonečnaju
Jednaju čistaju i neporočnaju
Jer nje više ima otkad samo sja
Reči su note jezik melodija
Samo Bog je pesnik drugi su kopija
A nad poezijom blista poezija.

²⁹ A po Pavlu i da planine pomeraš / Ništa si ako ljubavi nemaš.

³⁰ Učini mi ljubav kći jerusalimska / kao što napisala ruka damaskinska / Kad se bez majke na nebu rodio / A bez oca zemlji rađaj ponovio / Tad su se nebo i zemlja venčali / A koje je koje više nisu znali / Znali su da niko nije na gubitku / Dok god

which most brilliantly and most effectively shine are the words that glorify the Word and its power from the beginning of the *Gospel of John*, and those of the poet's prayer and celebration of the Creator and the Mother of God. Words, letters and the super-grammar – the Logos of the Creator – rule the stars and the starhome: “Make clear and accurate answer the poet's prayer / While the stars abide by the language law / And the cogwheel round the starhome / Is ruled by the Word and the Super-Grammar.”³¹

Thus, it is the language law, the word and the super-grammar that rule in astral domains and “the cogwheel round the starhome”. Bećković's trust in the Word, in language, is grounded in the Gospels.

That is why Bećković emphasizes the main purpose of his prayer to the Mother of God: He asks for as immense and powerful blaze as possible so that the holy light would spotlight each letter in the Book of Books, that is, in the *Holy Scripture*. The eulogy to love is given an emphasized point – a eulogy to the book, the letter and the word, that is, to light and to God as poet: “Just keep being bright do not stop shining / Be bright with the shine that shines from you / Push the great darks into the flame / And expiate your sins in the shine / So that each letter in the Book is made shiny / And the tongue's enamel begins to shine.”³²

The poet knows that the times in which he lives, composes verse and prays for love are the times of potent glooms, blind, shameful and hopeless, that the cosmos has been turned wrong-side-out, and the heaven upside down, so that salvation is offered by the great and frightful poet – God. That God is an immense and frightful poet should be understood in the original and accurate sense, probably in the Rilkean one – that beauty is (the beginning of) terror: “Bestow Thy love on me / In the blind times so shameful and hopeless / The cosmos has turned inside out / And the heaven has turned upside down / Give birth to another motionless star / Let the space eject the afterbirth / And the pinkish sunrise dawn reverse / And announce to the world beyond / As exit and salvation herald and guide / For God is an immense and frightful Poet.”³³

bude bila ljubav na dobitku / Ni pesnik oženjen na gori nebeskoj / Ni muza udata na kugli zemaljskoj.

³¹ Ujasni utačni usliši pesnika / Dok se zvezde drže zakona jezika / A zupčanikom oko zvezdarnika / Upravlja slovo i nadgramatika.

³² I samo sijaj sjati ne prestaji / Sijaj sijanem što iz tebe sjaji / Karamrakove plamenu predaji / I sve grehove u sjaju okaji / Da se svako slovo u Knjizi osjaji / I gled jezika se u pesmi zasjaji.

³³ Učini mi ljubav ne budi nenežna / U slepa vremena stidna beznadežna / Izvrnuo se kosmos na postavu / I okrenula se nebesa na glavu / Porodi novu zvezdu nekretnicu / Neka izbaci svemir posteljicu / I rumena zora s naličja osvane / I objavi svetu sa suprotne strane / Kao spas i izlaz vodilja i vesnik / Jer Bog je velik i strašan je pesnik.

This is how Bećković's long poems are developed. We have seen for ourselves that *Parousia for Vera Pavladolska* is in closest relation to the poem *Bestow Thy Love on Me*, and it is that very poem that led us before the face of the immense and frightful Poet, God the Creator, to whom the prayer-poem *Glory Be to Thee O Lord* is addressed as his glorification. At its opening, as a motto, there stand the verse lines by Njegoš: "What can all existence be / But the poesy of the father of all" („Što je skupa ovo svekoliko / Do opštega oca poezija“).

God's Creation – the Universe – is the poesy of the Father of All, and the Bishop's (Njegoš's) verse is signed by Bećković as his own motto, with the deepest belief of a poet. And the belief is visible and audible in each of the twenty long stanzas, consisting of fourteen verse lines each. Namely, each stanza ends in a two-line refrain that at the same time makes the point of the respective stanza, and of the poem on the whole; the refrain has been composed to glorify Our Lord and His Creation. Twenty-one times, the point-refrain echoes: "Glory be to Thee O God the sole poet / and hallelujah to Thy Creation".³⁴

In his prayer-long poems, Bećković appears to be a poet different from the one we knew before: he is now a poet of long stanzas consisting of seven (*Parousia*), ten (*Bestow Thy Love on Me*), twelve (*Lord, Have Mercy*), and fourteen (*Glory Be to Thee O Lord*) verse lines, whereby the stanzas are rhythmical-semantic and composition-related entities, little 'cantos' and compositional 'blocks' that build up the poems. They are firmly bound together by the rhymes, so that the rhyme has become an incredible challenge to the poet who was not particularly inclined to rhyme-making and who did not win renown by rhymes. In the said three long poems, and in *Parousia* which marked the beginning of this kind of Bećković's poetic manner, Matija Bećković turned into a consistent poet of rhyme and refrain.

What is more, Bećković embraced the challenge of the accumulated rhyme and carried it throughout the poem *Lord, Have Mercy*. Rare are the lengthy poetic forms that use one and the same, accumulated rhyme. The form hides a great risk of filling both the rhyme and the vocabulary with monotony, reiteration, and banality. And Matija Bećković, in the eighth decade of his life, took the boyish risk. In the long poem *Lord Have Mercy* he 'reduces' all of the seven stanzas, twelve lines each – that is, all of the 84 verse lines – to one and the same accumulated rhyme: 84 times, in a row and without a single exception, the one and the same suffix – *-ana* – resounds throughout.

What is the purpose thereof? How come the *-ana* does not impress one as tedious and banal? I am not sure if the poet was lucky enough,

³⁴ *Slava Tebi Bože pesniče jedini
I aleluja tvojoj tvorevini.*

or if he carefully planned and worked it out, but the accumulated rhyme has in this poem proved to be extremely functional and, in terms of meaning, profoundly justified. The poet asks for the Lord's mercy for the whole planet ("Lord have mercy for all the open wounds / of all continents and all oceans"),³⁵ for the entire Universe, God's creation ("Creator of all, have mercy for all your six-days' / Weaving work without a model or a precedent").³⁶ The Creation is held together by the Divine palm caressing it and by the uniform rhyme which audibly suggests the oneness of the world, our planet and whatever exists thereon; the oneness of the Creation and the oneness of the lyrical/poetic speaker's fear for the Earth and whatever there is on the Earth, equally for the bumped-skin toad and the wattle-adorned rooster, and the God-resembling man. The speaker's fear for the destiny of the planet and man thereon, that is, for the destiny of all living and dead, of all the things past, contemporary and future, of the Creator's and man's deeds alike – is articulated in the point-making refrain, the final distich ending each of the stanzas: "That is the plea of the soul known but to Thee / Still intact yet frightened wholly."³⁷

The praying soul is somewhat secretive, known to God solely, still whole, *intact yet frightened wholly*, endangered because of fear. The *still* preceding the *intact* (soul) suggests that the integrity of the soul is threatened and that it can fall apart under the pressure and the corrosive power of fear. The soul prays for the preservation of the world's and its own wholeness, that is, for the release from fear. The refrain's importance in this poem by Bečković matches that of Kostić's one,³⁸ to become a poetic 'law' – not in this one of his prayer-poems only.

What is the origin of such a great fear of the lyric/poetic first-person 'speaker'? Why is the soul so frightened? There is a suggestion, present from the very first lines, that our planet is covered with open wounds, across all of the continents and oceans, along each of the parallels and meridians: "Lord have mercy for all the open wounds / of all continents and all oceans". The open wounds cover both land and sea, solid ground and water alike. Life and the world are threatened from their foundations, everywhere. There is a danger of all-encompassing cataclysm, and God's mercy is the sole salvation. That mercy can only be asked for "in time" (*zarana*), while there is still time enough to save the world.

³⁵ Gospode pomiluj preko živih rana / Svih kontinenata i svih okeana.

³⁶ Pomiluj svetvorče sve što si šest dana / Tkao bez uzora i bez presedana.

³⁷ Moli Te duša samo Tebi znana / Još nenačeta a isprepadana.

³⁸ The author refers to the poem Santa Maria della Salute by Laza Kostić. – Translator's note.

Toward the end of the long poem, at the beginning of its final stanza, there is a hint of the eternal battle between the Lord's and Satan's forces. It is an eternal conflict between good and evil, in which *the unnamed of leprous minds* (*nepomenici uma ogubana*) come to prevail in bad times, poking and fanning their infernal fire *under the sooty cauldron* (*ispod garavog kazana*). Hence the prayer to the Lord, filled with hope and fear, should He voice *from all the heavenly screens* (*sa svih nebeskih ekrana*) and scrape off the rust on His Creation, that is, 'scrape off' the fear of the praying soul, so that the Creation could shine in its full brilliance. The imagery accompanying God's appearance in the final stanza is marked by paradox: God is at the same time, "Vaster-than-Heaven", like the Mother of God, but also the *concentrated spark* / *In the focus' focus focus-placed* (*iskra sažimana* / *I u žižinu žižu sažimana*), while in our homes He is *in a grain of incense* (*u zrnu tamjana*). The multiple faces and dimensions of the Divine Appearance – from the grain of incense, via the word-woven *focus' focus focus-placed* to the superheavenly vastness and heights – contribute to the concreteness of Bećković's imagery and the credibility of God's omnipresence: from the homely smoke of incense to the astral heights and spaces; they also contribute to the belief in God's presence permeating the Creation and to the hope in salvation, that is, the belief in the triumph over *the unnamed of leprous minds*. "While the unnamed of leprous minds / Poke under the sooty cauldron / Thou Vaster-than-Heaven, concentrated spark / In the homely grain of incense / May out of that grain like the manna from Heaven / Descend the Hand of the Saviour and howl the Hosanna / And may the voice be heard from all the heavenly screens / May the rust be scraped off Thy Creation / For the sake of Thy slandered name / That is the plea of the soul known but to Thee / Still intact yet frightened wholly."³⁹

The fear for Creation and for man has not died away. It persists as long as the open wounds on all continents and oceans await healing, at the Equator and the Poles alike. The fear exists on a planetary and cosmic scale, just like the open wounds that have spread across the globe and its land, ice and oceans. That is why we experience this very poem of Bećković's as the most harrowing one and the closest to us; it resides in the neighbourhood of Bećković's historical/apocalyptic scenes. Like Miodrag Pavlović, Matija Bećković feels from the depth of his soul that the apocalypse has already taken place, and repeatedly

³⁹ Dok nepomenici uma ogubana / Tarkaju ispod garavog kazana / Širi od nebesa iskro sažimana / I u Žižinu žižu sažimana / A kod kuće si u zrcu tamjana / Nek se iz tog zrnca ko sa neba mana / Spusti ruka Spasa i zaori Osana / I oglasi sa svih nebeskih ekrana / Da je rđa sa tvoga dela sastrugana / Imena tvoga radi opanjkana / Moli te duša samo tebi znana / Još nenačeta a isprepadana.

so, and that the peoples like ours meet multiple ends and experience multiple beginnings. It was by no means a matter of chance that Miodrag Pavlović wrote about Matija Bećković's *Lore* (*Kaža*) with such a deep emotion, inspiration and most profound belief, and we do not believe that it was by mere chance that he would see Bećković whenever he visited Belgrade. The vision of the end of the world having repeatedly happened before without man's awareness thereof is found in the long poem *Glory Be to Thee O Lord*: "They threatened by the world's end every now and then / Yet failed to see whenever it came true."⁴⁰ This poem, however, tells about the fear from global/planetary/universal apocalypse/cataclysm.

In the prayer-poem *Lord, Have Mercy* there is something of the love, grace and plea for clemency for the world of the poetess Desanka Maksimović.⁴¹ It is Tsar Dušan⁴² that the poetess asks for clemency, through a lyric dialogue with *Dušan's Code*, yet for the matters of human and earthly nature. However, the nature of Bećković's poem is planetary and cosmic, while the plea for clemency has been turned into a prayer for the Lord's mercy on the universal scale. Bećković's poem was composed out of fear from an all-embracing cataclysm and considers the salvation of the world and of man in that world. His poem asks for clemency that would concern the past, the present time and the future, the dead and the living, history and our day, the Divine Creation and human deeds – alike. Our Lord's mercy is asked for all the open wounds of *all continents and all oceans*; that is, for whatever exists *up to the seventh heaven and the nine ceilings*;⁴³ for this world and the afterworld; for the overall Creation which has come into being following the Divine Scheme. A particle of the *earth's dust* is separated from the astral powder and placed into the centre of the Divine Grace – so that it would *not die without mercy granted*. The poem treats as equal geographical terms, states and large parts of the globe, continents and oceans (India, China, Japan, Far East, western parts, the Southern

⁴⁰ Smakom sveta su svaki čas pretili / A kad god je bio nisu primetili.

⁴¹ Desanka Maksimović (1898–1993) was a poet, fiction-writer, author who wrote much for children, and translator. Also, she became a full member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. *Tražim pomilovanje* (*I Seek Clemency*) is considered one of her best volume of verse. She was extremely popular and wide-read all over the former Yugoslavia. – *Translator's note*.

⁴² Stefan Uroš IV Dušan (c. 1308–1355), known as Dušan the Mighty (*Silni*) was the King of Serbia from 1331 and Emperor of the Serbs and Greeks from 1346. He enacted the constitution of the Serbian Empire, *Dušan's Code* (proclaimed in 1349), suggesting that its objectives were spiritual and that it would help to save his people for the afterlife. – *Translator's note*.

⁴³ "Nine storeys" is a reference to the epic folk poem about the folk hero Ivo Senjanin who built his tower-house nine storeys/"ceilings" (*devet tavana*) high. – *Translator's note*.

Cross, Afghanistan, the two Americas in three oceans, the Equator, Mont Blanc, Sheep Gate, the Mediterranean), but among all those landmarks, shrines and altars are particularly honoured (Mt. Athos, Zion, Wailing Wall) juxtaposed – together and at the same height – to the Serbian towns, churches and battlefields in Kosovo (Peć, Prizren, Visoki Dečani, Gazimestan). The clemency includes the contrastingly mentioned waters (the Dead Sea and the vital Jordan), all religions (Muslims, Jews, Christians, pagans) and holy books of various faiths (Bible, Talmud, Quran, Gospels and Evangelists – Mathhew, Mark, Luke and John), dust and ashes, history's load of bull (Greece, Romans, the Fall of Constantinople, the Vatican, Russians, Germanic peoples, Asia and the Balkans). The simultaneous invocation of all the dead and the living, the past and current agents of history – emphasizes the unspecified yet in every line suggested nearing Last Judgment, and that is why the Lord is asked to grant mercy onto the forgotten, 'dead' worlds and ages, as well as on the living ones, for one's own and the aliens' kin, for foes and allies alike.

The prayer for God's mercy embraces the whole living world on earth / from the *budshoot which broke through the shroud of tar / And the worm undisencumbered from mud, to all and sundry*. It is not possible to enlist all of the animal and plant species, but this Bečković's 'enumeration' as a figure of speech asks for clemency to be bestowed on all life: "Give mercy to the horned owl and the raven black / The crippled ant the bumped-skin toad / The finch the red kite and the wattle-adorned rooster / The bear cub from Kamchatka on the seal's floe / The great crested grebe on the sparrow's twig / The green woodpecker solitary eagle / The macabre moth the mangy billy goat / And the legions of creatures and all and sundry / The budshoot breaking through the shroud of tar / And the worm undisencumbered from mud / That is the plea of the soul known but to Thee / Still intact yet frightened wholly."⁴⁴ In this poem, too, Bečković celebrates the glory of the Word and the Book/Speech/Logos. In the first stanza we find the line "All that moves on the earth following Thy Scheme's Word" (*Sve što vrvi zemljom po slovu tvoga plana*) which unambiguously reveals that the sub-text of the long poem comes from *The Gospel According to John* and celebration of the Word as the beginning, as *the Word* and *the Logos* in the Scheme of the Creation in progress.

⁴⁴ Pomiluj jejinu i vrana gavrana / Sakatog mrava žapca okrastana / Zebu mrku lunju petla naušljana / Meće sa kamčatke na santi tuljana / Ridjogrllog gnjrca na grani dživdžana / Zelenu žunu orla samotana / Grobnog leptira jarca ošugana / I tušta i tma i ala i vrana / Procvatak probio kroz pokrov katrana / I crva iz mulja još neiskobeljana / Moli te duša samo tebi znana / Još nenačeta a isprepadana.

In the long poem *Glory Be to Thee O Lord* we find an intricate poeticizing of *The Gospel of John*, that is, of its first sentence honouring the Word/Logos. Bećković had written poems to honour word and language, that is, to pay respect to poetry (which has repeatedly been pointed out), but his own 'Word of Love' has never been as amazing as it has in this long poem. The poem about God's Creation as poetry and the Creator as the sole true poet inevitably turned into the word-smithy of the Word and the Language.

God created the world out of nothing, before the letters *alpha* and *omega* came into being, and he created it (Bećković now 'weaves the words' in order to depict the act) while bearing in mind (pre-anticipated, paradoxically) what he wanted to create: "By the power of all-love-possessing Word of Love / You thought of all and everyone."⁴⁵ While weaving these lines and words, Matija Bećković remembered Despot Stefan the Tall⁴⁶ and his *Word of Love* (*Slovo ljubve*) which is present as a subtext of the poem. The Creator creates naming what is being created. He creates by word, pronouncing the name of what He is going to create, and the word/name is used with utmost and strictest accuracy, while the word and the act, the notion and the denotation, are in full correspondence mutually. It is by pronouncing the words, creating language/vocabulary, the Creator is making his Creation: "The moment you said land sky water grass / You saw it was right and that the word was the right one / And as you celebrated each word / You tongue-forged the new tongue / And as you uttered each syllable / You face-sculpted new realms / What your mouth professed / Came to life wrapped in a word / And for the Z most distant from the A / You tied the destiny of all deeds."⁴⁷

The world was created by language and out of language, for in the beginning was the Word, and Word was God. Word has the most difficult task and destiny, for *The Universe was in the word conceived / To yield all of the heavenly bodies / And reach the peak of glory / And*

⁴⁵ Silom sveljublanskog Slova ljubvenoga / Setio si se svega i svakoga.

⁴⁶ Despot Stefan Lazarević (1377–1427) was the ruler of Serbia after the heroic death of his father, Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović, in the Battle of Kosovo (1389). He successfully balanced the relations with the Ottomans and Hungary, managing to enlarge the territory of Serbia and using the times of peace to modernize his country politically, economically, culturally and militarily. A great patron of literature and art and a Renaissance poet himself, he wrote *The Word of Love*, addressing a close-to-him individual (thought to be his brother Vuk) with whom he was on bad terms. – Translator's note.

⁴⁷ Čim reče kopno nebo voda trava / Vide da je dobro i da je reč prava / I kako si koje slovo proslavio / Novi jezik si izjjezikotvorio / I kako si koji slog izgovarao / Nove svetove si olicetvarao / Tvojim ustima što je urečeno / Došlo je u život u reč obučeno / I za ižicu si zadnju od počela / Vezao sudbinu celokupnih dela.

*propel the wheel of Earth around the Sun.*⁴⁸ Therefore, no one has obeyed the Creator in the way the Word has. The *accuracy of articulation* is immanent to the Divine word of creation. Imagination – which is, likewise, of the Divine origin – is inseparable from the word and the language. It asserts, expresses and proves itself through language. When the word goes mute, imagination comes to a halt: “Wherever you set imagination free / Greens climb the pedestal of the greenfield site / Wherever the cliff stopped at an abyss / You refrained from saying a word.”⁴⁹ The Creator is the Father of a *free act of creation*, beyond any *poetics, moulds, models*; He is the model to Himself, so that *All the riches under the vault of the sky / Sing an ode to honour the freedom of poets.*⁵⁰ Creative and poetic freedoms have been granted by God, they are God-given and the whole Universe is evidence, expression and sign thereof. Being Himself a model to his work, the Creator is an absolutely original artist. His world-book is unprecedented and has *no forerunner*. A eulogy for the freedom of the creative act as a divine gain and heritage is at the same time a eulogy for the innovative and original character of creative work and the Creation.

Memory is immanent to poesy and poets. Poets remember even that which has never happened: “Poets have been where others have not / Remembering whatever has never been.”⁵¹ Memory is immanent to language and hence to poetry and poets. That is why language is the greatest and the most perfect of all wonders worked by the Creator during his creation of the world; that is why it is deeper than any universe: “Deeper than any universe of abyssal eyesight / Are the universe and the abyss of the tongue’s might / And in every nation’s tongue / All tongues and the whole universe / Have been made for some purpose and reason / As parts of God’s Providence / And the fatherland of each poet / Is the unknown distant and only one / Whose citizen he has only been / Never to leave it behind / And not sing one piece all of his life / But to sing the one piece together with all.”⁵² Language is the one and only homeland to every poet, the ever-mysterious one and never familiar enough. All of the world’s languages are in a kind of harmony, as are

⁴⁸ Vaseljena se u reči začela/ Iz nje se izlegla sva nebeska tela / I slava joj stigla do vrhunca / I kotur zemlje tera oko Sunca.

⁴⁹ A gde si mašti pustio na volju / Izeleni zelen po svom postopolju / Gde god je greben nad ponorom stao / Tu si se od reči i ti uzdržao.

⁵⁰ Sve blago ispod nebeskoga svoda / Oda je u počast pesničkih sloboda.

⁵¹ Gde nije niko pesnici su bili / Sve što nije bilo to su zapamtili.

⁵² Od svih svemira bezdana vidika / Dublji je svemir i bezdan jezika / A u jeziku svakog naciona / Svi su jezici i sva vasiona / Stvoreni zbog nekog razloga i smisla / Kao delovi Božjega primisla / A psniku je svakom otadžbina / Ona nepoznata daleka jedina / Čiji je građanin jedino i bio / I nikada je nije napustio / Da ne peva jedan ceo život jedno / Već da svi pevaju to jedno zajedno.

all of the poets worldwide. Celebrating God as the sole poet and His Creation as the most perfect and permanent work/book in progress, Bećković celebrates the Word and the Language. This is yet another eulogy for Language composed by Bećković, this time written from the metaphysical and theological approach. The eulogy for Language has been written by the poet who is in the special grace of his native language, so the eulogy – like an echo – has its response, as is the case through the lines: “Through beams through streams daybreaks dawns / Are good fortune’s priceless finds”.⁵³

Such finds/innovations include old-fashioned and novel lexemes and lexic blends in these poems: *kresivo* (‘flintlight’), *bogoposejan* (‘godsown’), *tarkati* (‘to poke’ fire), *procvatak* (‘budshoot’), *neiskobeljan* (of worm, ‘undisencumbered’), *najnajniija* (‘mostutmost’), *paučje* (‘spiderflock’), *zvučje* (‘soundrealm’), *satreptaj* (‘co-twinkle’), *krozvideti* (‘to throughsee’), *omojiti* (‘to my’, make mine), *zvezdarnik* (‘star-home’), *sveljubeći* (‘all-loving’), *istodobnik* (‘sameager’), *parbenik* (‘lawsuiter’), *izjezikotvoriti* (‘tongueforge’), *olicetvoriti* (‘facesculpt’), *pesmotvor* (‘poemmaker’), *pustopolje* (‘desertfield’), *prostrujak* (‘throughstream’), *svitaj* (‘dawnbeam’), *razdanak* (‘daybreak’), *iznititi* (‘to bring out thread’), *uvremeniti* (‘to lend the property of existing in time’), *uprosoriti* (‘to lend the property of existing in space’), *prepočeti* (‘forebegin’), *ramenovati se* (‘shake shoulders’), *gornjati se* (‘climb along’); similar “priceless finds” are impressive in the form of ‘letter-weaving’: *In the focus’ focus focus-placed / Love for love’s love [sake] / Of the glory glorifying itself, / The single singular of the singular, / Sleep my everything to everything superior, / Shine with the shine shining from your self / By the Force of the All-Loving Word of Love / You have remembered everyone and all*.⁵⁴ Many of these linguistic inventions bear an inner memory of the old Serbian literature, providing evidence of linguistic and poetic retention.

Since poets are the humans most truthful to the Divine image, God Himself being the greatest poet of all, and since the universe of words and poetry is deeper than any “abyssal eyesight”, Bećković cannot necessarily believe in the end of poetry and poets as long as humans and words exist on earth. At the same time, he believes that the surviving poetry shall be that poetry which incorporates the modern and the new while recollecting the old and the eternal: “And there shall be poem and immortal word / Only that which is modern and new / And

⁵³ Prosjaji prostruji svitaji razdanci / Neprocenjivi su srećni pronalasci.

⁵⁴ I u žižinu žižu sažižana, / Ljubav za ljubav ljubavi / Te slave koja sama sebe slavi / Jedine jednine jednina, / Spavaj sve moje iz svega starije, / Sijaj sijanjem [to iy tebe sjaji / Silom Sveljube’eg Slova Ljubvenoga / Setio si se svega i svakoga.

poems and poets shall by no means vanish / As long as the poet is the tongue's pipe."⁵⁵

Bećković's prayer-poems have enriched the already rich tradition of the Serbian Christian/prayer poetry, making a golden link which connects contemporary Serbian poetry with the tradition of ancient Serbian poesy and with Njegoš. They can also be understood as a fresh answer to the question "Why the new if there's the old?" asked by the poet himself. That the world is a book, a system, and also a maze of signs – has been claimed not only by the authors and thinkers of old, but by the modern minds as well. "There now, the old's turned into the new." In terms of blending tragical view of history with humour and myth, of the sense of language, of the universality and depth of meaning, of activating archetypes, of the historical thread once launched at the deadly pits and infernal cauldrons, or the underworld, to reach astral realms (which brings him close to Dante), of the coalescence of love, death, prayer and resurrection, of the *pletanje sloves* ('word-weaving') used to maintain 'correspondence' with Domestijan, of the invocation of his father's graveless spirit (which brings him close to Shakespeare), of celebrating language and the divine origin of speech and poesy (which brings him close to Njegoš), of the epiphanous revelations and illuminated insights, of the polyphony of his long poems – Bećković's poetry reaches universality to stay with us as part of our intimate experience, ever-recognized – from the very first line – as the verse written by no one else but Bećković.

Translated from the Serbian by
Angelina Čanković Popović

⁵⁵ "I biće pesma i nesmrtno slovo
Samo ono što je moderno i novo
I neće nestati pesme i pesnika
Dok god pesnik bude svirala jezika".

PETAR PIJANOVIĆ

GATALICA

At the very end of his life Laza Kostić wrote a very important essay, “On Simo Matavulj” („O Simi Matavulju”, 1909). Kostić’s evaluations and comments regarding the great story writer are crucial and interesting. Two of them are quite related. In the first comment he states that the list of Simo Matavulj’s works includes “fables and stories”,¹ while in the second one the author of the essay considers what could have been gained if Matavulj had lived longer. Then he says: “A good and friendly eye could see that Simo’s longer life would only enrich and elevate the Serbian book, the Serbian fable (*gatalica*).”² This shows that Laza Kostić joins “stories” with “fables” (*gatka*), and that he considers “the Serbian book” and “the Serbian fable” as the same thing. *Omen est nomen*. It seems that with its root, i.e. with its full form, the words “gatka” and “gatalica” determined not only the surname of our writer, Aleksandar Gatalica, but also his occupation.

To the unusual relations one should add another of Kostić’s remarks on the soul: “*In the soul!* This is where the significance and value of Simo Matavulj’s stories lie.”³ And this is that Matavulj’s stuff “that irresistibly grew from creative fervour”⁴, from “his immortal soul”.⁵ This is what in Matavulj’s work, as Kostić sees it in his own divisions, should be distinguished from Matavulj’s “offspring of his own mortal brain”,⁶ thus “more of a reflection and raw, spiritually indigested impression

¹ Лаза Костић, „О Сими Матавуљу”, in: *Књиџа о Мајавуљу*, Сабрана дела Симе Матавуља, књ. 9, приредио Душан Иванић, Завод за уџбенике – Српско културно друштво „Просвјета”, Београд–Загреб 2009, 65.

² Idem, 64.

³ Idem, 65.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

than his real inspiration”⁷ We shall see that many stories of Aleksandar Gatalica are stories of the soul; not just because they “grew from creative fervour” but, above all, because of the fact that everything essential, invisible and elusive is resolved *in the soul* of his characters and narrators, and is not so much determined from the outside.

In the foreword to the reissue of his early novels *The Lifelines* (*Linije života*), *Death of Euripides* (*Euripidova smrt*) and *The Reverse* (*Naličja*) (2013), and even more in the book *The Writer Doesn't Live Here* (*Pisac ne stanuje ovde*, 2013), Aleksandar Gatalica discusses different questions concerning his own poetics. In the foreword to the book, there is one of Gatalica's comments refering not only to the poetics but also to the chosen literary ancestors:

At the beginning, I loved more the tonic verse than the syllabic one: I passionately loved Crnjanski, both his poetry and his prose, as well as Danilo Kiš, Rastko Petrović and Laza K. Lazarević, all those writers in whom I felt a verse heartbeat that gets away from cold descriptions and vivisections of the human soul.⁸

In comparison to Kostić's already mentioned views regarding the art of words, one can find similarities here: Gatalica's “verse heartbeat” is related to what according to Kostić “grew from creative fervour” and “the immortal soul”, while “cold descriptions” resemble that which is the offspring of “the mortal brain”. Kostić also presents his aesthetic views in the book *The Basic Principle* (*Osnovno načelo*, 1884), in which he says that the intersecting of opposite and equal forces in nature and spirit result in their balance or symmetry. When the forces meet, creating a new whole, the union produces harmony in the spheres of the material and spiritual world. The intersected and doubled or antithetical world that aspires to unity is the foundation of Aleksandar Gatalica's view of the world, too. It is a different matter whether or not that dispersed or fragmented world becomes a real unity.

Until that can be seen, let us return once more to the selection according to kinship upon which Gatalica bases his poetics. In that selection his literary ancestors are: Laza Lazarević, Miloš Crnjanski, Rastko Petrović and Danilo Kiš. Let us see why they, besides several other authors mentioned in other texts, could be our writer's precursors. Lazarević introduces urban short stories into Serbian prose, thus enlarging its thematic range. His merit also lies in the fact that he is our

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Александар Гаталица, „Предговор”, in: А. Гаталица, *Огромни микрокосмоси – изабрани романи (Линије живога, Еурипидова смрт, Наличја)*, „Чаробна књига”, Београд 2013, 7.

first story writer who pays more attention to psychological analyses of actions or presentations of man's mental state than to descriptions of the external world. The descriptions of nature and milieu in his short stories point to the rich and sensitive, concealed and dramatic inner life of the character.

Lazarević's view of the world shows a fine sensitiveness, hidden and still dramatic quality, a mysterious and poetized inner life. The changing of the narrative rhythm adapted to the state of the soul and the stylistically clean and suggestive narration enable the author to be a good and interesting story writer. The pattern of such narration is the story "The Wind" („Vetar“), in which reality is interwoven with dreams. Its key motifs carry an inner meaning and symbolical sense of unrealized human happiness. As if they were taken from some symbolist text instead of a realist one. It is there that one can see, among other things, the significance of that short story in the development of Serbian prose. From the outer world it plunged into the inner regions of the human soul. That is why it consists of mere indications and hints. Nothing is really certain and final. Each thing or phenomenon has its false bottom, its hidden, symbolical meaning. In such a text Gatalica could find what interested him in short stories.

Miloš Crnjanski is a somewhat younger ancestor of Aleksandar Gatalica. However, unlike Laza Lazarević, who still shows the view of the world's wholeness, Crnjanski presents that world, in accordance with the changes brought about by modern times and the First World War, as a fragmentized, decentered and even dislocated one. Such a division had to find its own expression in art and literature. That resulted in the character's estrangement, in the splitting of the view of the world, in a growing number of contents belonging to the subconscious and dreams, as well as in searching for the utopian regions of human happiness. The mentioned division and search marked in a way the entire twentieth century. That is why we find the following words in the text "On Man" („O čoveku“) by Elder Tadej: "We are broken into many pieces, like a broken mirror showing reality in its pieces. Until God's might collects and puts together, so that God should look Himself in it and see His own face."⁹ The Serbian literary avant-garde, to which the early Miloš Crnjanski belongs, too, composed from those pieces or fragments of reality mosaic-like and disintegrated texts.

The changes in that literary period were rather comprehensive and far-reaching. The dislocated reality of the new age brought concern, anguish and fear, which found their expression in pictures with black

⁹ Отац Тадеј, *Ко је њобедио сѣрасѣи, ѡај је њобедио ѡуѣу*, „Империја књига“, Крагујевац 2012, 59.

humour and weird, grotesque ones. It brought a critical attitude towards the heritage of Western-European culture and an attempt to find, in new and refreshing primitiveness, an alternative to the world that was losing its balance. All that unstableness dislocated the classical text. It was no longer stable regarding the genres, but merged various literary texts and also mixed literature with music, painting, film and other types of art. That new text combined autobiographical elements with fictional ones, and documents – with artistic adaptation. In such a state of affairs, the common-sense attitude was being replaced by a defamiliarized, even deviating view of the world. The fixed fabulation order concerning prose was replaced by the association order logic and related narrative cuts similar to the cinematographic technique and editing of a work of art. The poetization of prose, experiments, fluidity of genres, as well as of all other things, became the essential qualities of avant-garde narrative art.

The change of the view of the world in modernism demanded the changing of the narrative syntax, even of the prose rhythm. Everything was done according to the belief that the purpose of art was, as Victor Šklovsky wrote in 1917, “to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known; the technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’ and to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception”.¹⁰ Since the prose rhythm, especially in traditional narration, automatizes the perception, “the artistic rhythm can be found in the prose rhythm when the latter is disturbed”.¹¹ However, “if the disturbance becomes a canon, it will lose all the power of making things difficult”.¹² So, everything that becomes a canon – regarding rhythm, verse, composition, narrative techniques, different expressions, language – weakens the artistic effect of the prose work. That was why the avant-garde text always tried to impede perception through numerous changes. On the other hand, the experience of the world as a dislocated or disintegrated whole looked for an unstable and decomposed form and expression that would present such a world in the best way. Serbian late modernist authors, writing since the sixties of the twentieth century, including Kiš, too, accepted some achievements of the avant-garde heritage.

Why are we linking all this to the prose of Aleksandar Gatalica? Not only because he finds his ancestors among the writers of that epoch – Crnjanski and Rastko Petrović – but also because his main works are connected to that time. In some of them, Serbian and European avant-garde authors appear as literary characters. In a word, Gatalica

¹⁰ Viktor Šklovski, „Umjetnost kao postupak”, in: V. Šklovski, *Uskrnuće riječi*, izbor i prevod Juraj Bedenicki, „Stvarnost”, Zagreb 1969, 43.

¹¹ Idem, 50.

¹² Idem, 51.

presents that epoch not only through the contents, characters and spirit of his works; it is also transposed through narrative techniques, which partly revive and, with the type of the text, bring us closer to that turbulent time.

From that tragic age, Miloš Crnjanski's characters set off in spirit for the heavenly blue world of Sumatraism. This is an attempt to find a higher purpose in life and in that way redeem man's mortal nature. However, in reality, that search turns out to be a delusion and fallacy, i.e. an attempt to overcome this world's limits of rationality. The world of Miloš Crnjanski is complex and colouristic. It is perceptible and sensuous because the author feels it and presents it through a number of simultaneous and different sensual impressions. That is why his way of expression is characterized by rich synesthetic fullness, which often marks the text of Aleksandar Gatalica as well. The particularities of Miloš Crnjanski's narrative process include the poetization of prose, lyrical rhythm of the sentence and a new syntax. It means that Crnjanski makes some modifications to the text – from the structure of sentences and lines to innovations regarding style and genres, thanks to which the usual difference between poetry and prose no longer exists. Along with the lyricism of the narrative, Crnjanski's lyrical "I" is sometimes intensified by the autobiographical narration located between a document and a fictional world. This particularly refers to his *Journal of Čarnojević (Dnevnik o Čarnojeviću, 1921)*, the first short avant-garde novel in Serbian literature.

Prose writer Rastko Petrović also belongs to the avant-garde circle. Thematically, his work is based upon archetypes, Slavonic myths and a search for the secret of human existence. Petrović is interested in the dual nature of man, between the animalistic and the human. The original and elementary independence brings Petrović's character back to his roots and to himself, and separates him from history and culture. Petrović's story, characterized by poetization, confirms "the principle of constant changing"¹³ through frequent disguises concerning genres. Going against the logic of proportion and together with deliberate "discordance of narration (modifications of narration planes, changing of narrators, mobility of standpoints – like in the short story 'An Impossible Peasant' ('Nemogući ratar'))",¹⁴ such narration includes the converging of "the position of the narrative subject and the one of the author".¹⁵ In the prose of Rastko Petrović, urban landscapes, dominant in the prose of Aleksandar Gatalica, too, often look phantasmagoric, i.e. unreal.

¹³ Mihajlo Pantić, *Modernističko pripovedanje – srpska i hrvatska pripovetka/novela 1918–1930*, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Beograd 1999, 276.

¹⁴ Idem, 281.

¹⁵ Idem, 286.

In Rastko's text everything is dispersed, dislocated and with pictures lacking a classic frame. In *The Sixth Day* (*Dan šesti*, 1961) the narration consists of short and quick, almost film cuts, which provide it with liveliness and dynamism. The narration is sometimes slowed down by monotonous parts with almost no action at all. Petrović's wretches in that novel find refuge only in dreams. Their actuality is dreamlike and mixed with real life. That is why it is difficult to discern the character's dreams from that which happens to him in reality. The mixing of reality and dreams leads to the merging of the novel's narrative planes – objective narration gets replaced by purely personal experiences transformed into a story. In the hybrid book, in regard to genres, entitled *People Talk* (*Ljudi govore*, 1931), the main character, a stranger on an island, would like to compensate the benefits of our civilization with the beauties of nature, which he considers as his own mythic, original homeland. An ordinary story about living abroad turns into a lyric philosophical essay on the structure of the cosmos and everything in the world. While the particles of the cosmos aspire for secret unity, men, living in a world that has lost its balance, alienated and separated themselves from one another.

And this is what the duality in the man of modern times is about. That division marks the prose of Rastko Petrović, whom Aleksandar Gatalica mentions as his literary ancestor. He does not mention Stanislav Vinaver, the author of *The Stories That Have Lost Their Balance* (*Priče koje su izgubile ravnotežu*, 1913) and one of his characters in *The Lifelines* (1993). Vinaver is an avant-gardist who in his works uses elements of different genres – lyric poetry and essays, prose and drama. A mixture of genres can also be found in his early narrative book *The Stories That Have Lost Their Balance*. It merges fantasy and mythology with the contents of the real world, which also loses balance and stability. The losing of the modern age's balance and the losing of the classic syntax can easily be seen in Gatalica's work, particularly in his hybrid *The Great War* (*Veliki rat*, 2012).

The heritage of the avant-garde poetics reflects itself in the work of Aleksandar Gatalica through the fact that the short novel is his favourite form. That form has been present in the Serbian avant-garde since *The Journal of Čarnojević*. It has been marked by experiments, the avoiding of the mimetic pattern, explicit (auto)poetic consciousness of the narrator – character, by predomination of psychological time over chronological one, by intertextuality and intermediality, (auto) citation and domination of the narrative subject that removes the omniscient narrator. In the entire twentieth century, in the Serbian short novel there often appear double narrators and characters. The figure of "the double in the short novel, from Milićević's *Wasteland* (*Bespuće*),

Crnjanski's *Journal of Čarnojević* to Andrić's *Damned Yard* (*Prokleta avlija*) and Kiš's *Attic* (*Mansarda*), is the most evident manifestation of the modern character's identity crisis and the disintegration of his value system, which cannot survive in a dehumanized world".¹⁶ Such a way of dividing the picture of the cracked world and syntax is also frequent in the prose of Aleksandar Gatalica.

We have seen that Gatalica, following the selection according to kinship, includes Danilo Kiš among his literary ancestors. With this he has drawn a poetic vertical line on the Serbian prose evolution arc that goes from the avant-garde to the late modernist poetics of the sixties and further approaching the end of the twentieth century. In the mentioned selection according to kinship Jorge Luis Borges can be found, too, whose work Gatalica discusses in detail in the book *The Writer Doesn't Live Here* (*Pisac ne stanuje ovde*). He is significant because he "relentlessly attacked mimesis, i.e. imitation,"¹⁷ like no other writer before him. He "separates the visible from the invisible and says that books, texts, chronicles and libraries are more inspiring than the history of a homeland or any other domestic scenery".¹⁸

Borges invents reality and documents his story by using imagination. Gatalica creatively uses this poetics in his own text. Regarding the material, neither of them considers life to be enough. That is why they need a parallel reality, dreams or fantasy. With the help of imagination, both of them create magically real worlds, in the same way the illusion created by our world is real. They stimulate their fiction with mythopoetics and poetic truth. They defamiliarize their creative practice by using difficult forms, prismatic images and prolonged perception, with the help of the figure of mirroring, mystifications and citations from non-existent encyclopedias and other imaginary books. Sometimes they also use alleged scientific sources. So they "document" fantasy, which gives the illusion of mystification the status of something allegedly real in their prose. In that way it becomes an illusion of literary reality. Like Borges, Gatalica includes in his works many contents that represent the apocryphal memory of mankind – diverse and even non-existent texts, historical stories and invented lexicographic sources.

Kiš is also a follower of Borges. It means that the fruits of his reading material are already existing stories and considerable knowledge that can be found in libraries, as well as in the books of non-existent authors. Such is the stuff of which Kiš's prose is made. That is why it is said he

¹⁶ Предраг Петровић, *Авангардни роман без романа – њоејика крајкоџ романа срјске авангарде*, Институт за књижевност и уметност, Београд 2008, 150.

¹⁷ Александар Гаталица, *Писац не стјанује овде*, Књижевна општина Вршац, Вршац 2013, 14.

¹⁸ Idem, 15.

is influenced by the Alexandrian school. The idea of mystification in Kiš's way allows and requires that all material coming from life, biographic and autobiographic, historical and literary material, including invented or fabricated sources, be legitimately used with one purpose only – to document the narrative and make the story plausible. Such a technique, which refers to various sources, "proves" the authenticity and "truthfulness" of the story. Therefore the techniques of Borges and Kiš frequently rely on citations, intertextuality and assembling, i.e. on mixing and connecting texts that already exist in numerous literary and non-literary works.

In Kiš's work, real facts, along with the material from the parallel world, support fantasy, too. Those facts are usually given not in the form of a paraphrase, but as facts that are "fabricated", modified or defamiliarized through some essential detail. Story writer Jorge Luis Borges considers the stories based on their original version and presented in a *different way* and with *some other wonders* as apocryphal ones. Such a technique, developing various themes, belongs to the Borges heritage and can be discerned in the prose of Danilo Kiš, too. Following the idea of Viktor Shklovsky that style, together with prose rhythm, must not become habitual turning into a canon, but ought to change and adapt itself to the view of the world, Kiš takes this poetic teaching as his own creative principle. The changeability and dynamics of those narrative form factors can particularly be seen in the early prose of Kiš. So the narrative convention of the short novel *Psalm 44* (*Psalam 44*, 1962) gets replaced by the open, polyphonic structure of *The Attic* (1962). This "satiric poem" not only parodies narrative models but also shows a whole range of viewpoints from which the world is observed and presented to the reader by means of certain narrative and interpretative voices.

The disintegration of the view of the world is confirmed in Kiš's works *Garden, Ashes* (*Bašta, pepeo*, 1965), *Early Sorrows* (*Rani jadi*, 1969) and *Hourglass* (*Peščanik*, 1972). The fragmentized and dispersed world of little Andreas Sam, who is the loose narrative centre connecting fragments of Andreas's family tree and memories, determines the philosophy of composition and the form of each of these Kiš's books, as well as the entire family cycle. The feeling of duality, which marks the image of the character – narrator, the reflection of one book in the other two, the mutuality of the story and reality, of a fictional and nonfictional world, the merging of the past and the present, of the real and the illusory, all that presents the parallel and the real world in these works as mirrors.

The mentioned duality is supported by the fact that the world in this cycle is disintegrated like the text itself; but contrary to such a world

– the manuscript there appears the longing of the character–narrator to gather and to collect, to arrange and to catalogue, to become complete, finding his figure in the idea of a big, universal book similar to the famous *guide* of Eduard Sam or *the encyclopedia of the dead* in Kiš's story of the same name. However, in spite of that longing, “the novelistic discourse of Danilo Kiš compensates the irretrievably lost wholeness of the world with the construction totality of its endlessly split and irreducible diversity”.¹⁹ Such poetic experience is a late modernist reflex of the divided view of the world and its appropriate form created in the Serbian avant-garde. This inheritance is also passed to the generation of writers at the turn of the century. Aleksandar Gatalica is one of them.

All that speaks of one vertical in Serbian prose where there is a lot of what is different and individual. Within related poetics in literary diachrony and synchrony, each significant author has built into his work his own creative experience and skill, his own view of the world and the sensibility of his own epoch. Gatalica's narrative is also based upon that similarity and experience of poetic differences. Thematically, it could be presented with the title of his book *Century (Vek)*. Of a wide fabulation scope, that book with one hundred and one faces has become a universal book of the past century. Through that century's acts of disgracefulness one has told and catalogued all essential stories of a fast, turbulent and traumatic period of time, which brought, with the two world wars, great instability to new European and Serbian history. Those infarcts in the bloodstream of the modern age, with all disasters and suffering, affected the wholeness of the view of the world, the author's consciousness and the story itself. That is why Gatalica's *Century*, with one hundred and one stories and hundreds of characters, is a vivid picture of an exciting and perverted social history and individual human destinies.

That rather large chronotope – with a comprehensive field of time and space – also includes Aleksandar Gatalica's other books. The majority of these books is thematically related to the beginning of the twentieth century, to the Great War and the interwar period, just to a slight extent to the Second World War, somewhat more to the disharmony of the postwar period and to the end of the weary century that still hasn't opened the door to the history with a human face. With the same view-point, which searches for everything that is immanent in man and his destiny, Gatalica's chronotope sometimes gets to the depths of time.

¹⁹ Тихомир Брајовић, „Пешчаник на Мансарди –позномодернистички сензибилитет у романима Данила Киша”, in: Т. Брајовић: *Облици модернизма*, Друштво за српски језик и књижевност Србије, Београд 2005, 262.

So historical time reaches its ancient period, the ancient world, which through the reflection of reality in myth and through the everliving archetype gets built into the foundations of modern European civilization.

Gatalica is not interested in the history's factuality, but above all in its inner processes or in the spirit of the time. These processes are usually subversive and not inclined to the man who is trying to give full meaning to his time. The paradox of the course of history, as seen by Gatalica's narrator – frequently in the role of the spotlight character – lies in the fact that history with its disgracefulness humiliates man and the world he lives in. The twentieth century is the measure of that regression and thus it is interesting as a literary theme in many ways. The crumbling of history and its sense alienates man and breaks his ties with the world. That is why disintegration as a loss of the wholeness is one of the obsessions of writer Aleksandar Gatalica. His prose is mainly focused on the Balkans and Serbia, especially on Belgrade, while more broadly it encompasses the entire old continent, above all Central Europe and the Mediterranean. That principal area of Gatalica's prose is a historical scene, i.e. a labyrinth in which the characters, led by their nature or destiny, look for the right path to the goal; if there are such things as goals.

Aleksandar Gatalica's narrator takes different forms and perspectives. Apart from telling the story, the narrator is sometimes in the role of the character – witness who remembers events and people, an erudite and commenter. A narrator with several functions, the first one being to narrate in an interesting and convincing way, and the changing of viewpoints and narration perspectives enable the writer to observe things and present them from various angles. His inner point of view enables him to replace historical time with psychological one, to spread or condense time and to set it in accordance with the nature of the plot and the story. Besides, the writer is not so much interested in outer truth, since it is merely a frame of an inner story or of a story of the soul.

What kind of a story is that? In order to answer the question, one must be reminded of the fact that the entire twentieth century is marked by division and separation. The first decades of that century – in which the view of the world's wholeness finally shattered through the premonition of the Great War – the suffering and pain in the war, as well as postwar traumas, destroyed the totality of a human being and created convenient conditions for the birth of a split personality. In Gatalica's works these conditions are sometimes related to hereditary or some other factors of human destiny. The new world war and the cataclysm it incited additionally contributed to the destruction of the wholeness. The time following the Second World War created in our country a new, ideo-

logical personality, with values completely different from the prewar ones. Ideologically recoded, the new man had to feel an inner division, which necessarily resulted in the birth of a double.

The topos of the double can already be found in *The Lines of Life*, Aleksandar Gatalica's first novel. The mirror projection in his prose is not confirmed through certain characters only; it also has its narrative character in the composition of certain stories that are included in the novel. To that kind belongs the mirror composition of the story about the murder of Rasputin and about the English agent in *The Great War*. Such an understanding of the world, reading material where Borges and Kiš have a prominent place, and, above all, the story's inner need to present the divided face of the world and of the reader, have made divisions and mirrors important figures in the prose of Aleksandar Gatalica.

In the prose of Danilo Kiš, this can be noticed in the autopoetic comments in which his character – narrator sees *himself from another's perspective*, i.e. through his *relationship with himself as a stranger*. In the prose of Borgesian poetics reality and dream reflect themselves in one another, and so do actuality and art, the author and his narrator. The broken mirror as a topos of that prose has theologically been confirmed by the already mentioned thought of Elder Tadej. He talks of a reality in pieces, which can be put together only by God's might and man converted by it. According to Elder Tadej, it is then that "God should look Himself in it and see His own face". The reconstructed mirror, which is just a longing of the modern times, would enable one to see the whole human face.

That prose, lacking a complete world and the author's complete view of it, is usually not classically homogenous regarding its narrative syntax and its story of the world. This particularly refers to the novel, i.e. to those of its constituent parts that make the novel a hybrid genre. Borges was not pleased with the novel because, in contrast to the story, which "has more spontaneity",²⁰ that genre is "quite artificial".²¹ When they chose to use that genre, the followers of Borges did not usually create solid narratives. They used to replace classic and complete narrative forms with those of a loose cyclic prose. This is so with Gatalica, too. His first short novel *The Lines of Life* has such a structure, while the novel *The Great War* has no classic main character and is a complex narrative of a mosaic form. It is neither easy nor desirable to transform an essentially destroyed world into monolithic novelistic forms, or use

²⁰ Хорхе Луис Борхес, „Роман”, in: Карло Роберто Стортини, *Борхесов речник*, Српска књижевна задруга, Београд 1996, 208.

²¹ Ibid.

in its creation classic narrative techniques. In Gatalica's work this is more related to the creation of novels than of shorter narratives, i.e. stories. No matter to what a degree his novel destroyed the classic form, which means that its form is loose and dispersed, his stories as independent units or parts of a macrostructure usually are narratively stable.

All that opens the question of the story and its status in the prose of this author. That status is somewhat different from Borgesian tradition because Gatalica does not consider the story as narration of a poetics. In contrast to Kiš's *Attic* and family cycle, where one can find fragments of a poetics in an explicit form, there is no such thing in Gatalica's prose. The complete *Attic* is an explicit and immanent treatise on the poetics of prose. Although Gatalica hasn't written such books, he is the author of *Mimicries* (*Mimikrije*), in which through a pastiche, slightly parodically, less ironically, different forms of narration get undermined, including the Borgesian heritage in literature. His other books present a poetic attitude in a much more discreet or, more precisely, an immanent way.

So, it can be seen that the story plays an important role in Aleksandar Gatalica's narrative poetics. According to this author, the story should not be a vacuous poetic game. Therefore he "opposes any literature that tells us *how it is going to narrate*, threatens to *tell* us something, or claims that what *has not been told* will be told in some famous future book".²² Instead of such faking, Gatalica returns dignity to the modern story, which turns out to be the only true guarantee "of the interesting quality of prose".²³ More precisely, relying on a story is "the mother tongue of literature in general, from *Gilgamesh* to *The Odyssey*, from *Medea* to *One Thousand and One Nights*, from *Romeo and Juliet* to *The Trial*".²⁴ This means that "literature cannot exist without a story".²⁵

Borislav Pekić says that one should not trust the writer when he talks of his poetics. Pekić rightfully thinks that prose itself is more important than explicit poetics. Gatalica confirms his poetic standpoints with his narration practice. It could be said that he pushes the talking about his poetics into the background, or that he reconciles it with telling, in an interesting and suggestive way, a story that speaks from the inside, for itself and about itself. Apart from being suggestive and very interesting, Gatalica's story, which, according to the author, must also be "dramatic, sensitive, vulnerable, heroic, Icarian",²⁶ is sometimes unintrusively poetized, but never lyrically sentimental. Not only because

²² Александар Гаталица, „Предговор”, idem, 9.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

of the fact that its plot is usually located in an urban area, that story is an expression of an urban narrative sensibility, and its spirit is contemporary even when it is deep in the past.

The literary vertical that Aleksandar Gatalica draws towards the past, looking there for his literary ancestors, does not just reach the beginning of the twentieth century and the avant-garde. As a creator who is quite familiar with ancient Greek literature, he looks for his ancestors in its sources, too. He finds them in the work of dramatist Euripides, of whom he writes in his novel *Death of Euripides*. It is not the only connection between Gatalica and the ancient dramatist. Namely, looking back at his own work and his connection with Euripides, he says that he is “some sort of a Serbian language secretary”²⁷ to his classical literary ancestor. And that connection lies in the fact that Euripides “completely formed”²⁸ his prose expression.

What is the essence of that influence and connection between the two authors that are separated by twenty-four centuries? Concerning Euripides, one should be reminded that in his *Poetics* Aristotle points out the importance of a story and the fact that the great dramatist is “certainly a poet of what is most tragic”.²⁹ To that remark on Euripides, Miloš Đurić adds the following comment:

With a vivid presentation of unusual passions and tragic loves, with an artistic preparation of the moments of recognizing, with a treatment of a large number of feelings, with a use of fine and moving gradation, no one was able to provoke such deep impressions in the soul of the audience as he was.³⁰

According to Gatalica, there are two important links between him and Euripides: the conviction that “great art can never be boring”³¹ and the attitude that with Euripides’ help poetry has forever determined his “lyrical prose”.³² Regardless of the circumstance that the twentieth century, with its estranged and essentially divided personality of the modern times, is the centre of Aleksandar Gatalica’s prose, its ancient heritage confirms the topos of the double, which finds its archetypal model in classical mythology and literature. In Gatalica’s work, that topos has been modernized and is a sign of the sensitivity of a writer who transmitted

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Aristotel, *O pesničkoj umetnosti*, preveo Miloš N. Đurić, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Beograd 1988, 65.

³⁰ Miloš N. Đurić, „Registar imena s objašnjenjima i napomenama“, idem, 119.

³¹ А. Гаталица, idem, 8.

³² Ibid.

the literary spirit from the end of the past century to the twenty-first century. Besides, he creates his own recognizable story based upon the experience of his literary ancestors. He is also aware of the fact that his ancestors might be Laza Lazarević, Rastko Petrović, Crnjanski and Kiš. In their vicinity there are ancient Euripides, worldly Borges, Borges' follower on the way to the world Pavić, and original modern classical author Pekić, as well as great models Andrić and Selimović. Not at all by chance, at the beginning of this text one mentions the outstanding story writer Simo Matavulj. *Wild* and brilliant Laza Kostić said about Matavulj that "Simo's longer life would only enrich and elevate the Serbian book, the Serbian fable (*gatalica*).” That is a carefully selected, immediate and extended literary family, whose Serbian book has confidently been continued by its descendant *Gatalica*.

Translated from the Serbian by
Dragan Purešić

BOGOLJUB ŠIJAKOVIĆ

THE CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE AND THE CARE FOR WAR VICTIMS

Dear Mr. President of the Matica srpska!
Ladies and gentlemen!

I feel honored and privileged to discuss the topic “The Culture of Remembrance and the Care for War Victims” at Matica srpska, due to the fact that this topic belongs to the Matica srpska which has been cherishing culture of remembrance and care for war victims since its establishment. During its long history and on various circumstances, the Matica¹ srpska has gathered numerous bees and used honey and a poultice for all wounds of our people.²

¹ In the Serbian language, *matica* means *a beehive* and therefore a metaphor for the Matica srpska which has brought many significant and hard-working people with even more significant pieces of work. Comparing the Matica srpska to the beehive shows that it has gathered a lot of bees whose work served as honey and a poultice for all wounds of our nation.

² In my presentation, I rely on my earlier texts (where the topic is expanded and in reference to relevant literature): *O Žrtvi i Pamćenju (About the War Victims and Their Remembrance)* (2000), *O pamćenju i zaboravu: Identitet između ontologije i diskursa (About the Memory and Oblivion: Identity between ontology and discourse)* (2005) (both texts are preserved in my book *Prisutnost transcendencije: Hellenstvo, Hrišćanstvo, Filosofija istorije (The Presence of Transcendence: Hellenism, Christianity and Philosophy of History)*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd 2013, 22-28, 64- 71), *Briga za Žrtvu: Pamćenje Imena i Spomen Srpske Žrtve (The care for War Victims: Remembering the Names and Memorial to Serbian Victims)* (2006, 2010) (preserved in my book *Ogledanje u kontekstu: O znanju i vjeri, predanju i identitetu, crkvi i državi, drugo, prošireno izdanje (Viewing in the context: About knowledge and faith, tradition and identity, churches and states, 2nd expanded edition)*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd 2011, 345-358) and *Veliki rat, Vidovdanska etika, Pamćenje: O istoriji ideja i Spomenu Žrtve (The Great War, Ethics of Vidovdan, Memory: About the History of Ideas and Memorial to War Victims)*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd 2015.

The unpalatable fact is that the Serbian people were reluctantly but famously among the few nations with the highest percentage of military and civilian casualties in recent history (19th and 20th centuries). Therefore, our obligation and need to establish a Memorial Institution dedicated to the Serbian victims – A Memorial to Victims of War – is related to identity and existentialism, so it is also ontological and not just moral.

The end of the Great War brought the Serbian people glory and they felt a sense of pride, but this could not alleviate the pain and suffering caused by the tragic death of many people. The consequences for Serbia were catastrophic and irreparable: the number of fatalities in Serbia led to an estimate of about 1,300,000, i.e. 28% of the total population (Serbia lost 62% of the male population aged between 18 and 55; 53% were dead and 9% of them were permanent invalids); then, 707,000 soldiers were mobilized but more than a half were killed or died (370,000), so 114,000 disabled people remained, as well as over half a million war orphans and children without foster care. In addition, human and economic goods were devastated by war in huge proportions: 57% of machines and installations were destroyed in 544 companies, 50% of metal mines and 100% of coal mines were damaged and stolen were 24,600 tons of copper, 2 970 tons of lead, 150,000 tons of pyrites, 500,000 tons of lignite, 220,000 tons of stone and brown coal, 750,000 tons of tertiary brown coal, 1,610 tons of gold and 3,100 tons of silver (the subject of an organized war robbery was also petroleum, wool, leather, grains, flour, wine, *rakija*,³ salt, cattle etc.). Moreover, 70% of the livestock fund was destroyed and therefore agricultural production was reduced, 44% of agricultural machinery and facilities were damaged, while bridges and railway lines were destroyed, so about three-fifths of the national wealth was lost. In Serbia, just one out of a thousand peasants had whole suit and a number of workers, not until 1923, reached the number of workers in 1910. Churches and monasteries were also subjects of devastation and robbery (bells, mobiliar (furniture), clothes, books, everything!).

Over 50% of priests and monks were killed, approximately 2,000 of them. (Sufferings and losses in the Balkan wars should be added too. The additional post-war burden was Serbian generosity towards the new areas of the enlarged country, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, because 500,000 soldiers from this country were mobilized by Austro-Hungary and they were equalized in the division of war reparations, whose joint debts and loans were taken over, etc.) But the most painful were committed crimes, which were carefully planned, dreadful and massive and extreme brutality by the owners of civilization

³ It is the Serbo-Croatian name given to an alcoholic drink made from the distillation of fermented fruit. (Translator's note)

and culture. When the Austro-Hungarian civilizer started the aggression against Serbia entering Mačva region, he brought 2,700 gallows with him. The intention to destroy Serbs was uncovered and serious, and, to a certain extent, it was accomplished. From today's perspective, it can be clearly seen that the Serbian people could not recover from the consequences of the Great War until today. Today is even harder.

How to overcome the historical experience of suffering in the Great War from 1914 to 1918 and its continuation from 1939 to 1945? No: having a celebration of catastrophe and continuous fatal illusions, marking that does not leave behind either a mark or a scar, evoking as a return to something that is irreversible and cannot be regained and *would never happen again* – that would not be a responsible attitude. The memorial to victims is a matter of life in the future. Being exposed to pogrom and persecution many times in the long movement through history, in the 20th century in particular, the Serbian people were forced to endure enormous sacrifices. Small in number but great in their national character, the Serbian people were prepared to sacrifice everything while defending the right to life, identity and freedom. This feature of being obliged and willing to sacrifice for the protection of the living space and life-long ideals entered the folk tradition and epic as the basis for *the ethics of Vidovdan*⁴ and motivational principle for *the Holy Cross and Golden Freedom* a long time ago: the ethos of victims and venture has become a part of Serbian identity, its constant. An important requirement of identity is memory, and it is even more important to someone who often and for a long time undergoes systematic pressure to change identity. Historical memory as an assumption of historical knowledge and self-awareness and as a concern for the fulcrum of national identity during long history is also necessary due to the collective awareness of the past and the orientation in the future. Remembering righteous and innocent victims, cherishing the memories of the *Name of the Victim* obliges us to respect fundamental moral norms, be motivated by the desire to preserve identity and integrity, obtain the right of admission and self-determination and makes us think about the sanctity of life, especially the future one. Either we will actively respect the victims and defend their right to the purpose of sacrificing, or we will give the right to violence and take part in oblivion. We need the culture of remembrance.

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The culture of remembrance (and memories) is quite often cited as a characteristic of our time. This is the second term for a relation to

⁴ St. Vitus's Day (Translator's note)

the past. Whether it is *preserving* or *overcoming* the past, *facing* the past, or trying to avoid it happening again – in relation to the present, the past is always determined by the standpoint of the present and equally when it comes to fading into oblivion or obsession with remembering. That is why the past is constitutive and sometimes constructive regarding not just the memory of individual, but collective or social consciousness as well. An important functional element of identity, both individual and social is to have the past, actually to have the ability to remember. Therefore, the remembrance (and oblivion) is a systemic and fundamental problem of social sciences.

Memory is a feature of individual consciousness, as well as collective and social consciousness; it is stored in products of culture, and it is functionally present in social relations. These different levels and types of memory are mutually interpenetrated and influence each other.

As the ability of an individual consciousness, memory is an important prerequisite for the person's identity, both as an assumption for living whole conscious life and as a prerequisite of self-consciousness and "self-affection" – for example a body memory as an auto-perception of its own individuality. In addition, memory has a dynamic nature, both as the ability and the content according to the biography as the basic setting of a personal identity that is repeatedly experienced and interpreted through a changeable memory medium. Memory loss would bring the basis of identity and planned actions into question, both individual and collective. Various types of pathology of memory problematize identity that is taking root. In contrast, memory is stored in material artifacts and the symbolic and spiritual products of culture, and no matter how they are open to interpretation, it represents the fulcrum of identity in historic timeline.

Memory is socially influenced and structured: collective memory is revived and learnt through common experience; collective memory is formed within a group and forms the group itself; social memory is contained in social relations and is permanently set in culture and the institutions of society. Furthermore, as individual memory integrates in the collective, so as social memory has a significant impact on establishing not only social but also personal identity. Eminent forms of social memory are social institutions such as the state and organs of government, or institutions of education and culture. Education is important, among other things, for the permanence and transfer of social memory and for the (re) production of collective identity. Since education presupposes a person's moral imperfection, it has the possibility that power structures, helped by pedagogical sculptors, form a man in order to produce a desirable collective identity; so mobilizing formative education, whose final result is bare indoctrination, can be received. Museums

are often, as a paradigmatic form of institutionalized memory, primarily institutions of power.

The past time gets the meaning from the present (taking into consideration future time), and accordingly, the present time gives the criteria for selecting, i.e. keeping and blotting out memory of past events, namely criteria for a new interpretation and giving a new sense to the past. Therefore, there is not only spontaneous, but also planned loss of memory. From here, an ability to invent the tradition is demonstrated and there is a possibility to establish a false continuity with past events that are made up and construct an identity (which is functional, however fictional it may be). It is important to distinguish whether a community's memory represents its conscious choice or something imposed, namely whether the identity that the community is forming is authentic (auto-referent) or manipulatively created by another (hetero-referent). The reconstruction and remembrance of history demonstrate the need of one community, especially expressed after historical wandering and fractures, when it is necessary to find and capture one's own characteristic thread in order to preserve an elementary identity. However, a discourse of memory as a system of statements that construct a memory object and thus produce a certain version of events, either on the basis of laying down the right to knowledge and truth from its perspective, or for the purpose of constructing a functional identity should be tested as well.

Analytically, we can speak of two types of identity, which are multilayered and closely intertwined in reality: an ontological and discursive identity. The ontological identity is connected to *objectivism* and is related to human *nature* and *essence* (*essential properties*) that involves a personal identity and belonging to tradition; this identity implies a stable memory. The discursive identity is specified by a social position and role, characterized by constitutionalism and fiction; this identity counts on the possibility of oblivion and the construction of memory.

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The imperfection of memory disturbs us, and a complete loss of memory is exasperating! It can be noticed that something is fading and completely disappearing from our memory in time, that we have not memorized something at all or that we cannot remember everything we have memorized. On the contrary, we cannot forget a traumatic event, despite our desire and need to defend ourselves from its intrusion. Moreover, we incorrectly, suggestively and manipulatively remember things, we remember in a way characterized by perspectivism and

constructivism. It is also paradoxical that man is aware of the fact that he forgets or what he remembers that he forgets. Accordingly, the additional meaning of Tertullian's view is that *man is perhaps the most forgetful of all creatures* (homini omnium forsitan obliuississimo; De anima c. XXIV, PL 2, 688C–689A). Odysseus's friends ate lotus (λωτοφάγος) and forgot to go home (Odyssey IX 82-104), namely they forgot their fathers, brothers, wives, children – forgot their identity: who they were and where they were from. The oblivion, therefore is forgetting oneself. According to Orphic-Pythagorean circles and Plato, it is believed that the souls of the dead are released from memories of their previous life and through re-birth can get life-long experience again, and not only that the soul enters life with the oblivion, but also *the water of oblivion* (λήθη) discourages soul from finding the truth (as not being forgetful: ἀ-λήθεια). If something genuine and important in life sinks into oblivion, it leads to self-forgetfulness (oblivio sui; Boethius, De consolazione philosophiae I 6, 18).

The dramatic result of man's self-forgetfulness is the forgetfulness of God. The forgetfulness of God is failing to remember Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us on the basis of our existence (we exist as human beings, to the extent that we sacrifice ourselves for others and others sacrifice themselves for us, and not if we sacrifice others for ourselves, but the instinct of biological existence leads us to do this). One of the most remarkable features of the new millennium is the forgetfulness of transcendence, namely the persecution of holiness, which follows the relativization of values, the fragmentation of consciousness and creating the illusion of reality. It has serious consequences for the nature and constitution of personal and community identity. Christian identity is based on the Eucharistic case history of Jesus Christ and the Memory of God (Μνήμη Θεοῦ, Memoria Dei, Memoria Christi). Every relationship with God is preceded by the memory of God. Relationally constituting oneself regarding this Memory of God and behave in a way of keeping one's mind on God means to seek a place in God's Memory.

Those who forget about God go towards death, but those who remember God take a different direction, i.e. to life. And then we bid those who pass away farewell, saying the words “вѣчная память”⁵ and we know that if we talk about them, they are not just unforgettable in our memory, but in the eternal memory of God as well. The name that is mentioned in prayer and which God remembers is not only preserved from oblivion, but also from death by extermination. According to the Old Testament book of the Prophet Isaiah (56: 5), the Lord will give

⁵ *Eternal Memory* is an exclamation used at the end of an Eastern Orthodox funeral or memorial service. (Translator's note)

those who create justice for Him and keep His covenant an everlasting name: “to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial (yad) and a name (šem) better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.” The eternal name is name in the eternal God’s Memory; a memorial and a name (יָד וְשֵׁם – yad your) are not just psychological overcoming of forgetfulness or emotional retention in memory, but ontological guaranty of existence regarding the name (“within my temple and its walls...”). The name is existence in a language which is a prayer and a memory, and when we are mentioned in the prayer, we are in God’s memory.

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Since antique times to the present day, oblivion has been used and proved as a repressive instrument of power many times. The verdict (usually posthumous) of the condemnation of memory (*damnatio memoriae* or *memoria damnata*) was delivered by destroying or obstructing and desecrating all memorials, memories and monuments that remind one of a convict aiming at sending that person into exile and ostracizing him/her from the memory of offspring and completely removing him/her from history. If a convict was consigned to oblivion it was a practised action to obliterate all traces that the convict really existed and take a right to mark the grave, all the way to finally forget and delete his/her name by putting a ban on mentioning the name and giving that name to a newborn child: the loss of the right to write the name on a tombstone and the obliteration of the name should mean the definitive victory of death over life, because the name is memory.

A special form of *damnatio memoriae* could be a condemnation or a curse on a defeated person in order to remember that failure. The perverted form is merciful forgetfulness as an act of political power used for forgetting a sense of guilt, forgiveness of punishment and granting of a pardon. However, the amnesty (“not remembering”: ἀμνηστία from μνήμη) as an act of mercy is not amnesia (“without memory”: ἀμνησία from μνήμη, Engl. amnesia) as the loss of ability to remember anything. Having the right to forget, power confirms itself as a power.

Forgetfulness is also an activity and participates in the construction of memory, which is the basis for the construction of even an invented past, which is being undertaken in the present for future goals. The invented past is either autonomous – taken by a subject ranging from self-defense to self-deception, or is heteronomous – undertaken over the subject, which then becomes the object of manipulation and mastery. These two

authorships of the simulation of the past are not mutually exclusive. The simulation of the past has ethical implications.

The structural powers, in our time, possess advanced tools for manipulation and mastery on the local and global social plan to produce amnesia (counterfeiting of memory content) and paramnesia and pseudomnesia (a subjective impression of memory of events that have not occurred). In addition to the constructed discursive identity, which is influenced by forgetting, it is necessary to fight for the right to remember. We can oppose accepting an attractive offer to be a *Lotofag*, or one to whom food is grass of forgetfulness by remembering the Name and not forgetting the transcendence. We need an ontology of memory (and the phenomenology of oblivion) based on the victim that develops our identity.

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All of history can be seen as a history of death, destruction and salvation, and therefore as the history of the victim. How does history look like through the eyes of victims? – This is a question that has yet to be answered admitting the truth that is related to the experience of the victim, which is the absolute experience of life and death.

There are many theories about sacrifice and there are various symbols and metaphors for the sacrifice, as well as the colloquial use of the term “sacrifice” for every kind of suffering, pain, hardship and effort. Different thematizations of sacrifice in victimology or thanatology, or in political ideology and demagoguery, or in mythology assign a victim the perspective of an object, whether it is a victim of unfortunate circumstances, the situation focusing on object or an animal, person or object offered to a divinity in sacrifice in a religious ceremony (The ancient formula *do ut des* or *Give so that you will be given* expresses the motive for that sacrifice.). For, the Christian understanding of the sacrifice Jesus Christ’s sufferings, death and resurrection has a decisive hermeneutical meaning: Christ’s sacrifice is a landmark for understanding the phenomenon of sacrifice and victimology. God is no longer the one who needs those who are sacrificed to please Him (that is the mythological and pagan view of sacrifice, which is based on sacrifice of another for yourself), but He is “the propitiation for our sins”⁶ (ἱλασμός, 1 John 2:2, 4:10) and only God can make sacrifice as the only pure and innocent sacrifice (that is the ideal of Christian sacrificing yourself for others): “because it was impossible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4). Jesus Christ’s representative and substitute

⁶ He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins. (Translator’s note)

sacrifice (“Christ died for our sins”, Romans 4:25) is aimed at redemption and salvation of a man (“to rescue man”, ἀπαλλάξῃ Heb 2:15). As the pure sacrifice of God for man, Christ’s sacrifice awakes us once and for all (Heb 9:28 ἅπαξ, 10:10 ἐφάπαξ, 10:14 εἰς τὸ διηνεκές) and Christ’s death has abolished all other priesthood offering of bodily sacrifice, and the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist⁷ is enough for a memorial to Jesus Christ (“This is my body, which is given on behalf of you. Do this for my memorial”, Luke 22:19). As a gift given with love, as a lifelong concrete and absolute sacrifice of love (“Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end,” John 13:1; compare 1 John 4:10), as an act of willingly depriving and sacrificing oneself, Christ’s sacrifice has the perspective of the subject, i.e. personality: Christianity, for the first time in general, views this from the perspective of the one who is sacrificed.

Self-giving and self-sacrificing oneself and a memorial to Him (taking part in sacrificing) establishes, maintains or renews community; consolidating and laying the foundations of community a person who is sacrificed constitutes its identity and ethos. Sacrifice for community assumes that events have a historical meaning; through sacrifice, history makes sense. Not only does sacrifice witness a total and radical realism that faces us with the brutal concretization of history, but sacrifice is a sublimation of history. The historical truth is neither logical nor universal; it is eventful, unique and not contradictory. The event of sublime sacrifice has the significance of the presence of the holy and gives sense to historical time, becomes the truth of historical time, the truth as an event and a gift. Readiness to sacrifice does not mean, of course, the sublimation of the value of sacrifice itself, because its value lies in its innocence and purpose, and that is the thing that makes sense when it comes to the events. The meaning and purpose of history must be salvation, otherwise the pointless persistence in the flow of physical time would remain; life would have been a mere chance and every sacrifice a great misfortune: an accident and an incident. The eschaton is not just an ultimate event, an unrealistic goal, a speculative salvation, a considerable hope, an unreliable conviction – the eschaton is potentially a measure of its significance at any historical moment. The Battle of Kosovo which took place on Vidovdan and the Jasenovac concentration camp are unique sacrificial paradigms that enable us to understand events as our history. The most important memorial that illuminates what happened in history is the sacrifice made by war victims. War victims

⁷ Holy Communion: a re-enactment of Jesus’s Last Supper of bread and wine (Translator’s note)

and sufferings (namely the experience of those who survived all sufferings in history, the boldness and responsibility of historical existence, historical experience of border situations, victories and defeats, glory and destruction) have an epistemic meaning as they enable the understanding of history. The hermeneutic significance of people who were killed in war for understanding history, if historical events are viewed from the perspective of the victim originated from that.

The identity of the Serbs is characterized by the ethos of sacrifice and heroic act. According to the basic principle (*for the Holy Cross and Golden Freedom*) and its nature, this ethos is deeply Christian. That is the ethos of freedom and love as the basic characteristics of personality, which are specifically related to the gift and sacrifice, and this ethos, as the way of existence of a person in the community (human and divine), is much more important than a certain philosophy of morality (ethics) or practical-moral knowledge (morality). The ethos of sacrifice as a mode of existence in freedom and love enables the unique and universal truth of a person's identity to bring concrete existence in the community and history: regarding sacrifice and heroic acts, the life of a person is accomplished in the historical events of the community. The ethos of sacrifice and heroic acts presupposes the history of philosophy and eschatology, and it also lays in the foundation of culture in which sacrifice makes sense, which is actually the expression of Christian culture based on Christ's sacrifice. The heroic act of sacrifice as a historical accomplishment of a person is not individual and private achievement of virtue; it is not a gesture of the self-sufficiency of an individual taken for the sake of social obligation or moral conceit, but totally the opposite: a heroic act is overcoming individualism in the community and history, self-giving and self-sacrifice leads an individual to an existential change into a personality that is similar to Christ's. A heroic act is an effort to overcome the inexorable limitations of reality, such as asceticism, the necessity of self-overcoming in the nature of life. Sacrifice and heroic acts testify to an eventful and existential truth that unifies the community and establishes the ethos and identity of nation. Sacrifice is the pledge of one community and the collective experience of truth in opposing violence.

The truth from the perspective of the victim as a subject is significantly different from the truth from the perspective of violence that seeks the victim as an object. Through stigmatizing, violence constructs a victim as an object and thus rationalizes its actions demonizing the victim and thus conceals the sanctity of the victim. It also conceals its nature. Violence is any, direct or indirect application of force, power, and position over the body, consciousness, will and good people, in order to dominate and rule in such a way to influence the change of free will, whether by fear or manipulation. Especially, fighting a war is

the way to get the right to go unpunished for killing people and stealing their properties using force (comp. Plato, Laws 626b). From the point of view of violence, the causation of the war (finding the cause of war, which is firstly dealing with the moralization of the war) is derived from the interests of the warring parties and the ultimate outcome of the war. Modern violence, as perverted and radicalized victimology, is actually a new absolutism: violence wants to take Christ's place. An innocent and non-violent victim represents an absolute value: that is Christ. Apparently, Christianity promises but does not bring peace, so peace and tolerance will be brought by violence. This modernization of barbarism, which uses the mythical justification of violence by constructing guilt, is actually a return to paganism. The truth is what is shown by the victim. Christianity radically defeats violence and unmasks mythology: Christ, who is God's victim and, above all, because God is the victim of death, wants to be the last victim, after which the victims (in the true sense of the word *sacrificium*) are no longer needed. Whose side are we on? Are we going to remember victims or are we going to accept violence and oblivion?

The forgetting of sacrifice makes it pointless, denying that sacrifice has a purpose, denying the right to the sense of sacrifice, abolishing the last rights of victims – to be a victim and to defeat violence by pure sacrificing: forgetting sacrifice is the victory of violence. If victims are forgotten, God's sacrifice for us is forgotten too, as well as His holiness and transcendence. Those who forget God are turned to death, but those who remember God are focused on life.

The care for sacrificial victims is a concern for the sanctity of life, otherwise our life has no value or purpose. Life makes sense through sacrificing and loving each other. Receiving the gift of sacrifice means to ensure the place of the victim (sacrifice) in one's identity. Self-giving and self-sacrificing is the truth of life that we keep in mind as a part of ourselves. But it does not mean that sacrifice is the only thing we need, because the sacrifices need us too. The care for sacrificial victims and its remembrance is the subsequent defense of a victim, because violence chooses the victim who cannot defend himself or seek revenge. Remembrance of victims is their opportunity for subsequent mercy and forgiveness, because the one who sacrifices has the right to forgive in the end. In essence, forgiving does not mean forgetting because it will not make the reason we want to forgive something disappear. Forgiveness presupposes repentance, justice and truth – so that only revenge and forgetfulness remain in the end.

In recent history regarding defensive liberation wars, the Serbian people have made great sacrifice regarding a still endless number of military and civilian victims of war for freedom and the preservation of national identity. In respect of many innocent and righteous victims, an outstanding task and immediate obligation arises to form, establish and develop a central and collective memory institution dedicated to Serbian victims, respect for them, learning, remembrance and commemoration: the Memorial to Serbian Victims.

The reasons for establishing a memorial institution dedicated to Serbian victims lies primarily in historical facts about the suffering of the Serbs and in the unacceptable disregard for Serbian victims. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the Serbs took part in twelve exhausting defensive liberation wars; several genocides and barbaric reprisals were committed against the Serbs (The First Serbian Uprising, the First World War, the Second World War); the Serbs were forced to emigrate and join a mass exodus several times (and we are witnesses of exodus from Krajina, Western Bosnia, Sarajevo and Kosovo and Metohija); Serbia and parts of the Serbian people outside Serbia were occupied several times in the last two centuries; it is important to mention the Serbian uprising against several foreign occupiers and the most notorious Nazi occupying regimes of Germany and the Independent State of Croatia; they were also killed in the Civil War (during the Second World War and in the 1990s) and in partially imposed domestic dictatorships; they were exposed to economic blockades by the world's largest powers several times in the 20th century. Affected by such historical troubles, Serbs made a great sacrifice of multi-million victims, whose exact number has not yet been determined. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a memorial institution that would carry out scientific research in order to gather all Serbian victims in the 19th and 20th centuries.

It would be instructive to face the number of Serbian victims and the way they were killed, because we have an inexplicable emptiness in our national memory and identity, and that can be seen in our political, educational, cultural and scientific institutions. The symbol of Serbian suffering is represented by the Jasenovac and Donja Gradina concentration camps complex erected by the Ustaša authorities (mass tombs in Donja Gradina are one of the biggest places of execution in general), in which criminals showed sadistic pleasure killing a lot of victims, a demonic personal relationship, tireless interest and emotional participation in torture and brutality, while German concentration camps represented a soulless death industry. What would other people think about us if we were ever indifferent to innocent victims that were killed in many imaginable and unimaginable ways? The explanation for such a long inadequate attitude towards Serbian victims is probably the fact

that a dynamic and abridged history of the Balkans, and especially the Serbs in the past two centuries, is characterized by frequent wartime suffering, as well as the fact that Serbian victims in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and in communist Yugoslavia were an essential obstacle to the political ideology of Yugoslavism and fraternity and unity. We must eliminate the damages that influence remembrance of the victims, because of the piety towards the victims and our self-understanding as a historical nation: if we do not have authentic memory as a prerequisite for identity, then someone else motivated by our interests will produce our memory, both personal and collective which leads to disorientation and enslavement through the construction of memory.

The Memorial to Serbian Victims is needed to oppose the stigmatization of the Serbs as an attempt to abolish their identity and to impose guilt on them as a means of control. Being stigmatized, which we experienced at first-hand in the last civil war, often served by the anti-Serbian propaganda from the First World War, is actually a technique by which the object (the Serbs) is firstly forced out from the field of morality, in order to be forced from the field of rights: the one who is disqualified as a moral being will be suitable for using unlawful violence against him. Therefore, we have a moral obligation to defend the honor of our victims. Our obligation and need to establish a memorial institution dedicated to Serbian victims is of an existential nature constituting Serbian identity,⁸ and thus it is also ontological: it is a matter of our existence as human beings. Forgetting the victims and their sacrifice is some kind of being partners in crime. On the other hand, the opposite is the remembrance of victims confirming its existence, a memory whose purpose is life, the most active way to resist death.

*

Honored gentlemen!

It should not be forgotten that we live in the time of oblivion. However, it is wise to oppose it. In general, wisdom is being smart enough to take proper actions in relation to oneself and others. Being wise means bearing in mind what is most important in life at that moment. For the orientation of wisdom, these two conditions are also necessary: self-awareness (knowledge and understanding of oneself) and conscience (moral self-awareness). According to Immanuel Kant (*Metaphysik der Sitten* § 14) moral self-knowledge (das moralische Selbsterkenntnis) is

⁸ The fundamental contribution of existential thought lies in the idea that one's identity is constituted neither by nature nor by culture, since to "exist" is precisely to constitute such an identity. (Translator's note)

the beginning of human wisdom at all. As stated by Philo of Alexandria (De somniis I 211) the beginning of wisdom is not to forget oneself (σοφίας οὐκ ἔστιν ἀρχὴ μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθαι ἑαυτοῦ). Wisdom is a resistance to self-forgetfulness.

Intelligence is a prerequisite of survival, and memory is a prerequisite of history. Being conscious that we belong to a particular historical community (whose right to be accepted does not need a prior explanation) is an assumption of historical responsibility, which is synchronic, as responsibility for our historical times, and diachronic, as a trans-generational responsibility. Historical responsibility is important for the constitution and self-determination of identity. And beyond the field of power, in which the memory and oblivion are created anyway, everyone would like to forget something. But the courage of facing yourself and the ability to repent is much better therapy than amnesia. The culture of remembrance and the care for war victims are based on existence and therefore have a therapeutic effect. In addition, the Matica srpska therapeutically works as well.**

Translated from the Serbian by
Jovana Marinković

** Lecture was held at Matica srpska in Novi Sad on May 13, 2016.

DORĐE ĐURIĆ

SERBIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY CONCERNING THE GREAT WAR IN THE CENTENARY YEAR

1.

The marking of the centenary of the beginning of the Great War (as the First World War used to be called while humanity had yet to confront the Second World War) has attracted a lot of attention from our public these past two years. The Centenary was marked in different ways in all of the scientific and cultural institutions of Serbia. A great number of television broadcasts were recorded (documentaries, scholarly docu-dramas), but no feature film, so Žika Mitrović's *March on the Drina* from 1964 remains our only war movie about the First World War.

This was an opportunity to devote oneself once again to Serbian historiography and the study of the Great War, to give a new interpretation of one of the greatest historic periods of Serbian history. Several conferences were organised, at which researchers from Serbia participated along with foreign scholars, and the general public was presented with some new knowledge and new interpretations were given. Nevertheless, the marking of the anniversary¹ remained overshadowed by a new cycle of revision of historical truth, especially on the question of responsibility for the outbreak of the war, which was reopened a few years previously by a few Western historians. This question had a rich

¹ Great anniversaries should always be an occasion to speak, write and think about the events and processes they refer to, in other words to return them to the collective consciousness of the culture they belong to, interpreted in a new and fresh way. In addition to demonstrating how something actually happened (Ranke's "Zeigen wie es eigentlich gewesen"), attention must also be paid to the historical and thought context in which the events took place, so as to be able to explain what they meant in their own time, and what kind of influence they had on the events that followed.

heritage, and it seemed that there were numerous political implications behind it.

The question of determining the responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War is one of the most controversial questions of historical scholarship. In addition to the historians in the past hundred years, there have been politicians involved, and propagandists, lawyers, journalists and publicists.

Even while the war was being waged, the two warring parties sought to demonstrate that the opposing block was to blame for the advent of the war, and this was done by fair means or foul. Half-truths, falsehoods and falsifications were used. One example of this is the fate of the archival material which the Austro-Hungarian army seized in Serbia during the war. It was removed from Serbia, and was subsequently “stylised”, in fact falsified, so as to prove that Russia and Serbia were responsible for the war. This “stylisation” was performed in Vienna and Theresienstadt (Tešín), at the centre of the Austro-Hungarian military intelligence service, about which Maximilian Ronge, one of the participants in this work, provides evidence in his memoirs.

A special commission was formed at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919 which was tasked with determining the responsibility for the war. It used the documents that were then available, but it was not fully objective, because it was working above all in the interests of the victorious powers. In the report of this commission, amongst other matters, stands the unequivocal assertion: “the Central Powers planned the war together with their Turkish and Bulgarian allies, and the war was the result of intentional actions that were initiated so that it would become inevitable.” Article 231 of the Versailles Peace Treaty derived from the work of this commission in which, among other matters, it is stated that Germany as a signatory “accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies”.

Very difficult peace conditions were imposed on Germany, which implicitly included the payment of huge war reparations, territorial losses, temporary loss of sovereignty over economically significant districts, disarmament and international isolation unprecedented in recent history. All of these were the very serious reasons that the German government, which signed this treaty under duress, launched a highly organised campaign for their revision. It was considered that the most persuasive way this could be achieved was by revising history and proving that somebody else was responsible for starting the war. For this purpose, a secret section was formed immediately within the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs which attempted to deal with these tasks. Later some other organisations and institutes were formed for the same purpose. As a result of the work of these organisations a few thousand books were published, and articles, in which it was proven that somebody else, and not Germany, was responsible for the outbreak of the war.

The other European governments behaved similarly, but to a much smaller extent and with weaker organisation. The exception was Soviet Russia, which published historical sources and books in which the European imperialists are blamed for the outbreak of the “imperialist war”, but also their own Czarist imperial government.

A more objective historiographical approach was possible only after the Second World War, when a sufficient length of time had passed, but also when there was no longer an urgent need for the revision that had resulted from provisions of the Versailles Peace Treaty. Among the numerous objective historical works created during the 1960s and 1970s, the works of the German historian Fritz Fischer, and of our own Academician Andrej Mitrović hold a notable place.

From the perspective of Serbian historiography, in several previous decades, it looked as though the question of responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War was scientifically resolved. However, its return to the focus of Western historiographical works, and in such a way that in the better case, some authors asserted that all sides were equally responsible for the war, or in the worse case (for us), that Serbia was guilty for the outbreak of the war, threatened once again to sweep away this question out of the framework of historical scholarship and let it cross over to the political sphere.

In the circumstances of increased public interest in this subject, an increasing number of works by foreign authors have been translated into the Serbian language in the past two years. There are also works among them that we can include in the revisionist historiography, such as the book *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* by Christopher Clark. But Fritz Fischer's book, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (*Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegzielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914–1918*) and Oliver Janz's *14. Der Grosse Krieg* give a balanced approach to the question of responsibility for the war. On the occasion of the centenary of the outbreak, a large number of reprints and re-issues were published of high quality works by Serbian historians on the First World War which were created in the second half of the 20th century (books by Andrej Mitrović, Vladimir Dedijer, Milorad Ekmečić, etc.); also, editions were re-issued of memoirs and journalism from the first half of the 20th century. New monographs were also written, in which the material examined extended the boundaries of previous knowledge of Serbian volunteers and prisoners of war

(for example, books by Milan Micić, Stevan Bugarski and Gordana Ilić Marković ...). It is worth mentioning the enterprise of the publishing house Prometej and of RTS who have published an edition *Serbia 1914 – 1918* in ten volumes, in 2014.

Among the works of Serbian historiography emerging on the occasion of the centenary of the Great War, one book stands out. It is *Србија у Великом рату 1914–1918. Крајња историја* (*Serbia in the Great War 1914 – 1918, A Short History*) by Dr Mira Radojević, and corresponding member of SANU Ljubodrag Dimić, a concise but very informative survey of the history of Serbia in the First World War, and is based on the unified results of Serbian historiography.

2.

The challenges which the contemporary generation of Serbian historians faced in writing about the Great War have attended our predecessors from the very beginnings of the writing of history in our country. Archimandrite Jovan Rajić, who is still the founding father of Serbian scholarly historiography, in the foreword to his *Историје разних словенских народа...* (*The History of Various Slavic Nations*) wrote, as early as 1768, that this history was written so as to be of use to his people and that he wishes “similarly to other nations that have already made an effort to describe their past as glorious” to do likewise. He especially set himself the task of refuting those stories about the Serbs that were written with “disgust and slander”. For this he developed a somewhat strange method, which did not always correspond with the scientific method as we understand it today. A century later, Ilarion Ruvarac, another archimandrite of equally patriotic inclination, introduced the consistent application of the critical method into Serbian historiography modelled upon his time and the principles of Leopold Ranke. According to him, the most important tasks placed before the historian were the collection of sources, their stringent criticism, and resistance to accepting myths as historical facts. Not all of his contemporaries (nor their successors) accepted these principles with pleasure and approval, largely because of the manner in which Ruvarac supported his ideas.

There were not many generations of Serbian historians in the previous two and half centuries who, in creating their own works, did not have to use their energy on repeatedly denying the interpretations arising, as Rajić said, “with disgust and slander” towards the Serbian people and history. Maybe one of the few which was relieved of this burden was the generation of Serbian historians who came along in the first decades of the second half of the 20th century, so that they could, in the footsteps of Ruvarac, dedicate themselves to the development of

the *method and the profession of the historian*. That was the generation of Serbian historians which were the contemporaries of Fritz Fischer.

Dr Mira Radojević and Corresponding Member of SANU Ljubodrag Dimić are worthy heirs to this generation (both are professors at the Department of History at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade). They are the authors of the work, *Serbia in the Great War 1914 – 1918, A Short History*, and they deserve special attention in this review. They are known in their craft for their pursuit of the methodical application of historiographical scholarship and for masterly proficiency in the historian's craft.

Anyone who has, even only superficially, followed Western European historiographical productions concerning the responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War and about the First World War in general these last years, cannot escape the impression that these create circumstances almost identical to those in which Rajić wrote his assertion about foreigners writing about Serbian history with disgust and defamation. To be honest, we should say that "lies and slanders" are by no means the attitude of historiographical scholarship in the West, but that those works which were written in such way that they received great publicity, disproportionate to their scholarly achievements.

These were the circumstances at the time of the emergence of the book, *Serbia in the Great War 1914 – 1918, A Short History*. Such a climate was both a major pitfall and a trial for the authors Mira Radojević and Ljubodrag Dimić. They, however, kept to the aforementioned principles and methods of historiographical scholarship and with masterly proficiency in the historian's craft succeeded in avoiding this pitfall, and with reliable scholarship wrote a synthesis on Serbia in the Great War.

If a book was to be written about one of the greatest historic periods of Serbian history, it was necessary to have collected and studied (in the case of Mira Radojević and Ljubodrag Dimić it is more precise to say to have achieved mastery of) an extremely large quantity of sources and literature.² Following the annotations but also the content of this book, it is clear that the authors used all of the available heritage of Serbian historiography, emerging from the 1920s and 1930s of the 20th century (works of contemporaries and of participants in the war). We highlight only some from this period: the books of Vladimir Ćorović, Jovan M. Jovanović, Živka Pavlović, the collection *The Great War of Serbia* for the liberation and unification of more than 30 volumes which

² Seeing the time of the Great War as one of the greatest historic periods of Serbian history does not require much explaining. Our history of that time comprises all the elements of grand epics: falling from grace with the gods (as well as the great powers), unjust placement of blame and the heroes' determination to fight against a much larger force, suffering similar to Biblical torments – the 1915 epidemics, the exodus, the glorious comeback, etc.

were published by the General Staff of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. However, a more important resource for writing this book were the works of the 60s to the 90s of the 20th century. Let us just mention them again Andrej Mitrović, Vladimir Dedijer, Milorad Ekmečić, Đorđe Stanković, Čedomir Popov, the work of the military historians Skoko, Opačić and Tomac, as well as collections of Serbian diplomatic material.³ To all of these, the works of numerous foreign authors (English, French, Russian and German), must be added, from the contemporaneous war reporter from Serbia and the foreign diplomats through the foreign historians of the Fischer generation to our contemporaries such as, let us say, Annika Mombauer.

The book is divided in six chapters, the first of which is devoted to the development of Serbia as an independent state between the Congress of Berlin and the assassination in Sarajevo, while each of the rest deals with one year of the war (with minor chronological deviations, when this is necessary to achieve synthesis in presentation. The conclusion entitled “Jugoslav Unification” closes the study.

Without intending to get into the content of the book, for the purpose of illustrating the authors’ method of work, let us mention how, for the foregoing reasons, a particularly important subject is processed: the question of the assassination in Sarajevo and the responsibility for the war. The authors dealt with presenting these problems in the last section of the first chapter entitled “The Guilty Party and the Kingdom of Serbia” and the first section of the second chapter entitled “The assassination in Sarajevo and the July crisis” (p. 40-111). Contrary to expectations, in these 70 pages the authors do not polemicise with the revisionist historians, moreover, except for the preface, this approach was not used in the book. The main directions of the foreign policies of the great powers as well as the emergence and further building of their alliances through several general European crises at the beginning of the 20th century are shown concisely; the rise to world power of an alliance of lofty furnaces and princely possessions in Germany and its view of the Balkans and Serbia in this context; Austro-Hungarian aspirations in the Balkans, as the one remaining field of expansion, and anxiety caused by Serbia as a Piedmont of the Southern Slavs. The Austro-Hungarian attitude towards Serbia on the eve of the First World War was clearly and concisely described in the following manner: “Serbia was positioned and politically led in such a way that objectively it was an obstacle to the efforts of Austro-Hungary to control the entire Balkans and occupy its central parts” (50).

³ Clearly it was impossible to cite all the relevant works. This short selection was made only to illustrate how wide was the basis on which the authors founded their work.

The context and the deed of the assassination in Sarajevo itself, which took place during the Austro-Hungarian military manoeuvres of Vidovdan⁴ in 1914, to which these authors bring to mind the comparison of the English historian A. J. P. Taylor, that that is as if the British monarch were to parade along the streets of Dublin on St Patrick's Day, is described on the basis of a multitude of sources: the court files, the memory of contemporaries and of the participants, and the reliable literature. Mira Radojević and Ljubodrag Dimić do not miss anything which the sources reveal, such as, let us say, the fact that Dragutin Dimitrović Apis probably was involved in the organisation of the assassination. However, they clearly point out that the sources show that the Serbian Government and General Staff did not have anything to do with this deed. The sequence of events at the time of the July crisis (the period from the assassination of 28th June to the commencement of the war on 28th July) clearly shows that Germany and Austro-Hungary used the assassination only as an excuse, as Prince Karl Max Lichnowsky, a high ranking German diplomat and ambassador to London from 1912 to 1914, first wrote even during the war.

The questions of the war aims of Serbia and the creation of the state of Jugoslavija are addressed over several chapters in the book.

Within the book, and deserving of a measure of special praise, are the harmonious relationships between the presentations of the military and political, economic and cultural history of Serbia in the Great War, which are well combined and distilled into what we can simply call a history. Although the book bears the title *Serbia in the Great War*, sufficient attention is paid to the general context, in this event to European history. As in the wider context the most important sequences and events on the military and political plane throughout the entire war in Europe are presented, which is a step forward compared to our earlier literature.

In this year marking the centenary of the beginning of the Great War, Mira Radojević and Ljubodrag Dimić have given a critically verified, interpreted in a modern way, concise and stylishly written Serbian view of the history of Serbia in the Great War on the basis of reliable sources. This has given the results of Serbian scholarly historiaography concerning one of the biggest problems of contemporary historical scholarship to our people and to the people abroad. Their book deserves special attention in the centenary year of the Great War.

Translated from the Serbian by
Jovanka Kalaba

⁴ Translator's note: Vidovdan, St Vitus's Day, (28th June in the Gregorian Calendar)

ĐORĐO SLADOJE

GOJKO ĐOGO'S ERECT PEN

Mikhail Epstein writes about how smothering one's creativity is a double crime – like murdering a pregnant woman. The gift of creativity is endowed on us from above, just like life itself. We cannot endow talent upon ourselves, in the same way we cannot give life to ourselves. He also adds that the spiritual life within ordinary existence is a gift that appears in its own place and time, and burying it is a double murder, a sacrilege, if you will, since the gift of creativity is a gift from God.

In his contemplations of the problematic relation that is established between the poet and the tyrant, Joseph Brodsky says that a poet can talk to a tyrant, but never to a democrat. As “the unacknowledged master of the world”, the poet always ends up on the losing end of the peculiar fight for material and spiritual power that poets and tyrants become involved in. And it all started in Rome, says Brodsky, referring to Ovid. It started, however, much earlier, since mythical poets such as Marsyas and Orpheus lose their lives after challenging the gods to a contest of music; and Plato's “ideal state” is no country for poets either (and not only Plato's). The two renowned Russian writers' statements are partly based on the tragic experiences of their famous predecessors, who suffered in various ways in their “ideal state”: Mandelstam, Kharms, Babel, Bulgakov, Zabolotsky, Gumilev, Pasternak, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, Shalamov were persecuted, incarcerated, assassinated.

Gojko Đogo, a poet and this year's winner of the Zmaj award, which he could have been awarded much earlier if the rules had allowed for a poet to be awarded and punished at the same time, met a similar fate about thirty years ago. Gojko Đogo was neither one of those pub dissidents who, back in those days, could be found on every corner, nor an organized state enemy like Borislav Pekić used to be. He worked

in the Belgrade Youth Center as a literary program editor, and he wrote “unclear poems” whose meanings even competent readers could not easily decipher. One of them, Jovan Delić, the writer of the detailed and comprehensive preface for “The Branch of a Cloud” (“Grana od oblaka”), had to employ his many interpretative skills and competences so as to shed light on the semantic obscurities of Đogo’s early poetic work.

Đogo’s poetry is one of a “secret sign” and “locked-up language” where what’s called objective reality first thickens and then fragments, breaking into symbols, metaphors, allegories, zoological and botanical parables, mythical projections and archetypal images, also containing poems that, in all honesty, lose themselves in lyrical abstractions and complex associations.

Unlike the majority of Dinaric poets, Đogo’s poetry does not rest on the epic heritage. Decasyllable is barely heard in his blank, somewhat bifurcated, but, in terms of its rhythmic and melodic characteristics, carefully constructed verse. He looks for, and finds, his poetic yarn in the lyrical folk poetry, in mythological poems, in oral folklore, as Vuk would put it – like Nastasijević and Popa – in the fantastic and in fairy tales, fables, spells, riddles, elegies, lullabies, lampooning poems, and especially in myths – Hellenic, Biblical, Slavic, and native, of course. It is in the dark and deep mythical layers, in “objective correlatives” and “the forest of symbols”, that the lyrical subject of this poetry lies obscured and its emotionality suppressed. The “locked-up language” of Đogo’s early books, *The Sorrow of Penguins*, *The Bruise* and, for the most part, *Hemlock*, contain lexis which is rich, diverse, and more and more archaic for most contemporary readers to grasp. It seemed that Đogo had been equipping his poetry for the encounter “in the terrible place”, in the real, everyday world for a long time, and when the language and the poetry opened for the world, the poet himself ended up tied and locked up – only because the official interpreters found devious allusions to the image and deeds of the untouchable master of our Arcadia, a hell’s machine through which the sensitive poet informed his readers. Jovan Delić is right when he says that in this case it was not just the poet who suffered, but his poetry too, which, being “tied to a dead man”, was reduced to superficial pamphleteering. To be fair, *The Woolen Times* cannot be read even today without a political afterthought, because, as someone wittily suggested, there is as much politics in poetry as there is tragedy in politics. In our case, there has never been a dearth of either of them of them – neither in the past nor in the present. Đogo defamed the master, but he defamed his servants even more, those eternal pretenders full of ideological hot air. He still has not been forgiven for that. If someone today did an anonymous

survey among Serbian intellectuals and literary authors, I fear that most of them would still side with Broz. And Đogo is still under suspicion, only this time as a Serbian nationalist, although there is not a single example of cheap, pamphleteering Serbian patriotism in his poetry. There is, however, sorrow (of penguins), and there is worry, the kind that Andrić's characters possess, about the destruction of the Serbian people and the dissolution of the Serbian state and culture, which are ongoing processes unlikely to end soon. If nothing else, one can at least give a deep, honest sigh on hearing this, as Zmaj used to say.

Although written three decades ago, *The Woolen Times* has not lost any of its modernity and freshness of language, and the mythical and archetypal basis still retains the universality of poetic expression. Unfortunately, this poetry is still relevant – as if the world, in the poet's words, had turned in the meantime into a crocodile jaw that a tiny crocodile bird cleans for food and boarding, just like in the eponymous poem by Đogo. In order to survive in this world, one either has to be as tiny and irrelevant as the crocodile bird, or as merciless as the crocodile itself.

Still, it should be noted that even the darkest of the poet's visions seem idyllic compared to the reality we reside in, with the black fleece weighing down on us, bruised, and sadder than penguins.

Twenty years after *The Woolen Times* and a genuine human and creative drama, Gojko Đogo published *The Black Fleece*, a book significant in more ways than one. The poet's obsessive motive of the fleece is found already in the poem's title, and it can be seen as that of the Argonauts, the quest for which never ceases, or as a sign of tragic separateness and loneliness in a predominantly white flock. Whichever it may be, here too the poet continues the argument with the evil spirits of the times that he invoked with his poems – judges, inspectors, spies, persecutors, guards and other “official specters” and grotesque figures of a badly mythologized reality, and on the other hand, in his epistles he addresses the glorious ancestors as unquestioned authorities in a world that has lost its center – Stefan Dečanski, Vuk Karadžić, the wise men from Ephesus, victors of war... I should not forget the poem “Hagia Sophia”, a poem as if from an ancient chronicle, about the building of the church of all churches. It deserves a special attention, just like some of Đogo's other poems that talk about the vertical order of things, which strive for the heights, as opposed to the common, crawling world.

Not before he was forced against the prison wall did the poet open his soul, however, to the unreasonable creatures incapable of evil that his poetry cannot do without. The ostracized poet has intimate and confidential talks with a hedgehog, a dove, a parrot, a deer and the like,

and with them he goes through personal, historical, moral, metaphysical, and poetic questions.

In an extraordinary poem, there are prison poplars as examples of vertical existence which, just like the poet, cannot be silenced in their whispering high in the air (perhaps whispering to the poplars from Dučić's poetry) by any other means but with an axe. And Đogo's long subdued and long suppressed lyricism will show in unusual, poignant love poems written in exile. And when a Herzegovinian writes a love poem, and to his wife too, then it is a lyrical wonder and an accomplishment of a special kind.

In the closing cycle *The Journey to Hum*, the echoes of the woollen times can still be heard, although very quietly, while the poet increasingly starts to turn to the metaphysical. Lyricism, as Dučić says, is the supreme metaphysical expression. This dimension of Đogo's poetry is noticeable from the start, although to me it seems that the metaphysical in his poetic beginnings is derived from poetic principles rather than from his personal experience. The journey to Hum and Zahumlje that the poet sets out on, after all the difficult and dramatic years, leads him straight to his native place, to a mythical country and a Biblical landscape where every ridge gives a view of "both worlds". Actually, the poet here settles accounts with the world and people, the chimeras of history and mundanity of everyday life, with his own raptures and illusions. He does it without being pathetic or feeling sorry for himself, devoid of every desire to teach and comfort, or to make things better and more beautiful than they really are. Đogo's late works, made heavy from both personal and collective tragic experience, are reduced and simple in expression, without poetic tools, entangled symbols and overstretched metaphors. In the poem "The View from the Leotar Mountain", the poet assures himself one more time that only the Maker knows "what disappears behind the deep blue lines on the horizon" and what "the abyss above the abyss" hides. No matter how high he climbs, the man cannot uncover the secrets of the otherworld. The "post to the sky" is still out of service, and lyrical transcendence, as the learned would say, is made impossible. "The Sweltering Heat", in which the whole misery of life and world settles, the poet, "as dejected as a Gypsy's horse", does not ask for more in life than "a green sprout that the wind only bends and does not break" that he could lean on, and in the poem "On the Hill", the poet, *in the shade*, "full of wounds and empty hymns" only remembers and notes down the chase of horses and horseflies as an archetypal image of the "incessant battle" in all spheres of life. In the famous "A Walk in the Spring" he revives and estranges the lyrical commonplace of the doppelganger. In "The Ball of String", which is growing while the poet is shrinking, he winds

the years around “a little stone in the chest”. In “The Alchemist”, he yearns for the creative powers of a bee, and in “Trnovo” he holds a memorial service in a burned church... The book ends with “A Memorial Service for the Past Century”, which, as the poet said elsewhere, was made famous by dungeons and concentration camps. If I have noted well, it is the only poem in the book written in verses bound by rhyme. As if the poet had temporarily tied a knot on his *woolen strings*.

Đogo’s “hagiography written on the inner side of the skin” still remains open. “The Journey to Hum” continues, and the poet is stocked up with basic travelling provisions only, but still enough for a poem – the bitter experience of a man who has known world in all its misery and glory, the language of his native place that grows on the branch of a cloud, and the fierce, erect pen – the most erect in Serbian contemporary poetry.*¹

Translated from the Serbian by
Jovanka Kalaba

* The speech given on the occasion of awarding Gojko Đogo with the Zmaj Award for the collection of poems *The Branch of a Cloud* (Orpheus, Novi Sad 2014), at the Ceremonial Sitting of Matica srpska on 16 February 2015

IVAN NEGRIŠORAC

ČEDOMIR POPOV'S CONTRIBUTION TO SERBIAN POLITICAL CULTURE

The book of interviews of the academician Čedomir Popov, former president of the Matica srpska, a longtime professor of General History of the New Age at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, the president of the Novi Sad branch of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the most important bearer of Serbian encyclopedic work in recent decades and the author of valuable historiographical discussions such as *From Versailles to Danzig* (1976), *Civic Europe* (1989, 2010), *Great Serbia* (2007) and others is multifariously interesting and extremely stimulating. This book of interviews was prepared by Jelena Popov, PhD a life associate of deceased academician Popov, a historian herself, a scientific adviser at the Institute for History of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. Her dedication to her husband's opus, among other things, was shown to the public in the supplementary bibliography of the great historian in 2015. From the book of Vida Zeremski and Jelena Popov (editor), *Čedomir Popov: Life and history. The bibliography (2015)* it is possible to see not only the breadth of the topics, but also the number of contributions by which this historian enriched Serbian scientific and cultural life: the book, namely, contains a total of 1574 bibliographic units.

The Art of Dialogue

The book of Popov's interviews *History at Work* (edited by Jelena Popov, Matica srpska, Novi Sad 2016) reveals the segment of his work, which has not been presented in the form of the book so far, and this edition already deserves special attention of the readers. By careful reading of this book, one can clearly see not only the conditions and

effects of his scientific opus, but also the forms of public and social actions of Čedomir Popov. Those who followed the academician Popov could notice a long time ago the importance of his words expressed in interviews and in some other forms of public appearances in the media. Now, with the help of such a systematic book, this perception becomes much clearer, more transparent, and faster, and this fact obliges us to seriously think about everything and to give an adequate word of assessment and comment.

And even for the connoisseurs of Popov's historiography opus, I believe, it is a rather surprising fact that he left as many as 95 interviews as separate bibliographic units. No less surprising is the fact that they are, most often, very extensive and serious conversations, and that almost none of them is made by the way, in some instantaneous exchange of thoughts, as a rule, this is about the conversations that were carefully prepared both by the interviewer and by the interviewed. Therefore, despite the fact that Jelena Popov eliminated a minor part of these conversations, the number was reduced to 82 interviews, and the volume of this dialogue book (almost 650 pages) certainly positively surprises even those people who, with more or less attention, followed the public-speaking of the academician Popov.

In that respect, we must bear in mind that the interviews with Čedomir Popov were made by the true masters of this genre (Miloš Jevtić, Ljubisav Andrić), excellent scientists or colleagues by the profession (Dušan Bataković, Jovan Delić, Simo C. Ćirković, Aleksandar Rastović, Dušan Vujičić, Nada Savković) or the great journalists and writers (Ljubomir Vukmanović, Ratka Cvijanović Lotina, Luka Mičeta, Vladimir Kopiel, Franja Petrinović, Zorica Mirković, Jovanka Simić, Mili-jana Baletić, Danica Radović, Zoran Hruski Radisavljević, Milorad Vukašinović and others) and some of the interviewers made interviews several times (Ruzica Zekić seven times, Jovanka Simić six, Zorica Mirković four, Ljubomir Vukmanović three, Aleksandra Tomić twice, etc.) and so were given the opportunity to talk to this excellent historian and the head of the leading scientific and cultural institutions (Matica srpska, The Department of SASA in Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy, etc.) It is also interesting to consider which media focused on the historical knowledge and public word of Čedomir Popov: in that respect, *Dnevnik* from Novi Sad took the lead (even 21 interviews were given to this daily), then *Večernje novosti* (12 interviews and one more given to the *Novosti*), *The Witness* 4 interviews), *Borba*, *Politika* (3), *Dan*, *Vojaska*, *NIN*, *Pečat* (2 interviews, in *Pečat*, on the occasion of presenting the prize „Pečat vremena“ award, the second interview was published in two newspaper issues). All this is strong evidence that *History in Progress* of Čedomir Popov is a book of dialogues that was created

from a variety of reasons, with a really great interest and specific confrontation between the interviewer and the interviewee, as well as the interviewed and the reading audience.

History as a Teacher of Life

The circle of topics raised in these conversations is also of particular interest. One circle contains general questions of historiography as a discipline, and its theoretical and methodological development; the second circle concerns the history of certain scientific problems, as well as the ways in which these problems were interpreted in different epochs, and especially in Serbian historiography; the third circle of topics relates to issues that Popov himself thoroughly searched in his books and discussions; the fourth circle of problems has often been imposed as a current, hot topic for whose discussion the social, and most frequently the political public was most directly interested, and therefore the comment of a significant historian was asked ... Specific issues brought one question after another: the Serbs and their international position; the problem of the Balkans and the relationship of great powers to that area; the so called Eastern Question and the ways of solving it; Serbian liberation movements and the construction of a nation-state during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the history of Yugoslavia, the way of constituting the Kingdom of the SCS / Yugoslavia, the time of SFR Yugoslavia, but also the description of the decay of that state; the position of Vojvodina within the Habsburg Empire, Serbia and Yugoslavia, and the possibility of the survival of the province; the idea of the Great Serbia, and the ways of its exploitation in the framework of propaganda activity directed against Serbia and its real political interest; the nature of the New World Order and the process of globalization, and the place of the Serbs in this context; the Memorandum as “diagnosis of the state crisis” of SFR Yugoslavia; the process of breaking up Serbia as a state and the role of the Hague Tribunal; Slobodan Milošević and his reign; the situation in Serbian historiography and in Serbian scientific and cultural institutions; the Matica srpska and Serbian encyclopedistics as a field of intellectual and social engagement, etc.

In the interviews, the topics change according to the changes in the time in which the interview was conducted, and in the way that social events established different lists of more or less priority issues. Therefore, the main topic of the first interviews, which at the beginning of the eighties of the twentieth century was given by the then young professor of the university, is the “history of the People’s Liberation War and the revolution of the people and the nationalities of Vojvodina”,

and the topics of the final interviews mostly concern the place of the Serbian people within the globalization processes in the world.

Popov spoke on the specificities of historiographical work on different occasions, but he always emphasized its complexity and social sensitivity. In the conversation with Miloš Jevtić in 1991, Popov pointed out that in order to do the work properly the researcher's empathy is necessary, as well as the necessity of establishing the distance related to the subject of the research. This other factor, however, contains both temporal ("you must wait for the sources to become available", and "it takes some time to pass from the process to be able to find out its results", page 28) as well as spiritual distance (in historiography there is an old dilemma about "who writes history better: those who participated in it and created it, that is to say, watching everything from inside, or those who have a distance to it, so they can be critical enough"; we are talking about the dilemma "who is a better historian of the Second World War: Churchill, with his six books of *Memoirs*, or Guy Wint and Peter Calvocoressi, who wrote the great book *Total War*", page 28). Apart from the high level of scientific standards of knowledge, Čedomir Popov also advocates the viewpoint on the importance of the social engagement of historians. Of course, he does not understand the necessity of social engagement as a form of dealing with "pure politics" but as a necessity, "even the duty of historians in the current democratization and in solving our overwhelming burden of various crises and national dilemmas in which we live to engage, but from the standpoint of science and always preserving its dignity" (page 30). That is, therefore, crucial for Čedomir Popov: remaining a true scientist, preserving the dignity of his activity, but being of use to the society and the nation in which you live and work.

Regarding the demands referring to history and historians, it is not necessary to exaggerate, of course, and therefore express the expectations that a historian cannot satisfy. Accordingly, Čedomir Popov very precisely names what a historian can do and what he cannot do: "The historian can, to the fullest possible extent, contribute if he cherishes his historical science, whose task is to reveal as many facts as possible, correct, exact facts, which he will make – in the most eye-catching way, but not betraying science at the same time – accessible to the public. I think that this is what we can ask from the historical science and that it should not be burdened with larger tasks than it can accomplish ... So if you ask from it to solve the problem, then you have imposed a task that it absolutely cannot do" (page 41). Being a teacher of life means, according to Čedomir Popov, to give man knowledge and reliable facts according to which he will be able to think creatively and solve the problems by himself: without such facts and knowledge, such creativity and the ability of solving the problem cannot be achieved. The facts them-

selves and knowledge are not enough, but they are necessary, necessary for further creative achievements that demand both the difficultness of the world in which we live, as well as the desire of individuals and entire collectives to be the active factors of such a world.

Not only the historians but also the widely understood intellectual elite in contemporary society should have a very important, indispensable role in certain countries and communities. In the last, almost testamental interview for the magazine *Pečat* (2012), Čedomir Popov expressed his opinion to Milorad Vukašinović and Ognjen Karanović (in the article entitled “As a nation, on no key issue did we have a solution”), on the importance of the intellectual influence on public opinion and at the same time the influence on those who make decisions on behalf of the whole society: “Of course, it is not intelligence that decisively influences the formation of a policy, but it can very effectively influence a careful attitude towards these issues. It is well-known that the responsibility for good or bad solutions cannot be solely traced to the decisions of politicians. Responsibility may be in their hands, because important decisions are made in closed circles, but it cannot be said that decision-makers absolutely do not take into account the views of public, primarily the political public. But who shapes this public opinion? It is the intellectual and supreme political elite” (page 609). In other words, social engagement and intelligence are in no way a matter of the past, but their role is still very important today because they can influence the formation of public opinion.

The help of the historians only makes sense when it comes to knowing the historical circumstances of past times, and in this context the knowledge about the European context of the existence of the Serbian people, as well as the special relations of the Serbs with other nations and countries of the world is extremely important. As a professor who taught general history, and who wrote the precious, three-volume book *Civic Europe* (1770-1914), Čedomir Popov was a great connoisseur of the history of international relations, and in this context he described in many places the nature of the relationship between the Serbs and some other nations. Thus, for example, in the aforementioned interview given to the weekly *Pečat*, he briefly sketched the history of Serbian-Russian relations in the last two centuries, especially in the context of the so-called Eastern Question. And on the Eastern Question itself, he will say in the most grievous possible form: “What is the Eastern Question? It is the struggle of great powers to overmaster the Balkans, through which all the communications of Europe with Asia pass. It’s so even today. Do you notice what a tough fight it is to attract us into their orbit. Despite the fact that it looks like as if Europe does not want us, it wants us and does not want to let us go, as Russia cannot leave us to

the others. It is like this from Catherine to Hitler, from Hitler to Tito, from Tito to Milošević, until today. All political and conquering initiatives in the new century, even before that in Europe, meant mastering the Balkans” (pp. 603-604). On less than three pages, Popov clearly and encyclopedically accurately depicted the nature of the Serbian-Russian relations from the time of the First Serbian Uprising until present, and in this context showed that Russia has always, to a greater or lesser degree, been present in all major events in the Balkans.

In his description, Popov particularly stresses the year 1878, the year of the recognition of Serbia at the Berlin Congress, but he did not mention that Russia was also able to make harmful decisions for Serbia, as was, for example, done at the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878, when trying to create Great Bulgaria. However, regardless of how the necessary procedures for reducing the information in the presentation are carried out, the general spirit upon which Popov insists is, first and foremost, praise for the initiative and zeal of the Serbian people, and the emphasis on the determination to take fate, as much as possible, into their own hands. Popov speaks about it with the deepest respect, so he makes the global assessment that “the Serbian people perfectly followed the processes and great movements that were happening in Europe” (page 601). With views of his, he did not, in any way, incite the thought that the great powers would somehow solve the issue of Serbian fate, but he emphasized the principle of their own activity and persecution as the only way to find the good solutions that were desirable. Popov, obviously, believed that such a spirit of initiative and decisive activity must be preserved even today, and in the future times that are yet to come.

Under the Pressure of the Imperial Millstone

In accordance with such beliefs, Popov devoted a great deal of attention to the description of the nature of imperial projects, but also of the new world order and today’s globalization processes. Therefore, in a conversation with Ivan Ninković, “Time in which it is not easy to live” (1994), he concluded that “the goal is to gather the nations under the leadership of great powers in order to achieve the hegemony of large capital. The entire twentieth century is the arena of such tendencies. Germany and Japan used to do it in order to achieve their dominance primarily with military power. Today America violently breaks old barriers between states and even more often raises new ones for its own interests” (page 226). Realizing himself that such processes are inevitable, Popov points out the necessity of finding much more humane forms for their performance, otherwise “counter action of the downtrodden could not be avoided and there will be permanent world conflict”; that is, this

“new totalitarian system of world dimensions” on an international scale establishes exploitation “which will inevitably cause great resistance fueled by misery and nationalism among the small nations. Therefore, the twenty-first century will never be a harmonious age” (page 226).

In the conversation with Sima C. Ćirković (“The entire history of the Serbs through the centuries is determined by the factor of European interest”), Čedomir Popov, completely opposite to François Fukuyama’s demobilization attitudes about the “end of history”, says that “the new world order is a dangerous ideological construct that has real bases in objective civilization and historical background. So it was with all the other great ideological systems. Mankind is lucky enough that none of them has been fully accomplished, so this one will not as well” (page 356). Popov is, in that sense, one of the determined, sharp critics of the imperial ambitions of individual countries or entire state communities, and points to the particularly terrifying effect of these processes on the territory of Europe. Therefore, in his last interview (2012), She says “it was a principle that would destroy the European spirit. Everyone wanted to create an empire. It was created by the British, the French, the Spanish, and the Russians. Let’s not forget that the Russian Empire (the Soviet Union) lasted until about twenty years ago. That is why it is the epoch of the imperialism. Typical characteristics of the imperial politics come from Roman times: take, conquer if you can, if not, make them recognize the hegemony and control” (page 606).

In the context of pronounced exposures to the international economic, political and military pressures, and the invading intentions of imperial powers, the historical knowledge of the propaganda effect of the idea of Great Serbia is very important, the ideas that were often attributed by Western powers to the Serbian state or the Serbian people and its political concepts. It was not difficult for Čedomir Popov to summarize the results of his research in order to show that the “cradle of the chase against the alleged Great Serbian idea was the Habsburg Monarchy” (page 493 et seq.); such an accusation evolved over the course of the whole nineteenth century, and was clearly formulated already in the fifties, at the time of the Crimean War (1853-1856), when in the war with the Russians, France and England came to help Turkey. Since then until this day, the attacks on Serbia over the alleged Great Serbian idea have been used to prevent a more serious Russian influence in the Balkans and that part of Europe. After that, such an idea has spread, and almost all Western powers have accepted it, as well as all the other nations (Serbian neighbours or the nations that participated in the Yugoslav communion) who are interested in building their own development on the suppression of the Serbian corps. Popov therefore concludes that “the fact that the Serbs were always the target of attack and satanization is

not the product of their Great Serbian policy, but two other interests: the great powers for their strategic position, and the neighbours for the interference of their conquering and big-state appetites and chauvinist intentions. That is why Serbia will be 'big' for them, however small it may be" (page 504).

The myth of Great Serbia, was obviously, mainly aimed at fragmenting not only the big one, but also the medium, small, even the smallest Serbia. Pointing out that the idea of Great Serbia never became the basis for conducting Serbian state policy, but that it regularly remained on the margin of the events, in the hands of the parties and the individuals who were not the bearers of state power, Čedomir Popov when testifying before the Hague Tribunal in the Slobodan Milošević's trial asked: "To what extent should Serbia be small not to be big?" This sentence, to whose authorship Branislav Crnčević asserts a right to as well, marked one of the sensitive points at which the Hague Tribunal most directly expressed itself as, first and foremost, a political court aimed at sanctioning a genuine political reality rather than a propaganda-political myth. Concerning the possible misuse of the idea of the Great Serbia, Čedomir Popov, in a conversation with Dragan Mojović for NIN (2007), on the occasion which occurred as the result of the success of the book *Great Serbia – Reality and Myth*, concludes: "For the creation of Great Serbia there was no, there is no, nor will there ever be the conditions: demographic, economic, political, military. Our strength is still only culture, language, tradition and correct but not condescending, communication with neighbours and the world as a whole. Above all we need to preserve this power to defend this state that is left to us. If it continues to crumble, the fate of the Serbian people will be sad" (page 508). Čedomir Popov was able to speak at the right moment and decisively, not at all pandering to the centers of power that would like to hear some other stories from the intellectuals. Historiographically ultimately honest, even in the socialist period, he was able to present his own different opinion, even in the circumstances that, to a large extent, involved ideologically differently defined readers. Thus, for example, at the end of the project and when publishing the book *The History of the People's Liberation War and the Revolution of the Nations and Nationalities of Vojvodina*, he concluded something about which communist politicians did not like to have a debate – about the participation of some nations in the national liberation struggle. Because of such an attitude, the national structure of the Partisan forces remained without precise data. In spite of knowing what prejudices were cherished about possible thematisations of the national contribution to the national liberation struggle, Čedomir Popov said in the utterly reduced form in the interview with Tomislav Marčín "Scientific Judgment on the Revolution"

(1984), the following: “We concluded that the anti-Yugoslav orientation of almost complete German and Horti-oriented part of the Hungarian national minority was one of the biggest obstacles for the development of NLM in Bačka and Banat. Of lesser significance and scope were the passivity, long unbiasedness and irresoluteness of some parts of the local Croatian people in Srem, especially the western, as well as parts of the Romanian and some other nationalities in all three areas of Vojvodina.”

Even more obvious was his critical word addressed to the creators of the Constitution, specifically the Basic Law of AP Vojvodina. Thus, in a conversation with Ljubiša Nikolin, “The Authors of the “Constitution in Vojvodina” prepared the ground for secession” from 2002, he resolutely opposed the introduction of serious elements of Vojvodina’s statehood, and explained this with strong arguments, claiming that “Vojvodina does not fulfill two basic conditions to be formed as a state, since all European countries are formed either on the basis of national coherence, or on the historical state-building experience. Since this is not the case, the new ‘Constitution’ of Vojvodina will fragment the Serbian state corps and, on the other hand, endanger Vojvodina!” (page 411). In the mentioned conversation, he did not explain how Vojvodina could endanger itself by its own decisions, but this has been explained elsewhere. In the conversation with Jovanka Simić “State on the plate” from 2002, and on several other occasions, he warned about the inevitability of the break-up of the independent Vojvodina: “The issue of the borders of this new state would immediately be raised. After all, the current Hungarian government has for a long time mentioned the revision of the Trianon Agreement, which established the Yugoslav-Hungarian border after the Second World War. Probably the Croats, on the basis of their ‘historical right’, would raise the question of Srem, which means that the independent Vojvodina would be in serious danger. I am surprised that autonomists with separatist tendencies do not see such an outcome” (page 416). When it comes to the issue of the autonomy of Vojvodina, Čedomir Popov, together with his wife Jelena, presented the key points written in a concise way, but in so far for the wider audience, the more attractive book *Autonomy of Vojvodina – the Serbian Question* (1993, supplemented edition 2000). And after the publication of this book, he followed the political situation and did not hesitate to express the most direct warnings about the dangers that could arise due to the insufficiently thought-out relationship towards such an important issue. Thus, in 2003, in a conversation with Milijan Baletić, he claimed that politics in Vojvodina was “secretly separatist”, based on the creation of a “legal basis for the secession”, which would not “be tomorrow, but when external bosses decide it, but it is important that everything is ready when the moment

comes” (page 425). This kind of warning Popov predicated in the interviews in a timely manner, in not at all, implicit form.

The Importance of Institutions

Čedomir Popov devoted considerable attention in his media talks to the most important Serbian cultural and scientific institutions, such as the Matica srpska and the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Even in the way of functioning of these institutions, the disastrous consequences of breaking up the state, as well as the scientific and cultural entities of Serbia, can be perceived. Therefore, he cited the example of the Vojvodina Academy of Sciences and Arts, which “was not established with the aim of gathering the topmost intelligence of the province on scientific but on quite political lines” (page 569). He observed such processes beforehand and saw their devastating consequences, so he reminds us that “when VASA was founded in 1979, then no one from Vojvodina could be elected to the SASA any more” (page 569). Because of such a break-up of the Serbian scientific and artistic space Popov was one of the most prominent and the most decisive critics of the re-establishing the VASA.

Popov also expressed his opinion about the activities of the SASA, and in particular about the much commented and attacked Memorandum for which he noted: “The Memorandum is just an unmistakable diagnosis of the state crisis in which Yugoslavia came by application of the Constitution of the SFRY from 1974. It showed the depth and comprehensiveness of the crisis, warning about the tragic consequences that can occur if it does not end. This documented diagnosis caused raving anger precisely among the creators of this crisis, who were rapidly preparing the breakup of the state. When it came to it, the Memorandum was used so that through the frenzied media campaign the defender of the state should be qualified as its own demolisher. This mystification dominates the Western public even today, and it has been condescendingly accepted by many of our coryphées of Mondialism” (pp. 573-574).

On various occasions Popov very accurately described the nature of the important institutions, for example, the Matica srpska, and he advocated that this nature essentially did not change, but only further on evolutionarily evolved. In a conversation with Jovanka Simić in 2008 (“Vojvodina on the Edge”), he talked about the need for the Matica to be profiled with a clear distance in relation to a daily politically intoned policy: “The Matica survived for 182 years by not letting the daily politics to go through its doors. In its strategy, it has always had long-term goals in the cultural and spiritual unification of the Serbian people. There were both in the past and the present the ambitious people who tried to push

through their political interests, and when they did not succeed, they became enemies of this institution. But the Matica has always successfully overcome these situations and remained one of the most eminent and noble institutions” (page 540).

In that institution, Čedomir Popov occupied one of the most honourable places in its history. It is not just about that he was performing a number of responsible functions for a long time: he was a member of the Board of Directors, the manager of the Manuscript Department, the Vice President, and then the President, as well as the Honorary President of the institution. It is primarily about that he directly contributed to the development of the Serbian Encyclopaedics, by taking *The Serbian Biographical Dictionary* to obvious results (under his leadership, this precious publication started to be published, and he published the five initial volumes), as well as the *Serbian Encyclopedia* (he led a team of experts who made the initial alphabet, he established the basic organization of work, and took a decisive role in the design of the initial two books, although formally he did not want to be the chairman of the Editorial Board). Čedomir Popov became the President of the Matica srpska, in a very sensitive, even difficult moment, when a not at all easy election crisis erupted, and when certain forms of behaviour in the work of the Matica began to appear that stood out from the established democracy of this institution. Due to his poor health and a fairly heavy burden in various obligations, Popov did not want to run for president but was forced to do so by circumstances in which an extension of the election crisis could have had very serious consequences for the institution. It has been a long time since Popov said that the greatest honour for him would be to be elected for the president of the Matica srpska, but when such an outcome spontaneously came, it was the others who insisted for him to be chosen and it was not him who supported such proposals. And indeed, at the time he was elected, the Matica was more in need for him than he needed the Matica. And when he completed his mandate, namely by winning the position of the honorary president of the Matica srpska, he perfectly accurately assessed his own work in the old institution: “I see my personal contribution in the fact that I managed to preserve harmony. I acted so as to avoid any eventual misunderstandings and the conceptual differences, if they appeared, managed to overcome them in a tolerant and relaxing way.” It was indeed a real pleasure to work with Čedomir Popov: you had a first-rate interlocutor on all the historical topics, and not just on them but some others as well; besides, he was a constant source of goodness and warmth when dealing with people and because of that the enthusiasm of the people with whom he worked constantly grew and multiplied. The Matica srpska has no other way to adequately respond to these merits except to

emphasize not only the values of his historiographical work, but also the beneficence of his human, purely human qualities.

The Entirety of Serbian Corpus

Čedomir Popov was a man of dialogue, and this is very well seen in this book of interviews *History at Work*. Answering many and various questions, he constantly expressed the necessity of defending the entirety of the Serbian cultural, political and national corpus. At the same time, he demonstrated a special understanding for certain regional characteristics, especially the characteristics of Vojvodina, but he also resolutely opposed any possibility of endangering and tearing down the Serbian state. His approach, therefore, is characterized by a pronounced nation-building seriousness and responsibility, and his entire professional, scientific knowledge he was ready to invest in the foundations of a policy that would respect such values. Because of that, he was able to express a thought that seemed to sound like a vow many times. Just before his death, literally on his deathbed for which he was tied to for months, both to the readers of the magazine *Pečat*, and to all the Serbs as well, he sent the word saying: "First of all, the goal of our people must be to become aware of the danger in which it has been in and to resist, with as much as possible unified forces, the tendency of denationalization and the destruction of the state of Serbia as the last guarantor of national identity and self-reliance, because without that we will become a colonial slave of the great powers, the colonial slaves of great powers, who will ask us to think like them, and to work for their benefit, with minimum conditions for our own survival. In the history of great powers there are countless such cases, from the colonial regions of Asia, Africa, Latin America, from American slavery, black slavery, today's threats of neocolonial forces in numerous countries in the world: in Asia, Africa, and here in Europe, we are such an example. I think it is our interest to awaken the feeling of national affiliation, national interest and dignity. Everything else will slowly move towards the improvement. Without this factor which is of a moral nature as well, I am afraid we will not get anywhere" (page 614-615). Always speaking clearly and openly, with an undisguised political attitude and seriousness of approach, the academician Popov, with his historical insights, but also by his political reasoning, helped to gain a complete and comprehensive notion of the overall complexity of some important issues of our historical destiny. It has been known for a very long time that Čedomir Popov could talk about even the most difficult problems of his discipline in a very fluent, plain and interesting way. With his interviews and public appearances, he undoubtedly provided extremely

important contributions to the development of the Serbian culture of public opinion and the open dialogue. He understood historiography as a science within the traditional, ancient concept of being a teacher of life, and therefore used much of his creative energy to present the historiographical findings that contained serious and important political implications in a simple, more popular way. There are things that every citizen of this country must know literally, and this is necessary in order to be able to make the right decision at election events, one that is based on reliable insight and a clear consideration of political processes in society. By these activities of his, which were the most evident in his interviews or occasional lectures in scientific and cultural institutions, Popov sought to define himself as an engaged intellectual who wanted to help his national and social community to think scientifically, rightly and reasonably about the world in which we live and work. That is why his contribution to the culture of a valid process of thinking and open public dialogue is of the greatest possible significance. It is not necessary to be a historiographer in order to detect this, extremely important contribution of Čedomir Popov to Serbian social life, his political relations and the appropriate intellectual culture.

Translated from the Serbian by
Ljubica Jankov

SVETOZAR KOLJEVIĆ

ON OUR “GOLDEN WRECKAGES”

In the dining room of Žiža Monastery at the Feast of the Transfiguration in 2007, Đorđo Sladoje told us that he had “burst into both life and literature from Klinja near Ulog”.¹ Not only that the poet felt that he “burst” into literature from some godforsaken place, but some of us, his listeners, asked ourselves, not without much wondering, where the place called Klinja was, and Ulog too. This wondering showed that perhaps we are not always aware of the importance of the regional points of departure as some of the hallmarks of the entire history of Serbian culture. Isn't it right to say that regional points of departure mark, for instance, the enterprises of Vuk Karadžić and his poetic voices and (gusle) singers, as well as many of our greatest writers from Njegoš to Andrić and Crnjanski, from Jovan Dučić to Matija Bećković, Rajko Petrov Nogo and others? The regional hallmarks of Serbian culture are, by all means, closely connected to the favourable and less favourable turns that Serbian history took in the past. Dominant values were often fostered on the margins of foreign rule, and among those values there is what can be described, in Ranko Popović's words, as “a quivering sensibility to the present time and tradition alike”,² which is what Ranko Popović noticed about Đorđo Sladoje's poetic work. This two-fold sensibility to contemporaneity and tradition as the broadest characteristic of Serbian culture could be seen in the zealous revolt on 27 March 1941, in the same way it can be seen in our strong reactions to the loss of Kosovo or the exodus of the Serbs from Krajina.

¹ Đorđo Sladoje . . . „Žičko sloveč“, *Đorđo Sladoje, pesnik*: anthology, ed. Dragan Hamović, the National Library „Stefan Prvovenčani“, Kraljevo 2008, 15.

² Ranko Popović. *Zavjetno pamćenje pjesme*. Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Istočno Sarajevo 2007, 368.

In Sladoje's poetry, the "quivering sensibility" to contemporaneity and tradition can already be discerned in the poem entitled "A Reproach to the Homeland" („Pokuda zavičaju“) published at the forefront of his first collections of poems *The Insomnia Diary (Dnevnik nesanice)* in 1976. In this poem, Sladoje warns his reader about what contemporaneity holds for him, reminding him of the outlaws' surrounding of the then Ottoman border town Livno and literary destiny of the outlaw Starac Vujadin (Old Man Vujadin) and his two sons:

the Livno days are already closing in on you.³

In one of the following poems in this collection – again with an intriguing title "A Wasteland of Bluish Gray" – Sladoje alludes at the deceptiveness of the slogans on "brotherhood and unity" and "bright prospects":

On the top of the shed stands a raven, portending ill.⁴

And when the poet's forebodings started to come true at the beginning of the nineteen-nineties, Sladoje's language appears to have started hovering "between wakefulness and dreams", and the poet, in almost every line, awoken after having dreamt about a world more beautiful just before facing reality. The horror of the awakening is often expressed in grotesque contrasts, on the verge of some metaphysical humour. In the poem "The Horse Road", for example, published in the collection of poems *The Quiver Book* (1992), at the time when our political leaders started playing their political roles with great zeal. With a premonition of the impending horror, the poet ironically invokes childhood memories of some natural phenomena that he had witnessed. He advises us to make sure that we rely on "horse wit" rather than the human one:

Rely on your horse
While others choose leaders
The horse knows its way in the dark
And remembers the paths previously trodden.⁵

The world of grotesquely awoken childhood dreams, beyond the contemporary reality, is found everywhere in the collection of poems

³ „Evo dani lijevljani već dolaze po te.“ „Pokuda zavičaju“, *Dnevnik nesanice*, „Veselin Masleša“, Sarajevo 1976, 5.

⁴ „Gavran žedan crnog grakće vrh pojate.“ „Sinja pustoš“, *Dnevnik nesanice*, 7.

⁵ „A ti se drži konja, / dok drugi slede vođe: / On znade put iz mraka / I pamti kuda prođe.“ „Konjski put“, *Trepetnik*, SKZ, Beograd, 1992, 11.

Small Resurrections, published in 2006. In the poem *The Patching-up of Wings*, in which the poet patches “wings with flour and resin”, we catch a glimpse of deceptive hope that the poet can rise above “the evil lands”.⁶ This is done through a grotesque, hauntingly humorous contrast between the poet’s dreams and the surrounding reality, the contrast reflected in the premonition of what a patching-up can finally come to:

While I’m not growing new wings and am more likely to
grow a tail and hooves
Crows and mute sparrows still fly with ease.

In the same collection, the poet evokes the “sooty pearl” as a fond memory from the forever gone childhood:

Won’t it ever happen again

That a sooty pearl will shine in our black attic?⁷
Being more than a just childhood memory, “our black attic” is a place of historical importance evoking our ancient past as well as our present times that both point to our future.

In this world where there is a desperate longing for soot to “shine” in the attic as if it were a pearl, the poet’s dream visions found in the collection *Golden Wreckages* are also announced. In this collection, Sladoje turns, for the nth time, to the past, present and future and settles accounts of his poetic experience, at least temporarily. Already in the first poem, he dreams of the happy days when he wrote his first poem:

In my father’s home
In the light of a petroleum lamp
That, in my dreams, my mother’s hands
Still light up sometimes.⁸

The light and happiness in this memory cannot be compared to the circumstances in which his other poem was “slapped together”, “in the dark / Under God knows whose roof” while the war was raging and “a hail of machinegun bullets” was falling:

⁶ „Ne niču mi krila, pre će rep i papci / A još lete vrane i mutavi vrapci.“ „Krpjenje krila“, *Mala vaskrsenja*, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Istočno Sarajevo 2006, 91.

⁷ „Zar neće nikad više za veka ni za dana / Zasjati biser čađi sa našeg crnog tavana?“ „Zar nikad?“, *Mala vaskrsenja*, 68.

⁸ „U domu očevome / U sjaju petrojelke / Koju mi majčine ruke / Još kadkad u snu pale.“ „Pesme“, *Zlatne olupine*, Srpska književna zadruka, Beograd 2012, 7.

It poured from the devil's ladle
 On beggars and cats
 On scattered trees
 And a bunch of refugees.⁹

The question that arises here is whether the poet saw something more acceptable in the horror of war, which sows exile and death, than in the triumph of modern technology, in the "steppes of the screen", which he encounters next when writing his third poem! It reminds us to a large extent of the contemporary world so extraordinarily evoked in Matija Bećković's collection of poems *When I Am Younger*.

Some new nuances of Sladoje's humour, as the last line of defence before life, are contained in *Golden Wreckages* and in Biblical associations such as, for example, evoking the ancestral fault in the context of the rural and erotic "jumping over fences", an activity present in our folk poetry as well. The poem "Heaven's Fences" („Rajske tarabe") praises God's mercy for expelling the innocent Adam from the Garden of Eden because of Eve's sin, implying that the curse would have been more terrible had Eve been the only one expelled:

Then who would jump over Heaven's fences
 Until the end of the world?¹⁰

The biblical associations evoke our historical contemporary times as the time of the Judgement Day, after Christ's second resurrection, when we remain "in the fog", "unwilling and alone":

Just like penguins
 We are all Judas and Doubting Thomases –
 Neither do we know where to go
 Nor do we have anyone to go to.¹¹

The ending lines, in which Christ "lays his wound" on our wounds, "awaiting to finally / resurrect and start living"¹² talk of utter despair. Are we today the "living ones" that should resurrect and start living? In a similarly Biblical, or at least monastic atmosphere, the contemporary Kosovo, its near and ancient past, is evoked: "Simonida is blessed / for not being able to see this."¹³

⁹ „Lila iz vrazjeg kabla / Na božjake i mačke / Na poskitana stabla / I buljuk izbeglica.“ Ibid.

¹⁰ „Ko bi rajske tarabe / Doveka preskako?“ „Rajske tarabe“, *Zlatne olupine*, 14.

¹¹ „Baš kao pingvini / Sve Juda do Tome – / Niti znamo kuda / Nit imamo kome“ „I vaskrse Hristos“, *Zlatne olupine*, 29.

¹² „Svoju ranu privi / Čekajuć da najzad / Vaskrsnu i živi.“

¹³ „Blago Simonidi / što ovo ne vidi.“ „KiM“, *Zlatne olupine*, 27.

Finally, aside from the biblical allusions to our contemporaneity, this collection of poems also confronts us with an unusual humorous evocation of the times of foreign rule. The period of Ottoman rule is, for example, evoked by the image of Sultans who smoked tobacco “on soft mattresses” and ruled their people “without fear or force”: “Even the noose that (they) tightened was made of silk.”¹⁴ Is it strange then that there is no dilemma when it comes to choosing the best Sultan:

And the best of all the Sultans
Was the one who ruled for about sixty whole days.¹⁵

With a glint of similar bitter humour, the Serbs also dream about Hitler asking them with a “moustached smile”: “didn’t I put you to death?”, at the same time lamenting the ingratitude of his victims:

No matter what you do to them, they forget
And they forget us, the old masters of absolute horror!¹⁶

The humour that resides in the discrepancy between text and sub-text emanates from the poem *Summer Games*, which features throwing pebbles into “the abysmal pit” as a part of children’s play in order to hear the “echo” of the falling stone, but aside from the harmless echo, the whispering of a grandmother who remembers the horrors of war in our lands is also heard:

My child, you don’t know
The lives of souls
The clinking of skulls.¹⁷

In some other poems in the collection, there is a shift in focus towards the contrast between the idyllic past and problematic present-day Serbia as a sort of “golden wreckage”,¹⁸ the remnants of the dreams of love, history and political unity of the Southern Slavs. The “wreckages” of those “golden” visions are evoked in the lines that allude to Šantić’s Mostar:

¹⁴ „I kad stegnu gajtan on beše od svile.“ „Knjiga o sultanima“, *Zlatne olupine*, 24-25.

¹⁵ „A najbolji beše od sviju sultana / Onaj što je vlado šezdesetak dana.“

¹⁶ „Šta god učiniš oni zaborave / I nas stare meštre užasa i strave!“ „Ispravka o srpskim fašistima sa najvišeg mesta“, *Zlatne olupine*, 26.

¹⁷ „Ne znaš ti dijete moje / Kako žive duše / Kako lobanje zvone.“ „Letnje igre“, *Zlatne olupine*, 96.

¹⁸ „Zlatna olupina“, *Zlatne olupine*, 67.

A carnivorous plant is yawning in a jasmine garden:
 My dear old Aleksa, I am too old
 Even for your Mostar, let alone this one;¹⁹
 Oh, do not stay here – it is a piece of brotherly advice
 Take what is yours, then fly straight to heavenly spectres.²⁰

Finally, the destiny of modern-day Serbia is not only marked by literary, biblical, and historical associations but also by the inevitability of natural phenomena, which give it a transcendental meaning. In the same line, the powerless cicada, as the voice of its land and its natural surroundings, tries to “sing louder than crows”, but:

No one sings back to the cicada, there is no reassuring response
 Only roaring laughter coming from the ant-hill.²¹

What else can a man expect from the world other than roaring laughter? It is not much different at home, where toads are “croaking” in full voice – whether cosmopolites or patriots, intellectuals or politicians, whether in the media, in pubs or in the privacy of their homes:

God almighty, you created them into this world
 But why did you let them speak so loud tonight?²²

Haunting humor appears to be emanating from the lines of this collection, but, as Marko Paovica noticed earlier: “Đorđo Sladoje, even when he talks about the most sensitive national topic, does not have any anachronistic ambitions to represent anything or anyone but his poetic self.”²³

Translated from the Serbian by
Jovanka Kalaba

¹⁹ „O ne ostajte ovde – to vam je bratski savet / Zgrabite sledovanje pa u nebesku avet.“ „Mostarska elegija“, *Zlatne olupine*, 70.

²⁰ „U senci jasmína zeva mesožderka; / Moj dobri Aleksa već sam i ja postar / I za tvoj nekmoli za ovakav Mostar“ „Labudova pesma o golubovima“, *Zlatne olupine*, 93.

²¹ „Niko se ne javlja cvrčku nema utešnog znaka / Samo se grohot vraća iz kule mravinjaka.“ „Cvrčak“, *Zlatne olupine*, 91.

²² „Svemilosni Tvorče kad si ih već dao / Zašto si ih noćas tako raspevao?“ „Žabe“, *Zlatne olupine*, 94.

²³ Speech on the occasion of the launch of Đorđo Sladoje’s collection of poems *Golden Wreckages* (Srpska književna zadruga, Beograd 2012) at the Matica srpska on 5 December 2012.

MIROSLAV RADONJIĆ

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST SHAKESPEARE PERFORMANCE AMONG SERBS

On the occasion of the publication of the book
Shakespeare and Kostić in the Town of Novi Sad in 1864
by Hadži Zoran Lazin

“In April 1664, one hundred years had passed since Shakespeare’s birth. England was absorbed in congratulating Charles II, who had sold Dunkirk to the French for two hundred and fifty pounds sterling, and in looking at a skeleton that once was Cromwell gleaming white in cold wind and rain at the Tyburn execution site.

In April 1764, two hundred years after Shakespeare was born, England witnessed the early days of George III, a king destined for stupidity, whose councils and illegal one-on-one meetings aimed at devising a resistance politics to progress: first in America against freedom, than in France against democracy, the politics that, during the ministry of the Prime Minister Pitt alone, incurred a debt of eighty million pounds sterling.

In April 1864, three hundred years after Shakespeare was born, a memorial statue of Shakespeare was erected. It was belated, but good,” one of the greatest French writers, Victor Hugo, wrote in a book with a simple title – *Shakespeare*, in that same year.

That year in Novi Sad, on the twelfth evening of the month of May by the Gregorian calendar, a stream of enthusiasts, but of the curious also, flowed along the road to the Carica Jelisaveta Hotel, where the Serbian National Theatre performed on stage, to commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth with dignity and style.

It was a day filled in every way with excitement. Thirty-eight years after it had been founded to operate in Pest, the Matica srpska's executive council decided to relocate the seat of the Matica srpska permanently to Novi Sad. The steamboats „Napredak“ (“Progress”) and „Sloga“ (“Unity”), owned by Matica's renowned benefactor Jovan Forović from Veliki Bečkerek, and under the supervision of the president Pavle Kojić and the secretary Antonije Hadžić, carried sixty-one chests containing Matica's movable property – books, archives, paintings, and museum artifacts. Cannons fired salutes, bells rang out, and a crowd of people, not just from Novi Sad, stood in a packed line from the port all the way to the rear of Vladičanski dvor (Bishop's Palace) and shouted in exaltation. A mass was held in the Saborna crkva (Orthodox Congregational Church), followed by the first assembly meeting of the Matica srpska in Novi Sad. The bishop of Bačka, Platon Atanacković, was elected president, and he, in return, gave his home, Platoneum, to the Matica srpska for temporary use as its seat. Platoneum today, located in 6 Pašićeva Street, is the seat of a branch of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. This is why the commemoration of the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's birth at the Serbian National Theatre truly ended that day on a high note.

One hundred and fifty years had passed since 12 May 1864, before an anthology, that is, a collection of essays by various authors, entitled *Shakespeare and Kostić in the Town of Novi Sad in 1864* was published (by The Theatre Museum of Vojvodina – the Small Historical Society, Novi Sad 2014) (Pozorišni muzej Vojvodine – Malo istorijsko društvo). The collection was edited in the most appropriate and thorough manner by the assiduous Hadži Zoran Lazin. Therefore, we will not exaggerate if we say that, in the past century and a half, two events of such significance have not occurred in the same town and on the same day over the course of the entire cultural history of our people.

What exactly Zoran Lazin did do to snap us out of the melancholic remembrances of the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Shakespeare's birth and four hundredth anniversary of his death, of this seemingly ordinary event? We cannot agree with the argument of some people that the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's birth was commemorated all over the world in 1864. This is not true. It was commemorated in Stratford and London – we have read how Hugo saw it – in Paris and Weimar, where Goethe once founded the first society of admirers and researchers of Shakespeare's life and work – then in Imperial Vienna and in Novi Sad. Dates and facts speak on behalf of this claim. And Lazin's collection reminds us and informs us exactly of this: firstly, by reprinting a small book by Laza Kostić entitled *Memory of the Three Hundredth Anniversary of the Celebration of Shakespeare*

in *Novi Sad on St. George's Day in 1864* (the date of St. George's Day here was miscalculated and published in *Srbski dnevnik*, rashly but without bad intentions, on 19 April / 1 May 1864). The entire circulation was almost seized due to Laza Kostić's debts to the printer Konstantin Lazarević. Nevertheless, it was thanks to Kostić that a copy of this book still managed to reach Shakespeare's library in Stratford. This copy can be found even today, under the catalogue number 212/702, with a note on the cover page written by the librarian's hand: "The cover page is not in Russian, but in the Serbian language". The reprint in the aforementioned *Memory* is then followed by the translations of the first two scenes of *Richard III*, Act I by Jovan Andrejević Joles and Laza Kostić; a marvellous and analytical *In Memory of Shakespeare* by a young jurat Gligorije Giga Geršić; and *Epilogue*, written in verse by Laza Kostić, which Kostić recited that very evening.

It should be noted that Andrejević, a renowned doctor and literary author, died of tuberculosis only two months later, before turning thirty-one; Laza Kostić, already the author of *Maksim Crnojević*, was twenty-three, and Gligorije Giga Geršić, who was later to become a professor of the Roman and international law at Belgrade Higher School, then the Minister of Justice during the reign of Milan Obrenović and a member of the Serbian Learned Society (later the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts), was twenty-two.

We should also take this opportunity to remind ourselves that only a year after the events described in Lazin's book, Andrejević persuaded Đura Jakšić, who lived in Novi Sad at the time, to paint the famous "Death of Karađorđe". He then gave it to Andrejević as a present and a token of his gratitude for saving his only son from certain death, and it was Andrejević who arranged for it to be exhibited in the Serbian Reading Room. The journal *Danica* noted at the time that: "(We are happy that) one of our best young writers excels also in the field of painting and that there is no doubt that Jakšić's name will become famous all over the world. This painting is owned by doctor Andrejević from Novi Sad, whom we thank for the public display of the painting."

This provides an interesting opportunity to compare the first quatrain from the Andrejević Joles and Kostić's translation of *King Richard III* with its modern counterpart by Živojin Simić and Sima Pandurović.

Gloster: Sad, posle zime naše zlovolje

I leto sijnu suncem Jorkovim.

Oblaci, što na dom naš padoše

Utonuše u morske dubine.

(Andrejević – Kostić)

Compared to:

Gloster: Jorkovo se sunce našeg jada stud

U divno leto pretvorilo sad
I mrgodni nam oblaci nad domom
Utonuše u nedra okeana.
(Simić – Pandurović)

In the same way we know that on 3 April 1948, on the occasion of the official opening of the Yugoslav Drama Theatre with Cankar's *The King of Betajnova*, the first line was uttered by Branko Pleša, I find it worth remembering – at least in the history of the Serbian theatre – that the first (above quoted) lines were uttered on 30 April / 12 May 1864 by none other than Laza Telečki from Kumane himself!

It is no accident (if there can be any such thing in Shakespeare's case) that Shakespeare had decided to write Richard III. Namely, Richard III, the Duke of Gloucester took shelter near Shakespeare's birthplace Stratford, in famous Coventry, after the decisive Battle at Bosworth.

The next, famous contribution is again by Laza Kostić, entitled *Romeo and Juliet – A Proposal for Domesticating Shakespeare among the Serbian people*, published in Novi Sad in 1866 on the occasion of the commemoration of the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Shakespeare's death. This would cause acrimonious and cruel contestations of Kostić's work by Jovan Skerlić and Bogdan Popović which lasted until he died in 1910. Before the 1940's, Laza Kostić did not receive widespread acclaim from literary historians for the relevance of his work. The text which then follows in Lazin's book is about a translation by Laza Kostić of one of Shakespeare's sonnets entitled "Moja Poeta", which appeared in 1864, most likely as the contamination of the 76th and 38th sonnets, as Luko Paljetak, one of the most notable translators of Shakespeare's Sonnets, says in a precious and, above all, analytical explanatory interpretation.

The Academician Predrag Palavestra, in the short text which follows speaks about the need, more precisely about the necessity of performing Shakespeare's works on the Serbian stage. The collection concludes, logically, with a passage from Miodrag Radović's book about Laza Kostić entitled *Shakespeare – god upon the Olympus of poetry*. Radović tells in a documented and studious manner of the influence of William Shakespeare on the entire creative work of Laza Kostić, asserting that Kostić's *Maksim Crnojević* is none other than our *Hamlet*.

At the beginning of the book there is an editorial statement in which, by valuable and unobtrusive clues, Zoran Lazić explains the necessity and significance of reprinting the aforementioned texts and the publishing the book at the present moment.

Additionally, while remembering these works, it is worth noting that a lot of the facts about William Shakespeare remain unrevealed to us. Firstly, we don't know exactly how many plays he wrote, nor in

what order. We can come to some conclusion about what he read, but we don't know where he obtained books, nor what happened to them later. Although he left behind nearly a million words, only fourteen of them were written by his own hand – six signatures and the words “By me” in his testament. Not one message or letter has been preserved, not a page of handwriting. Some experts consider that one part of the play *Sir Thomas More*, which has never been performed, was written by Shakespeare's hand, but that is not in any way certain. He left behind no personal description. The first textual portrait: “He was a handsome man of imposing stature: always pleasant in company and of very pleasant and keen spirit” was written sixty-four years after his death by John Aubrey, who was born ten years after it.

In conclusion, let us not forget the most important fact that the book is dedicated to the contributions of Prof. Dr. Dušan Mihailović, one of the best known Shakespearean scholars of our time.

However, all this does not prevent us from addressing some words of appreciation to Hadži Zoran Lazin for his idea to commemorate the most famous events of the life “of the swan upon the Avon” in this book, but also to one of his first translators and advocates in our land – Laza Kostić.

The ones considered competent in the past century and a half appear not to have learned their lesson, having forgotten Dušan Matić's timeless reminder that the “past lasts for a long time”.

Because “in the beginning there was passion,” says Laza Kostić, “and the passion was the poet, and whatever happened, it was passion.”

And the rest – “the rest is silence,” says Hamlet. After all, “Shakespeare was the greatest creator after God himself,” writes Victor Hugo without reservation.

Translated from the Serbian by
Jovanka Kalaba

WHAT SHAPES A MAN

Dragan Velikić, *Islednik* [The Investigator].
Laguna, Belgrade 2015.

On the one hand, Dragan Velikić's *Investigator* can be read as a didactic novel, as a history of the sentimental, or rather melancholic education of a man. The main protagonist, who is at the same time the narrator of the novel, finds himself in this world owing to circumstances beyond his control, as we all do, the ones that Rastko Petrović talks about in his poem "The Secret of Birth". This secret defies every rational explanation, and the main protagonist feels compelled at one point to ask himself who he is and what "he" means in his particular case; since he is who he is, why it is the case, and if he could somehow have been someone else, and different.

So, what shapes a man?

In his novel *The Investigator*, Dragan Velikić answers the key question of the entire modernist literature that represented and interpreted the human identity from all possible, sometimes barely imaginable perspectives. The author does this by putting forward and developing various kinds of conscious and subconscious formative influences as the themes that run through the novel, starting from the family story, the fate that befalls his parents, through a deeper background, the society, ideology, art, a clearly determined geographical space and historical time, to the enigma of genetic heritage that is resolved in every man's individual existence. Starting from the story of the mother, returning repeatedly to several questions and details in her fictionalized biography

whose profound significance is not disclosed before the moments of the narrator's heightened self-awareness and self-identification, Velikić's story branches into several story lines that provide a panorama of an era. It practically embraces the entire past century, from the eve of the Great War to our days, to the catastrophe and the social fall that we are witnessing today and whose consequences we continue to suffer, without much hope that we will be delivered any time soon.

In his efforts to interpret perhaps the crucial moving force of every narrative striving to give answers to the questions of identity – the relationship between the father and the son, the archetypal, Biblical, Nietzschean relation crucial for the self-understanding of every thinking creature – Danilo Kiš claimed that writing to your mother is an impossible endeavor due to the insurmountable emotional closeness that defies verbalization. If we expand on this thought, we can say that whatever you say about the mother is still too far from being enough, which is why the mother is seen as a godlike creature situated in the metaphysical domain, and the absence of the father and not the mother is what gets the story going. Dragan Velikić, however, set out on a journey to investigate the nature of his autofictional protagonist by examining this, in terms of fictional tackling risky motherly presence and less expected and less exploited but definitely the deepest, wordless human connection between a mother and her child, disregarding the ever-present danger of crossing the thin line between an intimate confession and a repetition of commonplaces. While trying to come to terms with his or her own emotional and existential baggage, each one of us in fact repeats the ancient, anthropologically coded story told countless times about man's fate, of existence as a fall, of suffering without guilt or reason, of the inhospitality of the earthly world regardless of the times and place a man is living in.

Dragan Velikić's *The Investigator* escapes the abovementioned latent danger of a repetition of commonplaces by turning the story about the mother into a branching, suggestive and layered chronicle of the caprices of the recent history as well as of the immediate present times. The novel tells a story of a sometimes visible and sometimes invisible interdependence of people's destinies, whose interconnectedness beyond rational comprehension actually keeps the world together, constructs it in a way that only art can, making it whole and unique, suggesting that no matter how chaotic, random, cruel and immoral this world, the only known world, is inside, it is still worth living. The closing letter that the narrator sends to his mother into eternity, telling her that he will be joining her when the time, which is running out, is right, is the

story's return to its core, its deepest motivational point; the meaning is discovered, the self is realized, the existential truth is revealed, the circle is closed. If the success of a novel depends on its ending, on the way it opens (or not) a new, universal horizon of meaning and self-reflection reaches an optimal existential credibility that is inevitably passed on to the reader, then we can say that *The Investigator*'s final chord entirely meets this criterion. In other words, the ending of Velikić's novel places it among the works of fiction of extraordinary worth.

If we look at it more broadly, we can say that the novel *The Investigator* resolves inadvertently a problem equation with two unknowns (I say inadvertently since it may not have been the author's intention when he was writing the novel, and precisely this incidental overcoming of the initial idea is the core of every real art) that keeps repeating itself regularly in contemporary narratives of Serbian and other European literatures and seeks to become first the dominant, and then a stereotype. On the one hand, a novel is seen as a socially engaged, crypto-ideological form, as a means to appeal to public consciousness through a certain level of aestheticization as well as politicization and to perform an ethical reconstitution by means of words, and, at the same time, such model of a novel, turned to the outside, understands and builds itself by default as a space of de-traumatization, in other words purification and liberation from the temptation and suffering that history and politics shower us with so generously.

On the other hand, there is the self-analytical novel, the novel as a brutal self-confession, resembling a black box in which one pours out and keeps all the things that, as Pekić says and Velikić adopts as *The Investigator*'s motto, "one confesses to no one". In brief, it is a narrative form turned to the inside, centering on the narrative "I" that self-examines, leaving the world, as much as it is possible, behind. Many novels nowadays can be easily classified in either of the two categories, which is a fact that says very little about their literary worth – both categories are legitimate and are, I dare say, in circulation that almost has a mechanical quality. Velikić's novel *The Investigator* is, by contrast, a product of a recognizable artistic manufacture, an original work with a rare authorial seal, with a successfully achieved balance between the personal and the general, the particular and the universal, the intimate and the public, the epic and the lyrical. The traditional novel teaches us that the worth and the importance of the form shows in a well told story that, in the process of narrating itself, implies and, in an Alexandrian way, constantly evokes other stories. In the novelistic hyperproduction nowadays, relatively rare books such as Velikić's *The*

Investigator confirm that it is still the case and, the way things are, it seems that literature will for sure not depart from this rule in the future. A novel is a great story that makes life deeper, more meaningful, more beautiful, more worthy... feel free to continue this positive series.

Period. Precisely as in the case in question.

Mihajlo PANTIĆ

Translated from the Serbian by
Jovanka Kalaba

WHEN DAY BREAKS AND THE NIGHT ENDS ...

Filip David, *Kuća sećanja i zaborava* [The House of Memories and Forgetfulness]. Laguna, Belgrade 2014

Filip David's novel begins with noise created by a locomotive – in other words, with a film sequence skillfully used by directors such as F. F. Coppola or S. Spielberg, as an indication of upcoming evil or blood racing through the veins of heroes before they get up the courage to go through with a deadly deed. The noise in the mentioned novel opens up the issue of memories, nightmares, and an uncertain and frightening journey. The novel also ends with the noise, but while the hero, Albert Vajs, experiences death as a way of finally uniting with the family he lost when he was just a boy – the noise increases and becomes deafening. If we observe F. David's novel, *The House of Memories and Forgetfulness*, as a literary elaboration on the subject of evil and crime, more precisely – one of the worst events in the 20th century – the Holocaust – we might be able to interpret the noise as a metaphor of just that unfathomable, dark state defying description which resides in the minds of individuals and spreads like a fatal infectious disease among the masses.

As the narrator himself says at the beginning of the novel, evil is the main preoccupation of Albert Vajs and his friends, who survived due to sheer luck what millions of their countrymen did not, but it defies logic. Beginning with the "Introduction" ("From the Journal of Albert Vajs") and throughout the novel, Filip David's fantastic discourse develops skillfully into an idea regarding the existence of dark forces that rule the world and cannot be explained by way of historical or psychological processes (for example, *The Anatomy of Human De-*

structiveness by Erich Fromm), or even sociological conditionality (for example, *People of the Lie* by Scott Peck), but with laws of the supernatural which overstep the boundaries of not only exactness but also experiments in metaphysics and analyses of cabbalistic writings. The one closest to comprehending evil, Albert Vajs's friend Solomon Levi, dies under mysterious circumstances, and the event in Auschwitz in which two prisoners disappear without a trace – one of which, Albert's father, wanders through unknown dimensions and spaces, leave the reader in a deep state of pessimism due to a lack of an adequate (final) solution, which would, according to Cvetan Todorović, a theorist of fantastic literature, support the reading process which moves in the direction of the wondrous, logically inexplicable. That is to say, at the very beginning of his journal Albert Vajs writes:

However, when it comes to the crime itself, the theory on the banality of evil, given by Hannah Arendt after Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem, was repeated by most. Many of the speakers emphasized how, after this realization, Mrs. Arendt was finally able to sleep peacefully, convinced that a crime of such proportions as the Holocaust will never be repeated, which otherwise might be the case if evil were something metaphysical, beyond human comprehension.

On occasion, the author sets aside theoretical questions regarding the nature of heinous acts and deals with individual cases: the experiences of Vajs's family; the Volksdeutsche couple Johan and Ingrid Kraft, whose only son drowned in the Danube; the case of a child possessed by demons and his father who exploits the situation for financial gain; and the stories of Uriel Cohen, whose mother was raped and molested and who is experiencing a deep identity crisis and the phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred, similar to guards in the death camps. It seems that in places where crimes are set before the reader *in vivo* there is no room for literary enhancement, only data, documents, the bare facts. How else would you describe the confinement of a girl who suffers heinous attacks from the man entrusted with her care? How do you tell the story of the crimes committed in the Banjica concentration camp without turning to the documents for help, to some other voice or written testimony, a cruel statistic which will tell us that reality often surpasses literature on the subject of horror? This calls to mind Kiš's powerlessness to describe a scene from his childhood in which the mother, who is sewing the yellow star on her son and husband, tries to find the perfect spot like some skillful seamstress. Hence the journals, testimonies, letters, hence an entire carefully guarded pile of press clippings on the atrocities people are capable of inflicting on one another.

And finally, to counterbalance (perhaps even mock) rational thoughts on evil, the road leads towards the phantasmal – dreams, visions, cabbalistic writings which open up parallel worlds that are not there – alas – to enable, likewith the inquisition fugitive from the novel *Pilgrims of the Earth and the Sky*, wondrous experiences on an uncertain journey that will pave the way to new cognitive spheres and be a constant reminder to Vajs of his personal Holocaust and collective fate of his people; the horrific experience caused not only by the madness of the human mind but also demonic forces which can possess any of us; the undead, unburied souls and shadows which interfere with life, determining its course. *The darkness of the soul has no address*, wrote Mirko Kovač in a letter to David. Indeed, it seems that the author of the novel *The House of Memories and Forgetfulness* effectively alternated this sentence throughout the entire novel, leaving the reader speechless before images of pain and suffering, before the narrated life of Albert Vajs, who spends his entire life waiting for his brother Elijah, in spite of knowing he had lost him forever.

The survival of the main character is subject to coincidence and fate, just like in the case of Miša Volf, who is convinced he is the lawful child of the Brankov couple until it becomes known that he is Jewish, left in the care of this Serbian family in order to survive. For Miša, the basis for the credibility of his background lies not so much in his parents' letters, which were dug up after almost half a century, but rather in the mystical music. Miša continues composing at the exact same place where his father stopped and this is definitely one of the most moving moments in this novel – a scene worthy of an outstanding movie, in which the son, standing before the likely grave of his parents, performs a violin piece entitled *When Day Breaks*. Music, just like the word, is a frequent connection to the world of the deceased, a link to their souls:

The professor bowed and carefully placed a bouquet of flowers on top of the tumulus. He stood there for a few moments in silence. Then he took out a violin out of the case he was holding under his arm. He began playing the composition *When Day Breaks* exactly the way his father, Avram Volf, wrote it and included the part he, Miša Volf, later added. This was now a completed, rounded melody, a fulfilled obligation of honoring his father and everyone else who was sent to their death from this spot.

The structural framework of the novel is comprised of several parallel stories about Jews living in Serbia. David presents the reader with an omnibus of incredible adventures, dreams, journal entries, letters, and testimonies. The smooth transitions from first to third person, from a world of authentic references to a world of cabbalistic discourse,

from utterly mimetic writing (like Johan Kraft's story) to somnambulism and legerdemain (like the episode in Auschwitz) is proof of the mastery of the writer who has been diligently dealing with evil demons for years in an attempt to tame and master them. Hence the steady walk along the meanders of the invisible, the confidence to bring the reader into a state of numbness and ultimately, the choice of narrating style enabling him to tell the story as efficiently, concisely and briefly as possible, to give a threadbare sketch, as if drowning, and narrate something that would suffer from claustrophobia in long sentences and detailed descriptions.

In the end, the hybrid identity of Vajs (his Sephardi/Ashkenazi descent, which is based on the biography of the author) is a guarantee of his endurance and strength to survive the greatest temptations and resist the dark visions that haunt him, all the while knowing that they could hold the answers to questions regarding the fate of his family. This is why Vajs copes so well with his partial identity, the memory gaps, the noise in his head. Besides Miša Volf, who finds out about his ethnicity late in life, at a point when he is already an elderly man, he is the only other character in the novel who is characterized by growth and delving into the inner life; like Solomon Levi, converted traitor of the Jewish people who reveals his true identity in the end, he is the only one prepared to search for the answer to evil. With the death of Solomon Levi/Ruben Rubenovič and the destruction of the documents, it becomes clear that the answer will not be found. The nightmarish life of Vajs makes it clear that evil is, nevertheless, closer to our senses than expected.

The wondrous house of memories and forgetfulness in which the hero lives for a short period of time (or his entire life?) is that private area which confirms that our *now* is indeed the process which takes place while we think about yesterday and make plans for tomorrow. What remains at the end, besides ashes and suffering? Hope for the new day remains, just like in the composition of Avram and Miša Volf, and of course, the story – as a warning which is passed on, by movies or literature, and thus ensures memory. With this novel, which was rightfully crowned with the NIN Award, Filip David joined the list of Serbian authors who, like Danilo Kiš, Erih Koš, Aleksandar Tišma, Frida Filipović and Judita Šalgo, found a way to turn their (or someone else's) bitter experiences into superb novelistic literature.

Dragana V. TODORESKOV

Translated from the Serbian by
Persida Bošković

THROUGH CONTRAST IN MOTION TO MEDITATIVENESS

Dragan Jovanović Danilov, *Simetrija vrtloga* [Vortex Symmetry].
Kulturni centar Novog Sada, Novi Sad 2014

Whenever a new book of poetry is written by Dragan Jovanović Danilov (in this case *Vortex Symmetry*), the person interpreting the poems is under obligation to register everything that comprises the poet's invariability in poetry, as well as everything resembling innovation, because such a "collision" always accompanies his poetic direction.

In view of that, the poet's adherence to Modernism and Post-symbolism is still evident, and it is manifested in key, dominant words such as: words, silence, shadows, infinity, (in)access, along with the earlier symbols, which as a whole transform into true phantasms and psychodominant books through sound play, dialogues, images and emotions, but once again they are expressed in an unusual, strangely surreal setting.

Danilov's new book of poetry needs to be observed through a prism of identity, since the motto of the book is the forethought of artist Tijana Kojić, which points to the following levels of meaning: "it seems that... identity is a map without a territory. How many identities can be ascribed to us?", and in turn forces us to tie his verses to today's (un)reality, tradition, as well as the past and spirituality, which is actually the content framework of the book we have before us.

Based on all of the above, one can assume that contrast, opposite-ness, and counterpoint represent the poet's already accepted techniques, whose forms are often unusual (Shklovsky), as well as overly contradictory and intentionally oxymoronic (for example, the poem *Kavez*

[The Cage], although befitting of the book title (“vortex”) and the attributes of the poet’s and our reality, which has not been so in a long time, but rather only an illusion of reality.

Looking at the introductory title poem, we can already single out verses which manifest both contrast and the question of identity. For example, the counterpoint between words and shadows (“The most accurate words were uttered by the shadows”; “silent shadows have the last word”), whilst we can detect the poet’s circumstances in the need to escape (“no words of comfort / can protect you from reality”). We can make out the image of the poet’s status and the poet’s home at the end of the mentioned poem (it is not the flutter of the leaves / but me, silent in my words. / Like a mole, I dig linguistic tunnels: / Once in a while I come out for air, / Trembling, / I’m torn, and this is the only state / in which I am sovereign”); as well as in the poem *Olovne reči* [Leaden Words]: “leaden words are like our homeland: dusk / is like our language”, although the intonation is slightly different and gloomier. Thus, language is the poet’s life. Just as Auden pointed out: “A poet is, before anything else, a person who is passionately in love with language.”

In addition, contrasts between words and their multilayered meanings flow throughout the book. Words can be “cheap”, “simple”, “leaden”, “too weak for the task given them”, but also “words no living person will ever utter”, “words heavier than an anvil”, “bloody words”. Words, in full contrast, are both the boundary between life and death and their symbol (“these souls and bodies of ours / miserable, stay alive as long as words still cause them unrest” – from the poem *Svetska ekonomska kriza u Beogradu* [The Global Economic Crisis in Belgrade]; “They’ve already uttered to each other / words that will take them to the other world” – from the poem *Ambis* [The Abyss]).

There is also unusual and exchangeable synergy within the specified contradiction in the aforementioned relationship between life and death (“beginning and end”). For instance, the unusual but convincing meditations within the same poem *Ono što vide mrtvi* [What the Dead See]: “It’s clear I don’t exist without the dead”, “The dead are dead because they have pulled out / from within all the words that might / pronounce them alive”, as well as the poem *Seobe poročnog sina* [Migrations of a Prodigal Son]: “I too was created by the dead”. In such collusion, the relationship between the eternal and the fleeting is also one and the same, that is, it is vigorously interchangeable, much the same as in the writings of Gundulić (“that which is forever, is fleeting: / that which is once lasts forever: the beginning and the end”). But, in the poem *Moje grobno mesto* [My Burial Plot], the poet insists on the detection of the perishable and the current, histrionic and unnatural phenomena and needs, mercantile zugzwangs, imposed illusions and

utopias (no matter how they present themselves and regardless of the manifested splendor, concealing the original hypostasis), as well as the inevitability of man's departure without return, which awaits us all. Especially in these times. We are in such a strong embrace, here and now, powerless, and above all: "nothing of this world is ours. // Discord and faith, greed and power, everything is fleeting."

And when it comes to spirituality, we see in only one poem, *Čuvar stada* [Guardian of the Flock], the poet's distrust and suspended indecision, and Kant's "ambiguity" within an imposed illusion, due to which priority is always given to the road going from distrust to ultimate verification. The poem begins with the verse: "I don't believe in you, God", and after accepting the next encoding image ("if you are a woman who / breastfeeds a child on one breast and everything else on the other"), and the final verse begins with an honest confession: "I feel you without even thinking who you are".

Thus, as suggested in the very title of the book, the poet emphasizes that both words and shadows are in motion (like on a stage). So everything is moving. And somewhat in a state of consequential instability. Both our life and our identity. More precisely, "a split identity", as befits the current situation of homelessness ("us who have no home"), senselessness ("Much the same as a snowstorm, you are not in reality, / my heart"), a feeling of redundancy ("socially irrelevant"), rejection ("me against the world"), and above all a lack of emotion ("where there is no love, there can be nothing"; "The grain of love ripens no more, fractured / is the tectonic plate"). Self-awareness of today's protagonists is characterized by duality ("In the mirror there is someone who is forced to look like me") and a perpetual state of questioning and insecurity ("Is my city the one I left / or the one I'm heading for"). Ambiguity and lack of self-confidence are therefore both of a personal and global nature.

The verses: "Dead man rise! / Everything you thought you knew / about yourself is wrong" indicate that their "symbolic basis is one of Christ's miracles – raising Lazarus of Bethany from the dead", as concluded by the author of the prologue, Mileta Aćimović Ivkov. Although, they could also be interpreted as Pindar's premise – a message to a lost and wandering, perforce, individual: "Brother, just be / become who you are" and like Kant's similar imperative invitation: "Use your own reason", not forgetting the already mentioned term ambiguity, which is more than distinctive of a nightmare, chaos and a vortex, which we are living in the illusion of life.

However, another characteristic of Danilov's newest book of poetry is that the space between binomial poles, between the holy and the profane, between the label and the labelled, between freedom and force,

between a poet and his double (within him and outside of him), is not static, but rather, I repeat, in constant, spinning and spiralling movement – a vortex. That is, movements are our fate and misfortune. We are movement (“far from history / my migrations are taking place, within me, / they’ve never been on the outside”); an ambivalent, fulminant, spiralling movement, bearing numerous semantic guidelines, which cannot be listed or explained in only one critical review. Besides, movement or migrations are the title of a cycle by the already mentioned artist, Kojić (her painting is on the cover), emphasizing the thematic connotation of large-scale movements (and not only individual movements, currently ours), as well as the especially significant layers and imprints of the metatextual.

In this book of poetry, we witness vigorous contradiction and constant concatenation of not only the expected Manichaeian level, but also interactive surreal playfulness of words and shadows, eternity and fleetingness, life and death, the ephemeral and the divine, the sensual and the spiritual, empirical and metaphysical which, as a whole, give poetic discourse multi-layered meaning and meditateness, whereby the poet picturesquely and experientially expounds himself, us and our (unfortunate) times.

Aleksandar B. LAKOVIĆ

Translated from the Serbian by
Persida Bošković

TRADING PLACES

Ivana Dimić, *Arzamas*. Laguna, Belgrade 2016

What is “Arzamas”? This is a question almost every potential reader will ask after reading the title of the novel by Ivana Dimić. The solution to the “enigma” is given on the very first page of the book, in a paratext which is more of a symbolically presented sum of what follows in the narrative, and less of a motto in the usual sense of the word. So:

Count Tolstoy came to Arzamas to purchase a large merchant estate and almost sealed the deal. He spent the night at the merchant’s home and suddenly, in his sleep, he felt a sense of horror. Death whispered in his ear: you’re afraid of me; joy and death – that’s the “Arzamas horror.

With these words of Viktor Shklovsky (*Energy of Delusion*), Ivana Dimić signifies that the meaning of her unusually composed novel will be intertwined with intense and contemplative questions which life imposes on us regarding love and death, but immediately after, the author decides on an almost completely unexpected theme, very rare in Serbian literature – the relationship between daughter and mother. This type of relationship, existentially founded, assigned to us by our mere existence, layered, contradictory and, correspondingly, unequivocally difficult to describe and not subject to conventional narrative form, was somehow left on the sidelines by Serbian authors, both those from the past and recent times. While, for example, relationships between son and father or father and son (depending on who is observing

and describing the relationship), though less between son and mother, represent, so to speak, a general theme and a biblically codified trigger for many works of literature throughout all literary epochs, from the Romantic period to present day, in Serbian prose an astonishingly small number of pages were written about how a mother experiences her daughter or how a daughter experiences her mother.

The answer to the question why this is so is neither simple nor one-dimensional and it should definitely be preceded by research in many areas, beginning with the nature of the culture itself, followed by a description and interpretation of the poetics of prose or characteristics of the literary system and finally, a review of the status and type of narrative subject from the standpoint of psychoanalysis, gender and narratology. In writing *Arzamas*, Ivana Dimić did not have the intention of dealing with this kind of problematics, but the artistic suggestiveness of her narration nevertheless opened up a discussion on the basic issues of this type as well. (Just like the town name of *Arzamas*, which was chosen as a symbolically indicative title of the novel, independently of the author's intentions, brings to mind a historical fact that, during the Stalin era, this Russian town was erased off the geographical map and turned into a closed off zone for scientists who were making an atomic bomb. And here we have one more collateral, "accidental" meaning which further emphasizes the force with which light and dark sides of life collide. Horror, obviously, surpasses individual thoughts and fates. And it never comes alone.)

The narration in *Arzamas* flows by rotating passages of drama, dialogue and prose essays. In the first and more extensive, a dominant story is formed about a mother with dementia who after a long, nine-year illness leaves this world, and a daughter who willingly makes a sacrifice in the name of love and cares for her. There's the "trading places", the inversion which, to a great extent, helps us to understand the depth of the described relationship. Over time, the mother with dementia turns into a mindless child and the daughter, who gradually resigns herself to the situation life dished out for her, becomes a caring, in a way "motherly", caregiver to her own mother. This primary part of the Romanesque plot combines darker and lighter tones, sometimes absurd and other times comical, which help to ease the inevitability of the end and accept it more easily. And thus, in a perceptively shifted – at the same time surprising when it comes to Serbian fiction – and inventive fashion Ivana Dimić's *Arzamas* repeats an ancient form of narration similar to reporting on someone's life: everything begins with birth, everything ends with death. Everything in-between is the human life span. It induces the story, "asks" to be described, or better yet, to

be subsequently epiphanically and cathartically illuminated and imaginatively reshaped, with the intention of using the fiction form to understand life as much as its linguistic presentation will enable us to understand.

And while all the complexities of love and (mis)understandings between two close, yet very different souls, one of which is at the zenith and the other the end of her life, are being presented in dramatic, colloquial form and an imminent marginal situation, key existential issues are reflected upon in contemplative fragments of prose, which are sometimes confessional and other times poetic. These fragments, which are characteristic of prose by Ivana Dimić, are of course symbolically, indirectly connected to the main story. They are, in fact, its second face, better yet its jointed segment or indirect, metonymic inner side. It's important to note that the basic plot comprises day-to-day activities, from seemingly quite ordinary conversations between the mother, daughter and episodic characters (doctor, lawyer, plumber, director and so on), while the poetic fragments or refurbished short stories move away from immediate reality, representing a special kind of pensive counterpoint or commentary with respect to the incomprehensibility and difficulty of life which is ruled by Thanatos despite the redeeming power of unquestioning love.

Unlike the drama part, which is narrated from an omniscient position, the prose, poetic and essayistic fragments are written by the heroin who is a (drama) writer. Her mother's approaching death occupies so much of her time, emotions and thoughts that she slowly builds a kind of parallel existence, and moves into dreams, fiction, writes about history, philosophy, nature, poetry and with hints that her mother is nearing her end, she turns to writing more and more about the fate of Emily Dickinson, and although she does not identify with her, it helps her to find at least some sort of comfort and gain a better understanding of herself. Due to the gravity of the expected, inevitable outcome as well as the manner in which it was formed, the ending of the story, following her mother's departure into eternity, is so suggestive that it should be cited in its entirety:

SOLITUDE

It's still very hot. Blinds are pulled down in all the windows and the apartments are dim. The city is quite deserted, wrapped in pleasant silence. Only the air conditioners are working hard to create artificial coolness, releasing water like sweaty slaves. Puddles evaporate quickly, making the asphalt flutter in the distance. Grapes have appeared in the marketplace.

Describing her own understanding of the narrative form in an interview, Ivana Dimić said: “I think that the way a sentence is arranged is crucial to the story, the point is to find the proper melody and rhythm, as well as to appropriately communicate profoundness and emotionality. In a good narrative each word stands in a unique and perfectly harmonious spot.” This standpoint can be applied quite well in the analysis of the mentioned fragment; the position of each word is unyielding.

By intersecting horizontal day-to-day life with the vertical thoughts of the narrator, who is searching for answers beyond the limits of this world to which she belongs and is condemned to live in, and which she accepts with effort and resistance despite the prevailing difficulty subdued by reason, the author opens up another, deeper level of meaning – *Arzamas* transpires as a multilayered life story worthy of being told. From a seemingly unpretentious, certainly readable, at times humorous, unassuming, deeply personal story about the most difficult existential conditions and issues, the novel imperceptibly – and this imperceptibility is an important quality and criterion of good narrative prose – moves into a sphere of social universality without which there is no successful novel or true art. Last but certainly not least, Ivana Dimić’s *Arzamas* proves unequivocally that art begins at the crossing point from individuality to generality, the moment when, due to the power of imagination and corresponding expression, an ordinary story which, in some form, some fashion is lived by every living being, becomes our story as well. In this respect, we can say that a successful novel is a special, always newly discovered language form which gives insight into the meaning (lessness) of the world and human nature; a novel is, both collectively and individually, a fictional reinterpretation, or universalization of man’s characteristics, both when he possesses them and when he doesn’t.

Told in a compressed, efficient manner of a drama, constantly shifting from a comically absurd to a melancholic tone, thus undefined with regard to genre, the novel *Arzamas* by Ivana Dimić is an unusual, exquisite fugue of prose about love and death, in which love, in spite of death, represents the force which atones for and designs life.

Mihajlo PANTIĆ

Translated from the Serbian by
Persida Bošković

COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF VESELIN KOSTIĆ

Veselin Kostić, *Britanija i Srbija: kontakti, veze i odnosi 1700-1860*
[Great Britain and Serbia: contacts, connections and relations
1700–1860]. Arhipelag, Belgrad 2014

Professor Veselin Kostić is without a doubt among our greatest Anglicists, with an impressive list of works. He has published several books on the history of English literature, mainly about the works of William Shakespeare: *Šekspirov život i svet* (1978) [Shakespeare's Life and World]; *Hamlet Viljema Šekspira* (1982) [William Shakespeare's Hamlet]; *Stvaralaštvo Viljema Šekspira I-II* (1994) [The Creativity of William Shakespeare]; and *Šekspirova dramaturgija* (2010) [Shakespeare's Dramaturgy]. Each of these books represents a date in the history of our Shakespeare studies, especially the two-volume study *The Works of William Shakespeare*, which would do honor to Shakespeare studies in much larger countries with longer cultural traditions.

Veselin Kostić's other field of interest is comparative literature – the relation between South Slav and English culture and literature. And again, he published books on the subject which are unsurpassed when it comes to wealth of information, comprehensiveness and systematic analysis. His most significant work in this field is the book *Kulturne veze između jugoslovenskih zemalja i Engleske do 1700* (1972) [Cultural Connections between Yugoslav Countries and England up to 1700]. This book is the crown and climax of his yearlong interest in the relations between Britain and Serbia/Yugoslavia.

The book is divided into four chapters: "Soldiers", "Travelers", "Diplomats" and "Literature".

The chapter on soldiers includes a wealth of information on the presence of British soldiers – English and especially Irish and Scottish, in wars that were fought on territories populated by Serbs, beginning with the final years of the 15th century to the end of the Austro-Ottoman wars towards the end of the 18th century. Many Britons joined the Austrian army during the siege and conquest of Buda – mercenaries, refugees fleeing religious persecution and dynastic struggles, many of whom were noblemen. Some even left written records on their warfare, and information about them can be found in numerous official reports as well. They come within the sphere of our history as participants of events which shaped the history of Central Europe, even ours, over a period of three centuries. Their participation was not unknown, but V. Kostić gives a comprehensive overview of their presence and activities, filling in numerous gaps in previously gathered information by using British sources for the most part. This data is quite interesting, sometimes even excellent material for a historical adventure novel. It also represents significant secondary literature on the history of this period because it includes descriptions of military operations which are not always found in other sources. The presence of the Britons, mostly the Irish and Scots, in the wars fought in our region during this period ends with the First Serbian Uprising. During the uprising of the Serbs against the Ottoman Empire, a contingent of Russian soldiers came to the aid of the Serbs, and both in 1810 and 1811 took part in the battles against the Ottomans. They were under the command of General O'Rourke, who was in fact an Irishman, Joseph Cornelius O'Rourke, descendant of an Irish family which, after the defeat of James II, fled to Europe and joined the armies of major European countries such as France, Austria and Russia. He distinguished himself during the war against Napoleon, and spent the two above-mentioned years fighting in Serbia. His greatest exploits were in the battles of a combined Russian and Serb army to defeat the Ottomans at Jasika and Varvarin.

The chapter on British travelers is the most extensive part of the book, and in many respects, most information-rich. In this chapter, the author includes the writings of some fifty British travelers who traveled through our regions during the period dealt with in this book. This material is covered quite well in our literature on Anglistics, but again Kostić filled in numerous gaps in addition to modifying previous researchers and correcting their mistakes. He surpasses his predecessors with his systematic and analytical approach, and thus with this chapter the reader is left with reliable insight into the classes of Britons who traveled through our regions, their motives, what they wrote about us, their interests, the reliability of their observations, and to what extent the prejudice of their developed civilizations and imperialist-colonial mentality influenced the objectivity of the images they created in their

writings. This chapter also offers an abundance of material about the situation in Serbia at the time, which is often missing from our sources.

The third, shorter chapter is devoted to the writings of British diplomats, especially after official diplomatic relations were established between Great Britain and the vassal principality of Serbia in 1837, and to the relations between Britain and Serbia at the time of the “Eastern Question”. This was when Britain began to display increased interest in Serbia and exert influence on the politics of the vassal principality, which is the case even today.

Second in length and, to a certain extent, the most significant chapter due to its subject-matter deals with literary permeation during this period. V. Kostić examines this topic chronologically, starting with Dositej Obradović, the first educated Serb who spent longer periods of time in Britain and became acquainted with contemporary English literature which influenced his writing. The influence of essayists Addison and Steele is especially evident in his work. The chapter also deals with British interest in our Serbian folk poetry from the Romantic period, the first translations of this poetry into English and the reviews. Kostić notes that information about our folk literature, and even some translations, can be found in British travel literature.

The second part of this chapter deals with the presence of Serbian themes and motifs in English literature, mostly world events, especially the siege of Belgrade. Kostić did not bypass even the less significant information, remarks and allusions to the topic of this chapter.

The book also includes quite an extensive bibliography which, in its own way, bears testimony to the huge effort made in writing this work of literature.

The reader of this book is impressed by the author’s comprehensiveness and systematic analysis, the abundance of covered material of very diverse provenance, his independent analysis of already used material, the revision of earlier studies and correction of the mistakes and conclusions of previous researchers (including the author of this review). A mere glance at a few footnotes is enough to realize how much effort was invested in writing this book which, like Kostić’s previous works, will be unavoidable literature for all researchers in this field. Researchers find it very difficult to find something new in areas covered by Veselin Kostić. I believe this is the greatest compliment one can give a writer.

Branko MOMČILOVIĆ

Translated from the Serbian by
Persida Bošković

THE SERBIAN NATIVE MELODY IN GERMAN

Momčilo Nastasijević, *Sind Flügel wohl...: Gedichte und Prosa*,
herausgegeben und übertragen von Robert Hodel. Leipziger
Literaturverlag, Leipzig, 2013

The existence of translations of representative forms which express the cultural and linguistic Other is what enables fruitful cultural permeability, the exchange of ideas between nations and epochs and even the mere ability to understand others. This is especially the case for translations of poetry, as a linguistic art which does not aspire to achieve universal expression through rationalization, but rather to preserve its own tone and color, emphasize its uniqueness and achieve universality by recognition of things local. Thus, it is also quite clear that translating poetry is a real venture, especially when the translator is aware that he has embarked on the impossible. Poetry can never be translated without leaving something behind, precisely because it acknowledges the unique values of its language and culture, which are being expressed in this language. And it is these values that form the untranslatable residue and mark the (indeed, somewhat porous) line which can be crossed only if one speaks about a culture using the resources of this culture. This margin of that which is local, whose contents and forms cannot be translated, only suggested, is sometimes narrower and other times wider; and the wider it is the more challenging it becomes. There is no wider margin in Serbian poetry than the one found in the work of Momčilo Nastasijević. This is why the challenge Robert Hodel faced in translating his work into German is enormous and this is also

why the results he attains are extremely valuable. He embarked on his impossible mission completely aware of what he was doing; knowing that he was addressing a poet with extreme local linguistic quality and this was probably what enabled him to penetrate so deeply in translating and suggesting the poet's world and meaning.

Nastasijević's *Lirski krugovi* [Lyrical Cycles], whose translation acts as the framework for the book *Sind Flügel wohl...* (the title is in fact the translation of one of the verses: *Krila li to*), was not the first challenge Hodel faced in Serbian poetry. This prominent Slavist, professor at the University of Hamburg, recently published an anthology of contemporary Serbian poetry (*Hundert Gramm Seele*, 2011 – title based on a poetry collection by Vojislav Despotov), and his bibliography includes other works on Serbian literature as well.

After a short but important introduction, the book begins with an extensive (over 70 pages) poetic biographical study on Nastasijević and his work, illustrated with a series of documentary photographs. The main segment, that is, the translation of selected versus, are given in both languages (I will later return to Hodel's explanation of what motivated him to choose this solution). This is followed by one of Nastasijević's prose texts (short story entitled „Zapis o darovima moje rođake Marije“ [A Record of Gifts from my Cousin Maria], and finally, the translation of his key, underlying essay „Za maternju melodiju“ [For the Native Melody]. As we can see, the book is arranged so as to ease the German reader into Nastasijević's demanding work, supply him with the necessary information and thus help him to make a conclusion regarding its value.

When it comes to Hodel's evaluation of Nastasijević's work, it is exceptionally high. Aside from Novica Petković, no one among the Serbian critiques was as full of praise for the author of *Native Melody* as Hodel. There are poets, says Hodel, “enveloped in an aura of uniqueness... Even when we can hardly read them because they are considered dark and hermetic... we observe their work and their life as a unity which is rarely attained. These Hölderlins, Celans, Mallarmés and Khlebnikovs stand untouched on bookshelves for years and still their readers always go back to them in spirit. As if they represent a world more important than the everyday...” – and to this list of great names in the world of poetry, Hodel adds Nastasijević. Nastasijević has established an authentic school of poetry comprised of poets of various generations; Hodel singles out Vasko Popa, Miodrag Pavlović, Novica Tadić, Milosav Tešić and Zlata Kocić, although this list could easily include other names related to this line of poetry.

Emphasizing the difficulty of the job before him and the limitations of translating a poet such as Nastasijević, who decisively amalgamates

the meaning and melody of his poem, a poet who is rooted in his language and its melody, Hodel decides to “more faithfully follow the meaning rather than form”, and he offers the German reader a parallel Serbian text in order to bring him closer to the “form” (music). On the one side, this is proof of scientific meticulousness – which is also reflected in the way Hodel, when quoting each just a little more significant term, always offers the Serbian form in square brackets, and on the other, proof of his sense of responsibility as translator. By choosing (quite correctly) *meaning*, he also demonstrates how much the composition of this meaning depends on the *form* in which it is presented. By choosing meaning, to a certain degree Hodel had to first solve the problem of meaning *for its own sake* – and this is the untranslatable part, the part which cannot be *said*, only *shown*. As Jovan Delić pointed out in one of his reviews, at the same time this makes his translation of Nastasijević a hermeneutical undertaking.

In a wonderful writing style, the remarkably meticulous study on the life and work of Momčilo Nastasijević provides the German reader, who is probably unfamiliar or knows little about this poet, with an abundance of valuable information. The segments of the study referring to the poet’s biographical circumstances discuss the existing information on his family’s origin, life and work, including such details as the instance when Nastasijević’s knowledge of the German language and literature saved him from a life-threatening situation. In writing this study, Hodel relies on four main sources: the biographies written by Milutin Devrnja and Novica Petković, memories of the poet’s brother Svetomir, but his foremost source were nevertheless the texts written by Nastasijević himself. *Sabrana dela Momčila Nastasijevića* [The Collected Works of Momčilo Nastasijević], for which Novica Petković did exemplary editorial work (1991), represents the textual basis for the study. Hodel demonstrates just how important this latter source is when he switches from biographical to poetic issues, and when the poet’s self-understanding becomes of great importance to him.

This, however, does not mean that Hodel accepts without question Nastasijević’s self-interpretation and that he does not evaluate his achievements independent of the poet’s program. This is evident in the part where he offers an overall evaluation of Nastasijević’s poetry. This evaluation is so carefully executed and nuanced that it needs to be discussed. Hodel does not observe Nastasijević’s shift in program to the *native melody* as an expression of some anti-modern, conservative view, but just the opposite, in the context of an avant-garde use of means with which he would radically criticize middle-class tradition; a potential conservative shift was possible only later, towards the end of the poet’s life, following a change in the “overall European context”.

And so the path of the *native melody*, because it is authentic, is a path towards the new and not perpetual repetition of the old. Hodel gives a similar argument in his interpretation of Nastasijević's image of art as the "new sacral sphere" and the artist as the "mage" and "priest" who acts "instinctively" and addresses "surrealism". It would be a mistake, says Hodel, to make conclusions about Nastasijević being some kind of religious ascetic based on such program statements and their accentuated religious conceptual apparatus. On the contrary, his understanding of art, according to Hodel, "is due more to the modernistic decadent movement" (especially the French "cursed poets" Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Rimbaud). Another comparison is offered here, this time with a phenomenon in German poetry: even though his program would be well-suited here, Nastasijević never built a pseudo-religious cult around him, like Stefan George. His circle was marked more with a family art community.

Confirmation of his accountability as a translator can also be found in the notes that accompany some of the solutions in his translation of Nastasijević's lyrics, which are sometimes unsolvable enigmas even for the Serbian reader. The choice of versus was such as to give the German reader not only an overall picture of the poet's work, but also to include in this picture his most valuable and most inventive tones. It is possible to imagine this book in Serbian as well – it would be a representative selection of versus, accompanied by an exceptional introductory essay.

In conclusion, I will once again address the overall assessment of Hodel's translation and hermeneutical *venture*. He not only offers a well-founded interpretation of a significant Serbian poet and an exemplary scientific study on him, but he also challenges the limits of translatability, implying that the Serbian *native melody* could be sung in another language. In other words, he succeeded in replanting Nastasijević's plant-poem, whose roots are in the local and flowers in the universal.

Saša RADOJČIĆ

Translated from the Serbian by
Persida Bošković

NOTES ON THE JOURNAL

Literary Links of Matica srpska is a journal devoted to Serbian literature and culture and it is published in English. The goal of the journal is to present Serbian literature through a worthy selection of contributions, and to provide knowledge and understanding in order to reveal the specific qualities of Serbian culture and the reasons why this culture should be specially protected and nurtured within the total corpus of national traditions in Europe and the world. The wealth and diversity of Serbian literature dissolves and eliminates every form of xenophobia, and emphasizes the need for open, productive communication with other cultures. Every authentic literature requires connections, links with other authentic values and, accordingly, Serbian literature also finds in these links some of the vital reasons for its existence.

Publishing this type of journal in English is necessary in order to enable non-Serbian-speaking readers to gain knowledge of Serbian literature which differs from the information they attained through various types of selections based on “oblique” views of other cultures. Even as such, these skewed selections have some value; nevertheless, it is imperative for Serbian culture to define its own view of the literary values it has developed, and then present this view to the foreign reader. If Serbian culture identifies its own self-understanding internationally, and successfully presents it to others for examination, this would be a sure sign that the endeavor of self-understanding has been well executed. Needless to say, the English language represents the universal language code of our times, and as such, using it as the intermediary is advantageous to the successful completion of such an important task.

On the one hand, *Literary Links of Matica srpska* is a means of establishing links with other cultures, but on the other, it is also a means

of establishing links with one's own individuality and authentic expressive potential. With such multiplicity and the collision of different worlds and values, literature can reach peaks where differences emerge in the form of presumed world unity, whereby this unity is expressed in an array of aesthetic diversity and attraction. We hope that this journal will be published long enough to realize at least some of its founding objectives.

Editorial Board

Translated from the Serbian by
Persida Bošković

DEJAN ALEKSIĆ (b. Kraljevo, Serbia, 1972) writes poetry and fiction. Books of verse: *Potpuni govor* [*Complete Speech*, 1995]; *Dokazivanje senke* [*Proving the Shadow*, 1996]; *Svagdašnji čas* [*Quotidian Hour*, 2000]; *Sobna mitologija* [*Bedroom Mythology*, 2003]; *Posle* [*Afterwards*, 2005]; *Dovoljno* [*Enough*, 2008]; *Jedino vetar* [*Just the Wind*, 2011]; *Biti* [*To Be*, 2013]; *Kako to reći* [*How to Say It*, 2015]; *U dobar čas* [*At the Right Moment*, 2016]. Books of children's poems and tales: *Dugme bez kaputa* [*Button without a Coat*, 2002]; *Pustolovina jednog zrna kafe* [*The Adventure of a Coffee Bean*, long poem, 2004]; *Kad se razboleo petak* [*When Friday Fell Ill*, 2006]; *Na primer* [*For Example*, 2006]; *Nežna pesma o nežnom vetru Duvoljubu* [*A Gentle Poem about Gentle Wind Named Blowlove*, long poem, 2006]; *Božićna priča* [*A Christmas Tale*, 2007]; *Muzika traži uši* [*Music Needs the Ear*, 2008]; *Igrokazi* [*Playtime Plays*, 2010]; *Petar i perle* [*Peter and Shoelaces*, 2010]; *Priča o dobroj metli* [*The Tale of a Kind Broom*, 2010]; *Stižu blese, čuvajte se* [*Mind the Tools of the Coming Fools*, 2010]; *Luka iz oluka* [*Luke, the Boy from the Trough*, 2011]; *Isidora i zub* [*Isidora and the Tooth*,], *Baš je dobro roditi se* [*What a Joy – Being Born*, 2012]; *Zagonetka retka zvana arhitekta* [*The Riddle's Name Is the Architects' Game*, 2013]; *Bojan Mrvica i zakopano blago* [*Painty Smidgeon and the Buried Treasure*, 2013]; *Koga se tiče kako žive priče* [*Who Cares to Know How the Stories Grow*, 2013]; *Cipela na kraju sveta* [*The Shoe at the End of the Globe*, 2016]; *Bajke plene i sa scene* [*Fairy Tales' Appeal Is an Onstage Deal*, 2016].

MATIJA BEČKOVIĆ (b. Senta, Vojvodina, Serbia, 1939). Member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, he writes verse, fiction and essays. Books of Poetry: *Vera Pavladijska*, 1962; *Metak litalica* [*Stray Bullet*, 1963]; *Tako je govorio Matija* [*Thus Spoke Matija*, 1965]; *Če – tragedija koja traje* [*Che: A Tragedy Afoot*, co-authored by D. Radović, 1970]; *Reče mi jedan čovek* [*A Fella Once Told Me*, 1970]; *Medja Vuka Manitoga* [, 1976]; *Lele i kuku* [*Woe and Alas*, 1978]; *Dva sveta* [*Two Worlds*, 1980]; *Poeme* [*Long Poems*, 1983]; *Bogojavljenje* [*The Epiphany* (selected verse), 1985]; *Kaža* [*Lore*, 1988]; *Čiji si ti, mali?* [*Whose Son Are You, Kid?*, 1989]; *Izabrane pesme i poeme* [*Selected Poems and Long Poems*, 1989, 1990]; *Trideset i jedna pesma* [*Thirty-One Poems*, 1990]; *Nadkokot* [*Supercock*, 1990]; *Sabrane pesme I-VI* [*Collected Poems*

I-VI,]; *Ovo i ono* [*This and That*, selected verse, 1995]; *Potpis* [*Signature*, 1995]; *Ćeraćemo se još* [*Our Scrapping Goes On*, 1996]; *Hleba i jezika* [*Bread and Speech*, 1997]; *Muška tužbalica* [*Men's Lament*, selected verse, 1999]; *Od do* [*From To*, 1999]; *Očinstvo* [*Fatherhood*, selected verse, 2000]; *Najlepše pesme Matije Bečkovića* [*The Most Beautiful Poems by Matija Bečković*, selected verse, 2001]; *Nisi ti više mali* [*You're No Longer a Kid*, 2001]; *Crnogorske poeme* [*Montenegrin Long Poems*, 2002]; *Kukavica* [*Cuckoo*, 2002]; *Treća ruka* [*The Third Hand*, 2002]; *Sabrane pesme I-IX* [*Collected Poems I-IX*, 2003]; *Kaže Vuka Manitoga* [*The Legends of Vuk the Wild*, selected verse, 2004]; *Tako je govorio Matija I-III* [*Thus Spoke Matija I-III*, selected verse, 2004]; *Sedimo nas dvoje u sutonu plavom* [*The Two of Us Sitting in Blue Twilight*, selected verse, 2005]; *Kažem ti tiho: Ništa nam ne treba* [*I'm Telling You Softly: We Need Nothing*, 2006]; *Kad budem mlađi* [*When I Grow Younger*, 2007]; *Put kojeg nema* [*The Unreal Road*, 2009]; *Bogojavljenje* [*The Epiphany*, 2009]; *Kad budem još mlađi* [*When I Grow Younger than That*, 2012]; *Kostići* [*The Kostićes*, 2012]; *Stanica za otkup vučjih koža* [*The Wolfskin Buying Station*, 2012]; *Ogledalo* [*The Mirror*, 2015]; *Tri poeme* [*Three Long Poems*,]; *Slava Tebi Bože* [*Glory Be to Thee O Lord*, 2015]; *Prahu oca poezije* [*To the Ashes of the Father of Poetry*, 2016]. Books of essays, notes, orations and conversations/interviews: *O međuvremenu* [*About the Interim Matters*, 1979]; *Služba Svetom Savi* [*The Service in Honour of Saint Sava*, 1988]; *Sima Milutinović / Petar II Petrović Njegoš*, 1988; *Kosovo najskuplja srpska reč* [*Kosovo Is the Most Expensive Serbian Word*, 1989]; *Ovako govori Matija* [*Thus Speaks Matija*, 1990]; *Moj pretpostavljeni je Gete* [*Goethe Is My Superior*, 1990]; *Poetika Matije Bečkovića* [*The Poetic Practice of Matija Bečković*, proceedings, 1995]; *Predskazanja Matije Bečkovića* [*The Anticipations of Matija Bečković*, proceedings, 1996]; *Matija – stari i novi razgovori* [*Matija: Conversations Old and New*, 1998]; *O međuvremenu i još ponečemu* [*About Some Interim and a Few Other Matters*, 1998]; *Poslušanja* [*Obedience Tasks*, 2000]; *Neboš* [essays on P. P. Njegoš, 2001]; *Saslušanja (1968–2001)* [*Interrogations (1968–2001)*, 2001]; *Matija Bečković, pesnik* [*Matija Bečković, the Poet*, proceedings, 2002]; *Poezija Matije Bečkovića* [*The Poetry of Matija Bečković*, proceedings, 2002]; *Čovek bez granica* [*The Man without Limits*, 2006]; *Misli* [*Thoughts*, 2006]; *Besede* [*Orations*, 2006]; *Izabrana dela I-VII* [*Selected Works I-VII*, 2006]; *Služba Pustinjaku cetinjskom* [*The Service in Honour of the Hermit of Cetinje*, 2013]; *Sabrana dela I–XII* [*Collected Works I–XII*, 2013].

ALEKSANDAR GATALICA (b. Belgrade, Serbia, 1964) is a fiction writer and playwright devoted to studies in the history of music and translation from Classical Greek (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Alcaeus, Anacreon, Sappho, Solon, Mimnermus). Novels: *Linije života* [*Lifelines*, 1993]; *Naličja* [*Inverted*, 1995]; *Kraj* [*The End*, 2001]; *Euripidova smrt* [*Euripides' Death*, 2002]; *Nevidljivi – pikarski roman u pismima* [*The Invisible – A Picaresque*

Novel in Epistolary Form, 2008]; *Veliki rat* [*The Great War*, 2012]; *Sonata za lošeg čoveka* [*Sonata for a Bad Man*, 2015]; *Sve novele* [*All Novellas*, 2015]. Books of short stories: *Mimikrije* [*Mimicries*, 1996]; *Vek* [*The Century*, 1999]; *Najlepše priče Aleksandra Gatalice* [*The Most Appealing Stories by Aleksandar Gatalica*, selected by P. Pijanović, 2003]; *Beograd za strance* [*Belgrade for Foreigners*, 2004]; *Dijalog sa opsenama* [*A Dialogue with Illusions*, 2006]; *Dnevnik poraženih neimara* [*A Diary of the Defeated Builders*, 2006]; *20 godina, 20 najboljih priča* [*20 Years, 20 Best Stories*, 2013]; *Kad sam bio mali* [*When I Was a Kid*, 2014]; *Sve priče* [*All Stories*, 2015]. Plays: *Čioda sa dve glave* [*Two-Headed Pin*, 2000]; *Svečanost* [*Solemn Occasion*, 2003]; *Franc Kafka: Proces – drama u dva čina* [*Franz Kafka: The Process – A Drama in Two Acts*, 2011]. Essays: *Govorite li klasični?* [*Do you Speak Classical?*, 1994]; *Crno i belo – kratka istorija deset slavnih pijanista XX veka* [*Black and White: A Short History of Ten Famous 20th Century Pianists*, 1998]; *Artur Rubinštajn protiv Vladimira Horovica i obrnuto* [*Arthur Rubinstein vs. Vladimir Horowitz and Vice Versa*, 1999]; *Zlatno doba pijanizma* [*The Golden Age of Pianism*, 2001]; *Kvadratura nota – ogleđi o muzici* [*Squaring the Notation: Essays on Music*, 2004]; *Stoleće uz muziku* [*A Century with Music*, monograph on the pianist Andreja Preger, 2008]; *Anegdote o velikim muzičarima* [*Anecdotes on Great Musicians*, 2010]; *Pisac ne stanuje ovde* [*The Author Doesn't Live Here*, 2013]; *Zlatno doba pijanizma* [*The Golden Age of Pianism*, 2017].

JOVAN DELIĆ (b. Borkovići near Plužine, Montenegro, 1949) writes literary criticism and essays. Books: *Kritičarevi paradoksi* [*The Paradoxes of a Critic*, 1980]; *Srpski nadrealizam i roman* [*The Serbian Surrealism and Novel*, 1980]; *Pjesnik „Patetike uma“ (o pjesništvu Pavla Popovića)* [*The Poet of “The Pathos of the Mind” (on the poetry of Pavle Popović)*, 1983]; *Tradicija i Vuk Stefanović Karadžić* [*Tradition and Vuk Stefanović Karadžić*, 1990]; *Hazarzarska prizma – tumačenje proze Milorada Pavića* [*The Khazarian Prism: An Interpretation of the Fiction by Milorad Pavić*, 1991]; *Književni pogledi Danila Kiša* [*The Literary Views of Danilo Kiš*, 1995]; *Kroz prozu Danila Kiša* [*Across the Prose by Danilo Kiš*, 1997]; *O poeziji i poetici srpske moderne* [*On the Poetry and Poetic Practices of the Serbian Modernism*, 2008]; *Ivo Andrić – Most i žrtva* [*Ivo Andrić: The Bridge and Sacrifice*, 2011]; *Ivan V. Lalić i njemačka lirika – jedno intertekstualno istraživanje* [*Ivan V. Lalić and German Lyric Poetry: An Intertextual Research*, 2011]. Delić edited a number of books by and on Serbian authors.

GOJKO DJOGO (b. Vlahovići near Ljubinja, Herzegovina, BiH, 1940) writes poetry, essays and critical reviews. Books of poems: *Tuga pingvina* [*Penguins' Sorrow*, 1967]; *Modrica* [*The Bruise*, 1974]; *Kukuta* [*The Hemlock*, 1977]; *Vunena vremena* [*Woollen Times*, 1981]; *Izabrane i nove pesme* [*Selected and New Verse*, 1986]; *Crno runo* [*Black Fleece*, 2002]; *Vunena vremena sa*

Optužnicom i Odbranom na sudu [*Woolen Times with the Indictment and the Defence at Court*, 2005]; *Kukutin vrt – izabrane i nove pesme* [*The Hemlock Garden: Selected and New Verse*, 2009]; *Grana od oblaka – izabrane i nove pesme* [*Cloud Branch: Selected and New Verse*, 2014]. Books of essays and commentaries: *Poezija kao apokrif* [*Poetry as Apocrypha*, 2008]; *Vunena vremena – proces i komentari* [*Woolen Times: The Trial and Commentaries*, Vols. 1-2, 2011]; *Put uz put* [*A Way by the Way*, 2017]. In the year 2006, a four-volume edition appeared of *Pesme, Eseji, Popudbina, Odbrana poezije* [*The Works of Gojko Djogo: Poems, Essays, Travel Victuals, In Defence of Poetry*].

DJORDJE DJURIĆ (b. Jarak near Sremska Mitrovica, Vojvodina, Serbia, 1971) is a historian specialized in the 19th-century general and national history, the history of Russia and the history of the Serbian science. He has authored monographs, studies and textbooks. Since April 2012, Djuric has been holding the post of Matica srpska's Secretary-General. His books include: *Srpski intelektualac u politici – politička biografija Jovana Žujovića* [*A Serbian Intellectual in Politics: The Political Biography of Jovan Žujović*, 2004]; *Vlade Srbije 1805–2005* [*Serbia's Governments 1805–2005* (by a group of authors), 2005]; *Vuk Marinković – biografija i naučni rad utemeljivača fizike kao moderne nauke u Srbije* [*Vuk Marinković: The Biography and Scientific Work of the Founding-Father of Physics as a Modern Science in Serbia*, 2007]; *Sremska Mitrovica – grad vredniji od carske kćeri* [*Sremska Mitrovica – A City Worthier than an Emperor's Daughter* (by a group of authors), 2008]; *Istorija 8* [*History 8*, text-book for the 8th grade of primary school, co-authored with M. Pavlović, 2010]; *Istorija za treći razred gimnazije prirodno-matematičkog smera i četvrti razred gimnazije opšeg i humanističkog smera* [*History for the 3rd grade of grammar school, science and math programme, and the 4th grade of general and humanities programmes*, text-book, co-authored with M. Pavlović, 2011]; *Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu – ilustrovana hronologija* [*Serbia in the First World War: An Illustrated Timeline*, 2014]; *Srpski intelektualac u politici – politička biografija Jovana Žujovića* [*A Serbian Intellectual in Politics: The Political Biography of Jovan Žujović*, 2014].

SVETOZAR KOLJEVIC (Banja Luka, BiH, 1930 – Novi Sad, Serbia, 2016). Anglist, written studies, essays, criticism and literature reviews, translated from English, academician. Published books: *Trijumf inteligencije* [*Triumph of Intelligence*, 1963]; *Humor i mit* [*Humor and myth*, 1968]; *Naš junački ep* [*Our heroine epic*, 1974]; *Putevi reči* [*Ways to say*, 1978]; *The Epic in the Making*, 1980; *Pripovetke Ive Andrića* [*Ivo Andric's Novels*, 1983]; *Engleska književnost 3* [*English Literature 3* (group of authors), 1984]; *Viđenja i snoviđenja* [*Visions and Dreams*, 1986]; *Hirovi romana* [*A novel of the novel*, 1988]; *Pripovetka 1945–1980* [*The Novel, 1945–1980*, 1991]; *Po belom svetlu – zapisi i sećanja* [*In the White World – Records and Memories*, 1997]; *Postanje epa* [*Becoming*

an epic, 1998]; *Englesko-srpski rečnik* [English-Serbian Dictionary (co-author I. Đurić Paunović), 1999]; *Engleski pesnici dvadesetog veka (1914–1980) – od Vilfreda Ovena do Filipa Larkina* [English poets of the twentieth century (1914–1980) – from Wilfred Owen to Philip Larkin, 2002]; *Engleski romansi-jeri dvadesetog veka (1914–1960) – od Džejmsa Džojlsa do Vilijama Goldinga* [English Romanesque Twentieth Century (1914–1960) – from James Joyce to William Golding, 2003]; *Vječna zublja – odjeci usmene u pisanoj književnosti* [Eternal Eyes - Echoes of Oral in Written Literature, 2005]; *Vavilonski izazovi – o susretima različitih kultura u književnosti* [Babylonian Challenges – Encounters of Different Cultures in Literature, 2007]; *Odjeci reči* [Echoes of the Word, 2009]; *Između zavičaja i tuđine – susreti različitih kultura u srpskoj književnosti* [Between the homeland and the alien - encounters of different cultures in Serbian literature, 2015]; *Džozef Konrad: čovek i umetnik* [Joseph Konrad: Man and Artist, 2016].

ALEKSANDAR B. LAKOVIĆ (b. Peć, Kosovo and Metohia, Serbia, 1955) is an author of poetry, essays, studies and literary reviews. Books of poems: *Noći* [Nights, 1992]; *Zaseda* [Ambush, 1994]; *Povratak u Hilandar* [Chilandari Revisited, 1996]; *Drvo slepog gavrana* [The Blind Raven's Tree, 1997]; *Dok nam krov prokišnjava* [While Our Roof Is Leaking, 1999]; *Ko da nam vrati lica usput izgubljena* [Who Can Return to Us the Faces Lost along Our Way, selected verse, 2004]; *Nećeš u pesmu* [You Have No Place in Verse, 2011]; *Silazak anđela – pokosovski ciklus* [The Angels' Descent: Post-Kosovo Cycle, 2015]; *Ko da nam vrati lica usput izgubljena* [Who Can Return to Us the Faces Lost along Our Way, selected and new verse, 2015]; *Glasovi neba pod zemljom* [The Underground Voices of the Heaven, 2016.]. Studies: *Od totema do srodnika: mitološki svet Slovena u srpskoj književnosti* [From the Totem to the Kins: The Mythological World of the Slavs in the Serbian Literature, 2000]; *Hilandarski putopisi* [Chilandari Travelogues, 2002]; *Tokovi van tokova – autentični pesnički postupci u savremenoj srpskoj poeziji* [Streams Beyond Streams: The Authentic Poetic Proceeds in Contemporary Serbian Poetry, 2004]; *Jezikotvorci – gongorizam u srpskoj poeziji* [Language-Makers: Gongorism in the Serbian Poetry, 2006]; *Dnevnik reči – eseji i prikazi srpske pesničke produkcije 2006–2007* [A Word Diary: Essays and Reviews on the Serbian Poets' Output 2006–2007, 2008]; *Dnevnik glasova – eseji i prikazi srpske pesničke produkcije 2008–2009* [A Sound Diary: Essays and Reviews on the Serbian Poets' Output 2008–2009, 2011]; *Djordje Marković Koder – jezik i mit* [Djordje Marković Koder: Language and Myth, 2013]; *Dnevnik stihova – prikazi i eseji srpske pesničke produkcije 2010–2012* [A Verse Diary: Reviews and Essays on the Serbian Poets' Output 2010–2012, 2014]; *Dnevnik pesama – prikazi i eseji srpske pesničke produkcije 2013–2015* [A Diary of Poems: Reviews and Essays on the Serbian Poets' Output 2013–2015, 2016]; *Kod kuće*

nismo zaključavali: roman-album [*We Didn't Lock Our House Door: An Album-Novel*, 2017].

ČEDOMIR MIRKOVIĆ (Nevade near Gornji Milanovac, Serbia, 1944 – Belgrade, Serbia, 2005) wrote fiction, literary reviews and essays. Books of fiction: *Pogorelci* [*Fire Victims*, 1986]; *Mrak u mraku* [*Darkness in the Dark*, 1999]; *Riblja kost* [*Fish Bone*, 2000]; *Lov na grešne misli* [*Hunting Sinful Thoughts*, 2002]. Books of reviews and essays: *Pisci, knjige, čitaoci* [*Writers, Books, Readers*, 1978]; *Bez iluzija* [*Free from Illusions*, 1981]; *Jedna decenija* [*A Decade*, 1981]; *Ponoćni dnevnik* [*Midnight Diary*, 1983]; *Argumenti i ocene* [*Argumentation and Evaluation*, 1984]; *U kritičarskoj dokolici* [*A Critic's Pastime*, 1987]; *Nove dokolice* [*Pastime Anew*, 1989]; *Subotnji dnevnik I, II, III* [*Saturdays' Diary I, II, III*, 1989, 1991, 1994]; *Zmajev znak na koricama* [*Zmaj's Sign on the Covers*, 1992]; *Nevidljivi okviri* [*Invisible Frames*, 1994]; *Pod okriljem nečastivog* [*Under the Evil One's Wing*, 1995]; *U djavolovom vidokrugu* [*Within the Devil's Horizon*, 1996]; *Krugovi tajanstvene svetlosti* [*The Circles of Mysterious Light*, 1997]; *Nadomak ćutanja* [*Verging on Silence*, 1999]; *Odrednice* [*Entries*, 2000]; *Izabrane kritike I-II* [*Selected Criticism I-II*, 2004].

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2009]; *A Short History of Serbian Literature* (by a group of authors), 2011; *Biti rokenrol* [*Being Rock-n'-Roll*, co-authored with P. Popović, 2011]; *Stan bez adrese* (*Puzzle VII*) [*An Apartment with No Address (Puzzle VII)*, 2014]; *Od stiha do stiha – svet iza sveta 3* [*From One Verse Line to Another: A World Behind the World 3*, 2014]; *Priče od vode – sve ribe Srbije* [*Stories Derived from Water: All of Serbia's Fish*, co-authored with M. Tucović, 2014]; *Osnovi srpskog pripovedanja* [*The Basics of Serbian Storytelling*, 2015]; *Šta čitam i šta mi se događa* [*What I Read and What Happens to Me*, 2016]. Pantić has edited numerous books, anthologies and proceedings.

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