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Publication of this issue was supported by
City Department for Culture of Novi Sad
Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia



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LITERARY LINKS OF MATICA SRPSKA

10–11/2022

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BORISAV STANKOVIĆ

THE DECEASED'S WIFE

She had been visiting his grave for so long that she had almost forgotten him alive and remembered him only by the grave. It is a long grave. A wooden cross protrudes at the head end of the grave. By the cross, a small clay jug with water and a posy of dry basil, its handles and sides black from the dripping wax of all the candles she lit for him. And, if not every day, then at least every Saturday and before every holiday, in the beginning with her mother, and later, as her child grew bigger and stronger, with the child, she would visit the grave and kneel by it. A big headscarf with a pan on top of it would then be spread over the grave, and in the pan, a variety of food: a pie, apples, grapes, and slices of baked pumpkin (all the things he loved to eat). The whiteness of the scarf in stark contrast to the decaying, black soil of the grave, which she never dared dig her finger in, afraid of encountering, touching a rotting human body, because so many had been buried in that grave! His whole family, one on top of the other, randomly, and—lastly, on top of all, he, her husband.

The candles around the cross would burn quietly. With flickering flames. Kneeling at the head end, she would lean forward towards the grave so that her head, her forehead, touched the cross. Her black hijab, with loose ends draping each side, would cover her pale face, and the shirt sleeve with black embroidery would be rolled up, laying bare the white, rosy skin of her hand. She would cry. Her round shoulders quivering. Her face, hidden behind the hijab, warmed by big, lush tears, would distinctly, softly stand out against the blackness of the hijab. Her eyes wet and dark. True, with a few wrinkles, but especially then, when red and swollen from crying, the wrinkles would not be visible.

And this crying of hers was so deep, muffled, choking...

Upon entering the cemetery, she would let go of her little boy, whom she had been holding by the hand, to walk behind her while she almost races to the grave... And, as she hurries, she would lower the pan from her head to be able to place it on the grave as fast as possible, and then, even more hurriedly, she would untie the hijab, loosen the ends, and, in an instant, reveal her round chin, face... And, as if in fear, distressed, after kissing the cross, she would light the candles with even more haste, and then, as if to finish everything in an instant—she would not kneel down, but, instead, almost throw herself on the grave and start sobbing:

“Oh, wretched life, Mita!”

Her little son, left running after her but unable to catch up, upon seeing her tumble and disappear by the tomb, he would rush up her:

“Don’t, mama...” and then, terrified as she would pay him no heed, he too would fall next to her on the grave and, clinging to her robe, start crying, sobbing.

She would not even glance at him, but sob, wail. As always, she would mention him, the deceased, the husband; list his wishes. And then continue with: who he had left them to... why he didn’t come and see them... especially the child, their son... see how big he now was and how much he had grown...

It is difficult to tell who was crying harder: she or the child. And not until the child, from underneath her robe, now even more terrified because of her refusal to turn to him, would start howling in despair and the earth on his little cheeks became wet and sticky would she come to, get control of herself and pick him up, by now almost unconscious from crying, and wipe the dirt from his little cheeks.

“What is this?” she would pretend to reprimand him through tears. “Don’t pay attention to mama, child... To cry just because you see mama cry! Don’t mind mama. Mama is different... Don’t. You’ll feel ill...” she would hush him, holding him closer, wrapping him in her robes. But now, feeling safe in her lap and free from fear, her little son would be overcome with sorrow and continue crying and wailing even more.

After a while, she would get up. And having tightened and smoothed out her clothes, dishevelled from crying, she would cover her face again with the hijab, now even tighter so that only her eyes and cheekbones showed from her tear-drenched face, and after distributing all that she had brought with her to the surrounding graves, and giving most of it to the beggars, and, lastly, after lighting the vigil lamp next to the candle, together with her little boy, tidying up, plucking the grass of and cleaning the grave—only then would they return, leaving his grave behind, silent and long.

They would return home. She, carrying the pan on her head. With one hand she would lead the child who, all cried out and pacified, would now merrily be prancing around her, while she was, still, feeling flustered. Her tear-drenched face flushed, burning, and her whole being augmented. Her dress suddenly too tight. Feeling as though her bosom was expanding, spilling out of the tight jacket, laid bare, visible... So, she would lower her head in shame, draw the hijab tighter so that her eyes and mouth, still quivering uncontrollably from crying, were barely visible. The road from the cemetery into town is wide, straight, and full of people. Even more scared of that, she would scurry close to the wall. But, as she approached Ita's butchery, she would change her walk. She would hold on tighter to her child, lower her head further, and feel desperate to reach the butchery as fast as possible, praise God in greeting and hurry by. Because, in front of Ita's butchery, there would always be several people, men, sitting idle on wooden panels, smoking, and, either watching people passing by on the road, or staring at the hanging quartered carcasses and the blood-stained butcher blocks, garnished with stale bowels and liver that only Gypsies and the destitute buy. As soon as she reached the shop, she would draw the child closer to her, shrink even further in humbleness, fear. She would praise the Lord in greeting to the men around the butcher's. But if Ita happened to be there, the moment he saw her, he would immediately step off the wood panel, put on the shoes he had taken off, step away from the others, stop her little son and call him to come up to him to get a gift. She would let go of the child and as he moved away from her, she would stand and wait, all the while facing away, towards the town. The child would walk up to Ita, kiss his hand, and Ita would pull out his pouch, fumblingly find a nickel and give it to the child. And even without anybody asking, he would explain whose child it was.

"Mita's. Mita who died last year. And that is his housewife—and point to her, and then turn to the child again, "Milan, my boy, come again tomorrow, but early, by cockcrow, so uncle Ita can give you some meat to take home. Now, go," he would send the child off watching her stand and wait for the child. "Go, go," he always said loudly, so that she too could hear him. "Go, so that mama doesn't have to wait for you."

And she would be waiting with growing impatience: seemingly fearful of everything, in particular of that wide and vast road, the crowd, the people walking along. The instance she sensed that her little son was coming back to her and was grabbing her hand, she would immediately continue on her way.

By then, it would be dusk. The fields would become dim, the town streets would seem narrower and darker. Her pace would quicken.

Across the wrecked Odžinka bridge she would enter the town. Hurriedly. But now with a little more ease down the familiar streets. Past entrances, gates, low houses, long Gipsy brick workshops... only here and there a big house, Turkish, with shutters and grates on the windows... Passing servants and children carrying meat, rice and other things that husbands, masters of the house, sent to their homes from the marketplace... But when she reached the marketplace and wanted to cross it to enter her street, she would have to stop again. Especially if it was a Saturday, it would be difficult to move through the crowd—the market patrons—the peasants, on their way back to their villages. Some drunk, on horses, blocking the way and stopping the crowd, while guzzling from magnum bottles, still mounted on the horses in front of the tavern. And then this whole throng would make their way, pushing forward, with noise and dust. She would wait until all this passed, like an onslaught, and then quickly cross, almost run, across the marketplace and enter her street. As soon as she entered the street, her little boy would let go of her and run ahead to their house.

She, feeling almost completely at ease in her street, would watch her son run merrily to the gate where, as always, waiting for them would be her mother who, every Saturday and before every holiday, came to stay the night.

“Finally here?” the mother would ask, rising up from the steps in front of the gate, carefully concealing the headscarf in which she would usually wrap flour and other things she would bring.

“Well, we’re finally here,” she would reply to her mother and bend down immediately, handing over the key to the lock as she was unable to unlock the gate because of the pot on her head.

The mother would open the door and, still concealing the headscarf, cross the threshold first and hurry into the house. And, as always, she would presently start tidying up, cleaning, lighting the fire, in a rushed manner, as if in fear, and making noise deliberately, clattering so hard that it echoed, as if trying to lessen the deafeningly silent, desolate look of the small, clean house fenced in with high walls.

She would follow her mother and little boy, the last one to come inside with tired steps. She would leave her mother busy in the kitchen to tidy up and discuss with her little boy what to prepare for dinner while she would, exhausted, drained, go to her room. After taking off her clothes, she would relax and loosen her robes and feel free, here ensconced in this room. She would sit down, almost recline, purportedly to rest from all the crying at the grave and the fear she had suffered walking back alone...

By then the women from the neighbourhood would start visiting. They would come to the house only then, when she was not alone, when

her mother was there. Never otherwise. Not because they didn't like her but because they couldn't. It was not proper. She being alone. There was no man to head the house, and she, alone like that, a widow, still young and beautiful. That is why it was improper for anyone to come to the house, to visit her. They were afraid that their visits might cause her ill repute, give her a "bad name".

But even now that they were here, she would not leave her room; she would leave her mother to stay and talk with them. She had gotten used to this and found it difficult to meet with them. She knew that they, feeling sorry for her and uncomfortable in front of her, could not carry a relaxed conversation with her as they did with other women who had husbands, heads of the house. Instead, they would always be careful what they said in front of her, fearing they might insult her somehow or remind her of something that was not meant for her ears. And they would always seek to depart at the earliest opportunity and leave her alone, dreading that their presence and conversation might cause her more pain. That is why she did not even greet them this time. They spoke with her mother in the kitchen, and then left. By then night had fallen. Her mother walked in and, albeit knowing she would refuse, asked for the sake of decency:

"Should we light a candle?"

"Don't bother," she refused. Her mother walked back to the kitchen, leaving her alone again. Which is just what she wanted. It is true that she was suffering, but the suffering seemed easier and softer alone in the dark.

So she laid in the room, very still, disrobed, breathing deeply and clumsily, listening to the bustling sounds and murmur from the neighbour's yards and her mother's elderly clattering in the kitchen. She would wait until dinner was prepared and her mother, after bringing in everything into her room and setting the low Turkish table, the *sofra*, called:

"Let's have dinner!"

And then, as her mother would bring in the dinner, she would just barely sit up, and they would have dinner. She would eat very little, or not at all. But she would have to sit at the *sofra* and wait until her mother and little boy were finished, and then her mother would—like every time she came to stay the night, feeling almost guilty for her daughter's hardships, misery, and not daring to talk to her—start entertaining and playing with the little boy, until they both dozed off and fell asleep. Only after that would she go to bed. Not to sleep, but, like before, to continue her lie-down.

To lie like that, even more weary from the silence of the night, with a furtive yet, by now, dulled fear, and listen to the passing of the

night, hear her mother's sleep become lighter and more sensitive. Virtually waiting for her mother to awaken at daybreak and, as usual, return home immediately, as if trying to run away from her daughter, home to her father and brothers, leaving her alone yet again. After that, like before, she would sit alone in the house and never go outside. Not even to the gate. It is only when she sent her little boy on an errand to the marketplace that she dared follow him to the gate and peer out after him, but as soon as she spotted somebody walking down the street, coming nearer, she would momentarily hide and then wait behind the gate for her little boy to come home. Very seldom, on the occasion of some important holiday, Ita, the butcher, might pay a visit. He, despite being her marriage elder, was seen as a member of her husband's, the deceased's, family—because her relatives, too, could not visit her out of fear that they might insult the deceased by “interfering with his household” if they came and “inconvenienced him.” Not even Ita, whenever he called on her, would go inside into the room—and she never invited him, either—instead, he would always sit on a low chair in front of the house, and always purposely leave the gate open so that everyone could see him. Not that he wanted to, but for her sake, out of concern for her good name, and even more out of fear of her brothers, who, despite never visiting, nor providing any help, save allowing her mother to come, still kept a watchful eye over her. And she would be in deep trouble if they were to hear that she was not doing what she was supposed to: staying at home alone with the child, that she was going out, seeing people... Because, as they themselves did not pay her visits, neither should others.

II

And she, Anica, was known only for her brothers. Nobody knew her by name, only as the “Ribinčiki sister”. These were cantankerous people, known as murderers. Way back when they were still living in the village, when they were young, they started dealing in smuggling, in dealings across the border. They forced their father, soon thereafter, to move from the village to the town (as if the village had grown too small, too constricted for them) and here, in the town, they continued their business. A nocturnal business: frequent travels, serving as bosses to merchants, continued smuggling, more life-threatening dealings, but in the town, now. Rarely were they at home, especially at night. Instead, they were always busy taking care of “some jobs”. These jobs were known to all, but no one dared say a word to them, so they managed to set themselves apart from and above everyone else, to become fearsome. Even when they were not working and traveling, but staying at home,

they would not, like other brothers, sit down together, at the *sofra*, to agree or discuss about something, but each one would keep to himself. Each would have lunch alone, order meals to be served when they pleased: each one felt mighty, strong. So, when they stayed at home for longer periods, they would argue over the smallest issue, sometimes even have a brawl. Yet, to an outsider, a third person, they were like one soul. It did not bode well for anyone who dared upset, offend any of them. All of them would, in such case, come running as one, and attack the offender. That is how they were, Anica's brothers. It is because of them that their house, despite being spacious, beautiful, could not be kept proper: beautifully furnished, clean, tidy, each thing in its place. It was not possible. Whenever anyone needed anything: a cloth, a towel, a pot, they would grab the first thing at hand, regardless of whether the item was meant for it, and when the job was done, just discard it anywhere. That is why their house looked almost naked, empty. Without a thing. Only a straw mat or a colourful rug in a corner. The shelves never in order. Around the fireplace scattered chairs, some broken, some pushed away as far as under the kneading trough. On the porch in front of the house, a discarded pack saddle; next to it a horse blanket, stirrups; over there, thrown by the well, a pair of reins. Behind the house, a huge garden. However, not even the garden, due to their trampling, bringing cargo and horses to and fro at night, could be well-kept and full of plants.

The father who, having left his village, had withdrawn completely, was not consulted about anything. They left him to his own devices. But they bothered the mother about everything instead. They did not tell the mother and her, Anica, apart. They perceived them as the same being, simply calling them "the women". And they were expected to do everything, and they were they blamed, considered guilty, for every little thing. In particular the mother who, never daring to object, always, in silence, tried to satisfy their needs so that she could rid herself of them as fast as possible and have them leave and stop yelling around the house. Yet, she would forever sigh with dread fearing that something might happen to them because each day they would become embroiled in several arguments, twists... So was it with her brothers; all of them, their house, seemed to stand out, protrude, in their part of town.

And still they, these brothers of hers, took care of each other. In particular were they keen not to have anything in short supply in the house. The "women", the mother and sister, were kept well dressed, as well. In particular she, their sister, Anica. They had beautiful, sometimes even expensive clothes tailored for her. But they kept a constant watchful eye on them. Not for any other reason than out of fear that the women, walking around the neighbourhood and mingling with other neighbours, town's women, might appear simple, like peasant women,

of a lower class... and thereby humiliate the men, as well. As a matter of fact, the mother was deeply anguished by this, not always following the dress code, forgetting what is proper. That is why the brothers did not allow them to socialize with others, with the neighbourhood women, to go for visits.

“Yeah, right! Why would you go there!?” they would always yell insolently at them. “You can’t even dress properly, let alone...”

They forbade, in particular, her, Anica. She was never allowed, like most of her girlfriends, to go out and stand in front of the gate; let alone attend some game, sit with friends from the neighbourhood. Not to mention what would happen if she were to meet a man!... It is true that many men did come to the house with them, but they were all like her brothers: they would arrive in the dark, armed and ready for the night. And they meant nothing to her, not like other townsfolk, quiet, regular. The only one that differed was Ita. Probably because he never engaged in the business, smuggling; instead, he would just come to the house to buy smuggled cattle for his butchery from her brothers. He seemed to mean something to her, but she dared not even think about it, nor did she actually have the time to. Running the whole household was her responsibility. Her mother did only the chores that were done in the same manner here in town as they had been done back in the village; all the rest, that was done differently, she left for Anica to take care of. And Anica took care of everything. Did she ever! Even though she did not socialize much and, as they say “mix” with others, she still managed to clean the house, tidy the rooms, the shelves, cook meals, do and run everything as if she were from an old, rich, town family. She knew how to do it all. And if her brothers had not been the way they were, imagine how impeccably tidy Anica would keep the house! But since they made it difficult, she did not flaunt her knowledge, skills, fearing that it might set her apart, distinguish herself from the brothers, and thereby anger them.

And, likely, out of the fear, shame, she kept her skills to herself, almost guarding them, knowing that she should show them, develop them, only when she became like other women; and that is: when she got married, started running her own house, “housewifery”... when, like other women, she started going to church, paying visits, hosting visits, attending assemblies, patron saint feasts, sittings... became what each of her friends eventually became and what they were meant to be. What was most curious was that whenever she thought about this, it somehow always seemed to focus on, to end up with, this Ita. So, she would promptly, blushing, force herself to stop thinking about it. And, without feeling unhappy, as if it did not concern her, let alone depend on her in any way, rather, as if it was bound to happen as a matter of

fact, she would calmly, dedicated to her daily chores, wait—actually not wait, but just continue to carry out her daily duties, that was, to take care of chores in the house for that day. And regarding this other matter, she was convinced: there is plenty of time, it will happen.

And so it did. She herself did not know how. She just knew that one holiday, together with her brothers and other guests in their house, there was a greying man with sharp, angular face, dressed better than anyone else. Two days later, some other men came, without this man, and drank long into the night in the next room with her brothers. Her mother, exiting the room they were in, burst into tears, while her brothers now forbade her—although rarely seen outside before either—to go out and show her face in the street. Hence, she had been “drunken”, given away over drinks. And from then on Anica’s life turned into preparing, sewing, weaving kilim rugs and other dowry... From then on Ita stopped buying smuggled cattle from her brothers, and he stopped visiting... There was no news of him after that, save that the man she had been given to was his blood brother; when she learned that, she almost felt relieved, as if she had been freed from some fear, angst... She even felt pleased that things had ended so agreeably, and that he would, from now on, be like a brother to her, not anything else... About this man, her husband, she had heard that he was from the upper part of town, which means from the best part of town, that he owned a house, that he was a tailor of national costumes for the townspeople, not working in a tailor’s shop but from the house. She had also heard that, as a young man, he had travelled the world, been a migrant labourer, returned home, married twice, but, word has it, that both wives died, and now, when he wanted to get married a third time, they refused to give him a young woman from his own neighbourhood, and offered him instead widows and servant girls of the rich ... He, on the other hand, to spite them, got up, walked to the lower part of town, to her family, and asked for her hand in marriage... The rest? She knew nothing more until the nuptials, the wedding reception.

They got married. The wedding was modest because of the husband, a widower, as was the custom with weddings with widowers. Yet, it was somehow better. Granted, not like a real, big wedding which lasts four days, but, again, not like one when a widower takes a widow for a wife and the nuptials take place before the orthros, the morning service, and then they quietly, almost hiding with shame that “people might see them”, go home with the few, essential wedding guests. It was better than that. Here, at Anica’s, there were musicians as well. And this man, her husband, did not want to be married in his old suit for special occasions, like other widowers, but opted to make a new one. She had the groom’s brother there, and candles, gifts... There was dancing, even

the “Variety Oro” folkdance... Only missing was the dinner, followed by the customary sitting and drinking all night, and then seeing off the best man in the morning hours... instead, there was only lunch, with his and her family. The older generation sat at the *sofra*, the younger played in the yard with the rest of the guests. At the wide-open gate, passers-by gathered and watched: the musicians, divided up, several inside by the *sofra*, the others in the yard, played, while across from them, along the wall, their Gipsy wives and children sat, enjoying the music and waiting for their husbands to get their meals delivered on the table so that they, too, could approach and eat together with them... The cook, with rolled up sleeves baring her elbows, pushed and shoved and prepared food in the kitchen; from behind the surrounding walls women, girls peered, looking this way... The *kolo* dance was danced, a crowd of children were pushing and chasing each other. Anica, too, was in the kolo, in the best position, dancing with the groom’s brother. She felt everybody watching her; in particular from the Ottoman-style enclosed balcony of Master Jova’s house next door, which stood two storeys taller than theirs; from there she was watched by the first, rich girls, women... And she noticed how they, as they were watching her, at the same time looked for the groom almost with a sneer... But he too was proper now. He was attending to the guests in the room and was, always, courteous, standing on the side. Even her brothers seemed to treat her differently now, as if she was somehow above them; they followed her, tried to please her... And the music was soft, the day warm. For the first time ever, she felt beautiful, young... And, all happy, she started trembling with expectation, sensing that all that she had been waiting for was happening, coming true, beautiful, good...

Then it turned to evening.

Just like in a game, imperceptibly, dimly, softly, the day slipped away and the night took over. The guests dissipated slowly. When everyone had left, she entered the house. However, the music from the room where her brothers and Ita had been sitting was louder. That’s where her husband had gone to, not, to her surprise, as the groom to attend to them from the sidelines, but as a guest; he sat down amongst them, at the head of the table no less. Later, as if the room was too small for them, they ventured outside into the garden and sat down. Only women were left in the house: the cook, some sisters of the husband and one of his old aunts who now served as a replacement for the mother-in-law. So, later, having changed, Anica went out to the garden to serve them... They were sitting under the vine leaves, next to the room. Her brothers, Ita and the rest, already intoxicated. Sprawled out. On the table: spilled wine, chewed bones, scattered tobacco. The candle in the middle of the table was casting light on them. All this seemed

disturbing to Anica, mostly because all of them, their carousing, did not seem befitting a prudent host; there seemed to be no order or respect: older people, younger people. For example, her brothers should treat her husband with the respect he commanded as their brother-in-law, and, vice versa, her husband towards them as their brother-in-law. But no. Instead, they all treated each other as equals, like some night brothers. This made her uneasy. But she shivered even more when she looked at her husband properly. It was only now that she truly saw him. In the night, in the candle light, his face looked stricter, more angular, with wide, sunken shoulders. Only his eyes were black, the neck long, strong, and, likely from recent shaving, with veins protruding more visibly. He was frowning, angry. This was obvious from his stiff stare and open, flared nostrils. Her heart sank. It occurred to her that he might be angry with her brothers, with Ita, and all the others for not leaving and allowing the two of them to be alone. The thought made him appear to her even more angry, strict, and in her fear she began drawing closer to her brothers, to Ita, all of whom were made to look strange from the music, the breezy summer night and the pale moon behind the dark clouds; they spoke a lot, unevenly, occasionally with cheer, then with confusion. Then her oldest brother started singing. He had thrown an arm around her husband, his brother-in-law, talking to him, singing and offering another round:

“Drink, Mita... you know, my brother... the first joy, so I made you... ‘Oh, Morava, my flat village,’” he belted out so loudly that it seemed to Anica that it was the first time he had ever sung so loudly, so joyfully, because they had freed themselves from her, married her off; that she had until then, as a girl at home, been a nuisance, an obstacle, not allowing them to do whatever they wanted!

Not understanding why herself, she almost ran away from them, left them and returned hurriedly into the house. It had, by now, a strong smell of food and spilled drinks. She walked into the room. And felt cold. Only her temples were sweating and small drops of perspiration collected on her lips from her warm breath. She felt constricted, uncomfortable, bothered. It was as if she was being surrounded from all sides, trapped. As for them over there in the garden, especially the husband, she dared not think about. However, from there spread increasingly loud chatter, singing and the night... Right then “her brother”, Ita, came into her room, humming the song everyone outside were singing.

“Why did you, my dear sister-in-law, run away?” he said teasingly, pretending to be drunk. “Why so unhappy? Hey, hey! You two are so lucky... I look at him, and...” Then he sat down beside her, but did not look at her, focusing his stare on something outside. It seemed like he was listening to the song and music that was growing louder. With a

sudden jerk, he looked at her all frozen with fear, and with a resentful expression, which at the same time showed some bitter commiseration, he started to mock and tease her, pointing at her husband:

“He’ll be here soon...”

“Who?” she jumped.

“Him, of course! My blood brother! The lucky devil. How lucky is he!”

She, barely whispering from fear:

“How, dear brother, aren’t you...”

And like a drowning man, hanging on to the word “brother”, she tried to fill the word with as much sisterly, and only sisterly, love as she could.

Ita sensed it, and it made him compose himself.

“Yes, yes, me too!” He got up. “I am happy! Why wouldn’t I be? Would you like me to sing for you? You know that, tonight, I will, while the two of you... the whole night I will—ah, tonight!”

And, again, this “tonight” was... She realized what he meant by this “tonight”. Blood rushed through her veins. She wanted to jump up, to yell, but could not. She barely managed to stand up and move away from him.

“Sister-in-law,” he started, remorseful and not looking at her. “Where to? Are you afraid? ...”

“No, dear brother...” she was shaking and stuttering, “but I should go. They are waiting for me... looking for me...”

Ita suddenly stepped in front of her. With a stiff, clenched jaw, as if he was trying to prevent his teeth from chattering. Attempting a forced smile on his stiff face. But, his smile was rigid, frozen.

“Sister-in-law...” he began, barely voicing his words, “...I shall not come back again tonight to see you. Who knows after... May God grant you happiness... great, immense... Especially to you. As far as he is concerned,” he pointed outside, to her husband, “his luck has already been granted.”

He extended his hand towards her, but could not take a step. She, pretending not to understand, asked him anxiously, sisterly:

“Why, dear brother? You are not cross, are you?” pretending to worry that he may have been neglected as a guest, not attended to properly, and, therefore, now angered, she approached to kiss his hand as a request for forgiveness, an apology.

Ita, seeing her pain—her desperate attempts to compose herself, to present herself only as a sister, a sister-in-law, and nothing else—and watching her struggle, simply straightened up, allowed her to kiss his hand, and walked out.

Unawares, she watched him walk away. She heard people trying to prevent him from leaving, and him refusing to be stopped. With a

hoarse voice. She heard him jokingly tell her husband on his way out, "You're stopping people, but actually can't wait to be alone with her..." Then he called the musicians. With a stiff movement, he threw his jacket over his shoulders, pulled the fez over his eyes to look more drunk, and ordered the musicians to play and sing for him. Then tensely left with the musicians who were singing to him:

Blow you winds of dawn break ...

By then it was pitch black outside; the trees had begun their mass rustling, and she, as she had fallen down on the crate, so she stayed until they brought in a candle and managed to wake her, bring her back from her daze, with great difficulty.

III

How they then cleared the room and prepared the bed, how the cook brought the groom to her—she knew nothing. Through a haze she remembered: when the last clasp on her *yelek* burst open, her breasts, her life force, laid bare; the touch of her husband's scrawny body, falling down after trying to break loose from her husband's arms in vain, and burying her head in her hair, suffering in tears.

Then? She was oblivious to everything until dawn, when she woke and recoiled. Beside her was he, her husband, with half-open mouth and, due to a slouched, tangled moustache, no visible teeth. Tense, with sunken shoulders, wiry, strong arms, a hairy chest, greying hair, he slept. She was shaking. It all seemed so, so... The, still, dim daybreak, growing ever brighter, and the smell of new furniture in the room, the breath of the extinguished lamp; she, half-naked, bruised, with broken body, with him next to her, bent, bony, alongside, touching her... she could feel his breath... She jumped up. Fumbling, she put on the sleeveless dress and headscarf, and stumbling over scattered pots, which the drunk cook had failed to put away, ventured outside. She heard the cook, woken by the noise and tumble, grumble at her:

"Is that you?"

"Me, me. Don't worry, auntie!" she placated the cook and went out.

When she felt that she was alone in the garden, alone in the silent night, she ran like a fugitive towards the gate, but realizing there was nowhere to go, that she was not allowed anywhere, she sank to the ground.

"Mama, mama, aah!!" she burst into tears. "Mama, mama..." she sobbed quietly, standing stiff and terrified that her husband or somebody else from the house might see her, hear her cry. So, she pressed her palms against her eyes, wiping away tears, as if blocking them from falling.

By then the daylight had become brighter. Everything, from all sides, started opening up and becoming busy. All around Anica, from the gardens, birds, bees, awoke and started buzzing, moving. Through the fresh, crisp air, murmur and movement sounded... it was a bright day. Right then, from the end of the street, from some tavern, sounds of music and song could be heard. She grew colder, petrified. She knew—she was certain—that Ita was there. And, as if right there with him, in her mind's eye she watched him walk out of the tavern: he is walking, but unsteady on his feet. The musicians are too tired to play for him. He is walking without stumbling, but with tottering steps, while pressing his fez down—or throwing it on the ground. He orders a Gypsy to pick it up and bring it to him. The Gypsy brings it to him, and he takes out money and drapes the Gypsy with it.

“Play... You don't know, but play anyway... you know, the one... ‘Blow, you winds.’”

She can almost hear the weary, hoarse voices of the Gypsies belt out the song accompanied by shrill music.

While he, Ita, is leaning back. His overcoat touching the ground.

“Yes, yes, that one... play that one... ‘The winds opened the rose’... true... yes... she, too, opened tonight, tonight...”

Anica senses that he is referring to her, knows what he means, that “opened tonight” refers to her husband, to her wedding night. While she, here in the garden, starts pulling her clothes tighter in fear, trying to hide her chest, her whole body, so that no part of her can be seen, to convince herself that it is not true that she “opened, opened” last night...

However, none of this had been real. The song and music from the distance dissipated quickly. And who knows who had been in the tavern over there... None of this had been real. Only the day conquering the night, becoming brighter. Squeaking gates could be heard along the street, and the opening of shops and removal of shutters sounded from the marketplace. That brought her to her senses. Admittedly, with difficulty and defeat, stifling her cry in pain, but nonetheless composed, she went back, found a broom, and, as if nothing had happened, like any other young housewife, started sweeping the yard, struggling to calm down, stop sobbing, collect herself. By then it had become full daylight and, for the first time, she got a proper look at everything, in particular her new house. The house was small, low. There was a vast garden surrounding it. The garden was well kept, with clean, long alleys of plants. By the gate stood a granary, a corn crib, and from there, from the gate, led a cobbled path, white, along the part of the house next to the garden where the room they slept in was. That front part of the house was painted, the rest was not. Everything, the whole house, the

garden, the cobblestone, looked small indeed, but clean, orderly, like new. Only the walls surrounding the house were huge, old-looking. And close to the gate, behind the well, there was a big, old walnut tree. Branchy, semi-dry, spreading its rich branches from above, it looked like it was protecting, covering the whole house, the garden, everything.

That is all that was there, nothing else. Later Anica got to know her husband, too. Just like the first time she had seen him, he looked scrawny, but also decrepit. Only that black moustache of his was full and stood out from the rest of his dry, rigid physique. For all that, he was clean, tidy, precise, and, in a way, strange. He looked like a man who had lived life to the fullest, enjoyed himself, and then, fed up and disappointed, had withdrawn. He always looked, and appeared to be, calm, quiet. Yet, in a second, for the smallest thing, he would burst out with rage and be capable of anything. It seemed that he had respect for no one, least of all her, his wife, Anica. As if she were not his wife, an adult, his equal, but instead a child, who knows nothing nor has any prospects of ever learning anything, or becoming somebody. That is how he treated her. She had to ask him about everything. Even the preparation of food; in this matter, too, he knew best and did not allow her to cook the way she knew how. In the house she was not allowed to touch or do anything different to the furniture, kitchen utensils, shelves; it had to stay the way it was when she first saw it, the way it had been arranged before her arrival.

“Don’t move anything! If there’s something you don’t know, ask. You are not to do anything on your own,” were his first words to her.

At first she found it difficult. She thought she was not allowed to change anything because one of his first wives had arranged things, and that, out of love for her, in her memory, he would not allow anything to be touched, spoiled; later, however, she found out that he had been the same towards all his former wives. And when she saw things for what they really were: the husband, the house... she calmed down, grew accustomed to it. Admittedly, with difficulty, but accustomed nevertheless.

Now, since things were not the way she had imagined they would be, she had hoped for, as compensation she made an effort to ensure that at least she, the house, her husband, everything were proper. In particular, she made sure that their clothing (she had, indeed, beautiful, expensive clothes from his former wives), their demeanour, conduct, run of the house, did not put her to shame in comparison with richer women, many of whom lived in this part of town, this neighbourhood. She found solace of sorts in this. Indeed, she worked very hard, cleaning, tidying up, trying to please her husband. She attended to his smallest needs, not out of love, but out of fear that he would have reason to scold

her for something, talk to her, come near her, and, thus, remind her of that thing. So diligent was she, almost obsessively, that even to him, her husband, it seemed excessive.

“Come, come...” he would stop her, flinching when seeing her zeal and sole focus on work, from early morning till late into the night. He felt uneasy because he sensed that she forced herself into work with such obsession in order to escape from, flee from, something else...

And that thing? The running away on her wedding night, the sobbing in the night—never. Never again did she cry... She did not think about it. And to avoid thinking about it, she would throw herself into work... From time to time, but very rarely, she would sense it coming back, reappearing; her breasts would heave, her cheeks, mouth itch... She would then, blaming those bosoms of hers, cheeks, all flushed, whisper in despair:

“Oh, barren be it!”

IV

A year later her husband died. This scared her even more. She became beside herself with anguish. In the beginning she did not mourn him truly from the heart. But as she sensed that she was not sincere in her mourning, feeling guilty about it and, thus, attempting to punish herself for it, she began crying more and more. At the funeral, at the memorial services after the seventh and the fortieth day after his death, and after six months, she could barely be brought back from the sobbing and trance she would fall into.

That “Oh, wretched life, Mita!” of hers—who knows why she wailed. Whether the cry was for him, or for herself.

Later, when she had rid herself of the fear of his death, and collected herself somewhat, she fully devoted herself to the crying and to visiting his grave, and in doing so she seemed to have found solace from all that had befallen her, all she had endured. She could not wait for Saturday, or some holiday, to go to his grave, light a candle and cry endlessly, to her heart’s content.

She would be calm the whole week. All alone, with the child, throughout the day, since nobody ever visited; like in a prison, she would sit, clean the house and the garden. Especially the house, which she now cleaned even more meticulously; she did not alter anything from before, anxious to not make it appear that now that he, her husband, was gone, she did whatever she pleased. That she was free... So, calmly, heavily, even with pleasure, she would sit at home all week and take care of the house. But just before Saturday, she would start feeling angst, restlessness, and a yearning. She could hardly wait. It was almost

as if she forgot how to prepare the food for the cemetery. When her child was small and her mother used to accompany them to the cemetery, she would impatiently wait at the gate, and later, when she went alone with the child, she would dress the boy quickly, get ready herself, tie the food in the headscarf, and hurry out of the house heading for the cemetery. Out of anxiety, she barely dared to cross the marketplace, the streets and enter the cemetery. She only knew that, when she entered the cemetery and felt the wall behind her, she could breathe out, and she felt an even deeper relief when she fell on the grave and started wailing:

“Oh, wretched life, Mita!...”

Trapped in this circle of visiting the grave and crying, she did not mourn the fact that she had been abandoned by almost all—especially her family, the neighbourhood wives, the deceased’s family, his friends—that they had disappeared as soon as he died. Even Ita, who used to stop by often when the dead man was alive, now hardly ever came to visit; sometimes he would remember them and send some meat for them to feast on. And even when he sent the meat, out of fear that the neighbourhood, or anyone else, might think that he was doing it for her, Anica, he had his delivery boy say that Ita, his master, had sent it “for the little boy; he worried that the little boy might see such meat in the street market and wish for it...”

Nothing offended her. True, she found the loneliness difficult. Especially at night came the fear of being alone. Or in winter, when she would run out of logs and have nothing to burn—not for her own sake, but to keep the child warm. The wood from the garden—a dead branch, some dry vine sticks—she dared not take fearing that people might notice and start gossiping that she was ruining the house... She did not care for herself, but needed to keep the child warm and close to her...

So, staying at home alone all week, taking care of the house, cleaning, keeping everything the way the deceased had left it, caring for the child, making sure it was clean, properly dressed, not obviously fatherless... Visiting the cemetery every Saturday and mourning... The wailing, in particular, agreed with her, gave her, almost, a sense of pleasure and ignited a fire, life, inside her... She got used to all that, and felt good. With a calm, young face and eyes exhausted from crying, wearing black, completely covered up, sitting modestly, serenely, with the child in her lap, all cried up, calm, deeply calm—she seemed to want nothing more. She was so calm that it looked like she had become incapable of feeling, thinking, as if she were dead. As if she was undone after his, the husband’s, death. As if there was nothing left for her. Least of all to re-marry. Even though her mother, knowing that she would

not be able to continue helping her secretly like this, by bringing flour and other supplies, hiding from her brothers and sisters-in-law, mentioned remarriage often.

Anica always knew when mother was about to bring it up. Usually after dinner, when the child had fallen asleep. The two of them would remain alone, and when Anica started asking about her brothers and news in town, the neighbourhood, her mother would, while answering her questions, suddenly, like it had just crossed her mind, stop mid-sentence and begin to praise a certain person:

“Now then, Anica, I happened to hear that Nedeljko has recovered. I walked by and took a look, and his little shop was chock-full. Baskets full, shelves stocked.”

Anica would wince, but immediately regain composure and good spirits, and almost pitying her mother for being so naïve, she would reply unperturbed:

“Don’t, mama...” and to convince her mother that this had not caused her distress or offended her, she would continue, cheerfully, to ask about something else.

Her mother would leave the matter alone. Then, she would not mention remarrying again for months. In fact, she would not have allowed Anica to re-marry and thereby commit a sin, dishonour the deceased, if she hadn’t had to, if there had been a way to sustain a living otherwise. No man could live off the house and the two vineyards, let alone a woman. And she, her mother, could no longer bring her supplies in secret, hiding from the sisters-in-law and the brothers. And the amount she managed to bring was scarcely enough for the daughter, let alone the child... And she would rather see Anica dead than allow her to run into debt, sell the vineyard, or the deceased’s house. When mentioning remarriage, only she knew how painful, what a struggle it was for her to utter the words. She considered it a sin. Not just her, the mother, but everybody else—relatives, neighbours—seemed to view it as a sin if they spoke to Anica about any topic other than him, the deceased. They would recount some anecdotes about him, his words. Every detail of his life seemed to be remembered and with Anica he was the only thing they talked about. While she, Anica, the child, and everyday life—all that was treated as if it did not exist, was not worthy of any attention, of mentioning. The main topic was him, the deceased. Not because they actually loved him, truly mourned him, but because they felt that they would be to blame if they stopped talking about him, mentioning him constantly, and thereby confirming that he truly was dead, deceased, gone. And that could not be. It was a sin to think it. And, fearing that it might be true that he was still here, not gone, but alive, especially for her sake, Anica’s, his wife’s—she could not be allowed

to think that she was free; that his death meant that he was gone; that she no longer belonged to him—they all made an effort to take every opportunity to mention him, not to allow him to be forgotten.

So, if a neighbour were to bake something, prepare some food, she would bring it, hand it over, and, coyly, say:

“Here, I brought this! I know that the late Mita, your husband, loved this so I brought some for you to try!”

Or, if a neighbour would come over to borrow something, some utensils, she would not ask for them, but rather say:

“Anica, do you have this? While your husband was alive, it was in the house. He never complained; we would just take it.”

Anica, too, knew all this, sensed it. She too tried to avoid thinking that he, the deceased, was not here, in the house, alive, that he was dead and far away from her. It was a sin to think it. He was still everywhere: in the garden, in the house, everywhere; everything belonged to him. She could still see him, standing in front of her with his scrawny, thin physique—especially his full black moustache, which, even during his life, stood out against his pale, stern face. Even though he was gone, even though so much time had passed since his death, he simply had to remain alive for her. Especially for her, Anica. Because he was the one who had stooped, taken her and led her into his house and, thereby, created some order... women, people. He had given her—not a name—but something more important, stronger—a respected identity. She no longer had to, like when she was an unmarried woman, avoid looking at anybody, because if she had done so—what would they have thought of her! Most certainly something ill, dishonourable. But when he claimed her, took her into his house, when she became his, from then on she could look freely at anybody, she could live, because she did not belong to herself. Concerning the person she would look at, if he were to have ill thoughts about her, that would not concern her, would not be aimed at her, but at him, her husband, the master of the house, as if the person had given him a nasty look. He was here, because she was his. Even when he died, she still belonged to him.

That is why everyone, all the relatives, and in particular women, in compensation of sorts and out of gratitude and worry that they might appear ungracious, almost with reverence, endeavoured to honour the memory of him, not to overlook anything.

It was of principal importance that he, the deceased, be attended to, that he be pleased... As far as everything else was concerned, mundane daily life, it was attended to only after all obligations to him, the deceased, had been taken care of. The most essential was this: the deceased, doing right by him. And what about her, the child, not to mention remarriage!?... Oh, Anica would have preferred to not re-marry,

but to have things remain as is. The deceased, the loneliness, the misery, the crying—she had become so accustomed to it all that it almost felt endearing. She knew well that there would be pain and suffering when the time came to part with the accustomed misery and tears, when she re-entered life. So, in the beginning she vigorously opposed remarriage. Adding to her grievance was the thought that her body had not yet cleansed itself from her first husband, the deceased, let alone was ready for the body of another man. Later, however, she knew, she was utterly convinced, that the next man to take her would most decidedly have to be worse, poorer, older, and that, once again, it had to happen, that she had to re-marry, indeed, that her family—her mother, brothers—would not leave her like this, but would marry her off again when they deemed the time to be right. So, she let them think about it, worry about it, while she continued, diligently, laboriously, to run the house, sit alone, visit the grave together with her child and lay there and cry, cry to her heart's content. Her tears would run till she had no more tears for all her sorrows, for all that she had suffered: disappointments, the pain from the wedding night, youth, love. As for marrying again, she felt indifferent. She even mocked the idea, saying:

“Dear, dear, who would have me?!”

Still, she sensed that her remarriage was approaching, that it had become an open subject, that some suitors had been calling. Talks favouring a certain Nedeljko had started circulating widely. She knew who he was. He had recently opened a grocer's shop. He had started as a servant, and after marrying his master's servant and having received a dowry from the master, he opened a grocery of his own. His wife died shortly thereafter, leaving behind three small children... She knew that he had asked for her hand, and that her brothers were hesitant on account of so many children... She knew where he had his shop: in the marketplace by her mahallah. Once she even saw him as she was walking towards the cemetery across the marketplace. He was bringing out some baskets with fruit and placing them on the wooden shelves. It was as if he had known that she would pass by around that time because he was dressed in nice, clean, even, dandyish clothes. However, from the threshold of the shop, holding a piece of bread, peered his dirty children. She had heard that he himself washed, dressed and slept with them in his little shop... She knew all this and still—she did not just give an appearance of being indifferent, she truly was, and she would often mock those who broached the subject, especially her mother. She would recognize from the gate when her mother was here to give some news about the remarriage, or about some other suitor. On those occasions her mother would walk hurriedly through the gate and close it even faster, and then approach Anica slowly, apprehensively, as if

afraid of someone. (Most likely the deceased, as she was in his house, talking to his wife about another man.)

But every time, Anica would ease this worry, apprehension, struggle of hers to talk about the proposal. The moment she noticed her mother entering in that fashion, she would withdraw into the room and, so, give her mother time to calm down, collect herself, and afterwards, when her mother was in the room, Anica herself, feeling sorry for her mother, would ask about it in a flat voice...

However, one day, having just left the house, her mother, out of the ordinary, returned promptly. She forgot to close the gate behind her. It seemed that she had also forgotten about the deceased and her fear of him. She looked happy, cheerful. So quickly did she enter. Anica was not in the room, but behind the house attending to a chore. Her mother called out her name. But unable to wait calmly in the room, she stepped outside and ran into Anica at the entrance to the room.

"Anica, guess what, my girl!..." she started.

Anica gave her mother a painful, disinterested smile, guessing that this was about some new suitor, most likely, a better one this time. Certainly rich, wealthy.

"There, there, mama: who is it?" and, anticipating what was going to happen, prepared to return and continue her chore.

"Ita," said her mother quickly.

Anica winced as if she had been hit in the midriff. She covered her mouth with her hand, as if to muffle a cry. Of joy, or?

"Ita, Ita, my daughter..." her mother kept repeating, worriedly leaning into her when she saw her daughter turn rigid and, then, slump.

Anica could barely regain her composure.

"Mama!" she covered her forehead with the whole palm of her hand; barely able to stand. "Don't leave me alone tonight. Sleep here."

Then she practically shoved her mother out of the room, closing the door behind her. And her mother could hear her tumble and fall somewhere in the room.

She stayed like that the whole night.

Her mother, terrified, kept standing there, calling her, begging, imploring, in vain. She would not utter a word, save:

"Leave me alone. Don't bother me, mother..." and her voice sounded, admittedly, not like she was crying, but cracked, broken.

No more sounds from the room could be heard. Her mother tried to get in, beseeched, cried the whole night; finally, overcome with fatigue, fell down at the threshold and fell asleep. In the morning, Anica woke up, and to keep her mother silenced, to avoid startling her, prevent her from shouting, from asking her why she looked like she

did: wide, wrinkled eyes, sunken breasts, and her previously fresh, strong life force, now broken and exhausted, silenced her in despair.

"Be quiet, mama, please!" And then, mustering all her strength, replied to Ita's proposal.

"Marry Ita? I will not. But Nedeljko, if he will have me, despite his many children, I want to marry."

Then begging her mother not to ask why she was doing this, returned to the room and closed the door.

Her mother left, but changed her mind half-way home and returned. She repeatedly hit herself on the forehead with her hand, seething with anger at herself.

"Silly me! Why did I stay silent? Why am I listening to her?"

So she returned to ask why she had refused. Why she had rejected Ita. And instead wanted Nedeljko, the widower, the pauper, placing her, the mother, in a position to have to continue worrying about her, continue bringing her supplies, in secret, stealing from the sisters-in-law. Why she did not want Ita, the unmarried man; why she refused to marry him and become rich, and, thus, release her mother from this burden, letting her stop worrying about her; allow her to sit down over there, at the brothers' house, to a good meal and not have to choke on the food sensing that she, Anica, over here, at her husband's may not even have bread to eat. She came back to ask, and to scold and slap. But when she reached the gate, she dared not go in. Not knowing what to do, practically in tears, she stopped by the neighbours and asked them, begged them, to see Anica and ask why she would not have Ita.

"If she refuses him," she told the women, "can she at least say why?"

But Anica would not tell the neighbourhood women, nor anyone else. Not even the brothers who wanted to beat her out of anger. They might even have done so if she hadn't looked so sickly, so broken. She kept replying only:

"Nedeljko, I will have," clutching, wringing her hot, sweaty palms.

"Nedeljko, I will have," she kept saying, placating her brothers. Not because she really wanted to marry Nedeljko, because she loved him, but to appease her brothers, her mother, so that they would stop being angry with her... So that they would not think that she refused to marry Ita because she wanted things to remain as they were; that she wanted them to continue caring for her, feeding her, providing for her; to keep them from worrying about that, almost to comfort them and release them of this burden, she kept eagerly repeating:

"Nedeljko, I will have..."

All this only to stop them from asking why she refused to marry Ita who was clearly better, unmarried, wealthy... She did not want to be asked, or to be bothered. Nor to have anyone visit, nor to have to

see or host anyone. Even the child she could not see. As if she had begun loathing him. Her mother had to keep the child away from her and sleep with him in the kitchen.

Even the mother she could not stand. She began scolding, chastising her. Especially when her mother, while tidying up in the kitchen, would forget to place an item back in its old place, where it had been before when the deceased was alive. That's when she would scold her most severely. Not because of what she had done, but because Anica believed that her mother was intentionally trying to offend the deceased. That all of them were now against him. That they almost hated him. Just because Anica refused to marry Ita. So, now, when everyone was against the deceased, Anica felt that it was her duty to defend him from them, and not just him, but also herself from them; because by marrying her off to Ita they wanted to separate her from him, to tear her away. That is why she did not want to see anyone nor leave the room. Heavy thoughts made her sometimes lose herself in a reverie, unaware of anything for a whole day. Then, when regaining consciousness and seeing her mother standing above her, pressing her forehead, her whole head, placing onion with coffee on her temples, she would chase her away:

“Go, leave me.”

Especially at night, she would not allow her mother near her. She wanted to be alone. The whole night she would: either, determined not to marry Ita, lie there like dead; or, when she relived his proposal in her mind's eye, tremble in pain.

“Ita, my Ita...” and as if he had died, she would start wailing, mourning him.

It is not as if she didn't love him! Oh, if she could only feel him once, and then... But how could she? How could she look at him, Ita, smile at him, cry tears of joy when she embraced him, when she knew that he, the deceased, would come between them right away, at that very instant. Now she, Anica, was no longer what she once had been: the young Anica, but a woman, while he, Ita, well, he was still Ita... So how then could she receive him, embrace him, as his? He might always feel, when holding her, kissing her, that she had not come to him pure; that she had belonged to someone else, to the deceased... had already been caressed in somebody else's arms.

It would not have mattered if he had been like any other ordinary husband, like this Nedeljko, but this was Ita. An ordinary husband was one thing, but Ita was something entirely different.

Ita was Ita...

Ah! Sometimes would Anica fall down, surrender. Allow her breasts, her life force, to tremble, to give herself to this new, other life,

away from the deceased's house, walls, gate. And this new life was—Ita. But immediately, always, as retribution, in the middle of this sweet, heavy dream about Ita, he would appear—the deceased. He would not speak. Only his full, black moustache would stand in deeper contrast to his pale, scrawny, and, now, dead face. He would stand in front of Anica, rigid, slowly rising up in the air. Looking at her with stern, dark eyes. She would not dare move. Only start shrieking, as if pleading for clemency, for forgiveness for daring to think about anything else:

“Yours, yours...”

She would retreat before the deceased, petrified, because she knew in her heart that this “yours, yours” may not be true.

Once, this was so overwhelming, that she jumped up in terror and utterly distraught ran to the window, the window bars, and started tearing at them as if trying to break them and escape. Her mother ran up to her. The child woke up. He started whining, leaning against her. But she was not aware of anything. In a long shirt, almost mad with fear, she kept shaking the bars in despair, all the while knowing that there was nowhere to go, that she was not allowed anywhere. The child whined, whined so loudly that the neighbours could hear him. They jumped the wall, but did not go in; instead, they opened the gates first to let the women in so that they could go to her.

“Anica, Anica... the child, Anica!” the women and her mother removed her from the windows and pointed to her child to bring her back to reality, to compose herself.

But she could not break the trance. Not until she saw the candle, her mother, the women, and become certain that it had not been real; then she burst into tears.

“What is it, Anica?” they asked her and dabbed her with water.

She could not relax, say a word, but kept sobbing.

“What is it? Did somebody scare you, or what?”

“Nothing!” she stuttered.

“What do you mean ‘nothing’? Don’t be afraid. There’s nothing there.” They showed her the calm, dark night, the house, realizing that she had had dark dreams and seen apparitions.

So afterwards, her mother and the neighbourhood women—against Anica’s will, by force, until the day she got married to Nedeljko and left, departed the deceased’s house—sat close to her every night and guarded her, as if defending her from someone.

Translated from Serbian by
Milana Todoroskov

MILAN NENADIĆ

SIX POEMS

BLACK BROOKS

The century comes back again to read us as victims
In the dead hour, at midnight, for our unawareness.
From the back, from the desert of History Tales,
Death comes again, to put its face into our selves.

Are we really, undeniably dead, or can it be
Just a rest – with our hands on swords!
While the campaign goes on from above
The days are mere darkened black spots.

Nothing is death, from the eye it looks,
A short circuit through centuries burns.
By the brook we fall into Black Brooks.
The springs are drowned, waters take turns.

Divided from souls, saved from time,
Our fingers, at night, kindle fireflies:
Our boned glow from the black brine,
So Death will look into its own eyes.

DISRUPTIONS

I grow my horror as someone
would grow flowers.
Spreading rare odours is
Like creating rare worlds.

Horror is my brother, my beloved sister
I see myself as a whole in it.
I watch over it, strive to make it braver
It's only the usual that I can resist.
In it there's a power that reveals wonders.
In it there is an ancient highlander.
See how in my language he enjoys,
How happy he is while I surrender.

As I would myself, I nourish that wonder.
That's what I am, now its my turn.
From Tantalus' torments I draw my power.
This is healthy tissue, and this is the burn.

WINTER, MEPHISTO

Wasteness is useful like air, like nothing:
Wasteness of things, ice on fire, wasteness of being.
Captured I am, but clear. Into icicle turned, I dream:
The world loses breath – but I am redeemed.
As if I'd do something, so strange and awful –
Other world I head for, devoted and sinful.
For I don't like heavens, North Pole and fir above:
Almighty stands there, with a snake behind his brow.

Hellish winter besieges the globe!
Where are the houses? Where's my abode?
Black horse in the field: estranged ideas
of heaven and earth, the wind blows and blows.
Dead, I don't care, I know no awakening:
White as the landscape, cold as daydreaming.

Mephisto, what if I smile now –
Will the world vanish in a wave?
Kindle at last, with laughter and scream –
Cold is the earth with its deadly grip.

WILD GOD

Empty human vein, world in the shallows,
Madness running forth, horseman in black:
See the awful pendulum of the planet's gallows,
See the dimension that wails at us back.

Horror will not last. I live unhindered.
Nights and days mingle, and drink like me.
Guided by black sound, by black sound threatened
I haste into frozen, eternal anarchy.

Hesitate, hand, hesitate, power:
Hours are numbered, beauty is in doubt.
I hear the moment that must come over
From the depth of God – into human shoot.

SERBIAN YOUNGSTERS

Sleep, youngsters, bound, slaughtered.
Sleep, youngsters, too early discarded.

Sleep, you buds, too soon withered,
Unaware of joy by blossoms rendered.

On bright holiday, on Palm Sunday.
When all beauties meet by the well.

When everyone is overwhlemed by joy,
Will anyone remember you at all:

You could have been happy and content
With Serbian lasses, innocent and chaste.

Sleep, you buds, unjustly burnt down,
You could've been globe's jewel in the crown.

Peace to your ashes, by the dusty roads,
Rest to your souls after martyrdom.

Sleep by the roads, with ancestors' sleep,
Sleep, dear youngsters, in eternal peace.

RUNNING FROM HELL

1.

With some tobacco in the pocket
And with heads in confusion
(A moment after mine explosion)
Our perplexed, our pitiful
Excursions over the Drina.

The bus is roaring, brothers' power's coming.
Loads of words, chimeras, imagined force.
And when one looks to the left and right
Onto the dark valleys and ravines
And sees the soothed skeletons
Of junipers and fir trees
And sees meadows
With no butterflies or bees
And sees Krajina villages
Burned down
And sees faces
Hardened for pain –
How strange – upon return, a lady
In silken dress
Settles the bill loudly:
We never waged the war,
For who has seen the battlefield
Where we won!

Her face beams, with redness it's full,
No triumph could be more awful.

2.

I do not invent this, I engrave the picture:
One brother's hand is trembling
While he lights a fag for a man from Krajina:
He came here to ask for fire,
He lost everything he had.
His relatives, his neighbours,
They are all dead –
But he still breathes

And, oh my God,
He wants to have a fag.

This will also pass,
Alas, without righteous scream.
With lightnings inside
Breaking the Krajina people's spine.

Do not be embarrassed, just have a fag!
After the birthplace
After the homeland
Disappeared in smoke –
Let the slaves disappear too.

Let it smoke, let it evaporate:
Just light it, brother
Just have your fag.

Translated from Serbian by
Zoran Paunović

RADOVAN BELI MARKOVIĆ

THE RETURN OF LAZAR DRAŽIĆ

The train came to a stop at the Valjevo train station. This was also the end of the line, with the rails bent upwards and pressed against the concrete pillars, and a windswept plain extending in all directions. Light snow was falling, the poplar trees around the warehouse rose towards the skies like in deep thought, and from a distance a drawn-out voice was calling; as if the fellow's oxcart had moved ahead while he was relieving himself in the thick bushes. I had three more hours of walking to reach the village. The Mislopoljska Street is the easiest road leading out of Valjevo. The street extends along the right bank of the Kolubara river, and forks by the toll gate: left, the white road to Lajkovac, and right, the potholed byway which, meandering up the hills, almost touches the skies: all the way to that open area with no shade where our houses and our barns are wedged, leaving me in no doubt: mine is the potholed road, because I have had very few choices in life, least of all where to be born.

Well, as the story keeps unfolding, it would be proper of me, whether asked or not, to say: I am Lazar, of the Dražić family, from Gornja Psuća. I have arrived from Germany, from Munich, all alone and sort of bent sideways, like a dog afraid of a random kick from passers-by. I'm not carrying much, yet I am stiff and heavy, like I had been sleeping on hemp. All that I have toiled away for is in Deutsche Marks, and it is not much, but I can walk down Mislopoljska Street as if I were a rich man, because Mislopoljska Street is a scanty alley compared to even the most remote *Strasse*. I have to revisit the once splendid looking shop windows with wooden shutters of the blacksmith's, the tanner's, and the traditional peasant shoes' shop, lining the street on both sides like a poor man's luggage. And what I want is not just for idleness, nor is it far from it: I'm in need of a bag, a school bag, blue; with a yellow zip and fringes on the sides!

I wanted one like that once. It seemed to me, in that time of scarcity, captivatingly beautiful, more so than anything I had ever seen, so I thought: one day, I shall have the same, despite the fact that anything I touch and think: "*It's mine*", somehow suddenly starts seeming insignificant and almost putrid from the inside.

Truth be told, that blue bag was not the only thing that caught my eye and caressed my soul, but it was my first-ever, and the first-ever can never be forgotten, so it seems fitting, and somebody would do just that, to ask myself: Did I really take the trouble of travelling from Munich only to buy this, admittedly, trivial bag here in Mislopoljska, as if there were no other, more beautiful bags in the world, in the whole wide world, for which one would know and address a distinguished man?

I was walking along and thinking, and the snow flurried by like in a story. Suddenly, within some twenty steps, everything, literally everything came back to me: there are things that cannot be forgotten even when you think they are, things that the soul sees most clearly while a log is burning out in the fireplace, in the darkest of nights when many a snowed-in poor soul call for their livestock.

I noticed the bag way back during that windy post-war spring, in primary school: it flashed suddenly one morning in our classroom, which had, until the war, been a barn belonging to the gendarmerie, and it was obvious that it was made of a truly silky blue, with a yellow zip and fringes on the sides; the most beautiful bag I could ever have seen or dreamt of. It was brought by my next-door neighbor, Miloš Sandarić, who used to *receive packages* from America, from his uncle. I became ill, willfully, from such beauty, and felt a yearning to have this bag in front of me, always. Until then, nothing was more difficult for me than school, but after that: I would dash to school just to behold that silky blue, that silky *heavenliness*, from which, they say, *zeppelins* are made; so I even believed that Miloš's bag could fly, with some negligible modifications.

I had to have it: it could not be left to hope and a long wait for things to change in my favor.

I gave up all my pursuits. I stopped playing kick-the-hat, catch, Red Rover and stick. I stopped caring for empty cans and yellow bullet casings from the garbage dump behind the military garden, and didn't even go to the local cooperative to watch how they kill lame horses with a mallet. That spring brought me a deep sorrow because I understood that the Dražić family was not like the Sandarić family, but rather one of misery and wilt, whose lives saw no holidays, or white dressy shirts. True, we did eat cereal crops and the new authorities did approve disability to my father Bajkula for the leg he lost fighting horse thieves, but I could not count on any new bag; nor on any kind of *bribe*

for teacher Gojko, even in the form of trout, or a jar of grape pomace brandy, which would be just enough for an excellent report card, and even more excellent marks for behavior; instead, I was always the worst of the worst; first in line only for a slap on the wrist, to kneel on uncooked corn kernels, be locked up in a cellar, and practically irreplaceable in the last desk at the back of the classroom. And, so, I mourned, shrunk inside like a puddle in the hot sun. A hatred of sorts towards my neighbor Miloš took hold of me and could not be concealed, but seemed to *flare up*, like scabies between fingers; yet, it was this very loathing that kept me from truly falling ill. But the object of my hatred was beyond reach. They never found any lice on Miloš nor did he get whipped for having dirty fingers or mouth sores. He even had a sailor suit, a hat with blue ribbons, and low-cut shoes at that, while he himself seemed sort of distant and serenely beautiful, especially when the sunlight would light up the back of his head. In those moments, I would forget all about the bag, let alone about the hatred, and devote my full attention to the view, enjoying it almost like a sinner.

But, anyhow, I could not get the bag out of my head, nor find any peace. I could not buy it, I was not going to receive it as a present, snatching it was out of the question: Miloš was bigger and stronger, I was a sickly, smallish child, and, on top of all that, everything else on me was *constructed* so as to ruin and embarrass me; in particular my rotten teeth, which I was forever, unsuccessfully, trying to hide, and the swarm of scratched *zits*.

In the end, I knew I had to steal that bag, and so I did, one Saturday, while we were *playing hide-and-seek*; we had agreed that the seeker would count to a 100 first. I stuffed Miloš's bag quickly into my own wirehaired goat bag, knowing that I was courting disaster as some of the other players, who had spread in all directions looking for a place to hide, could have seen me, or Miloš himself who was counting with eyes closed, but he might have kept them open as well.

Oh God, I think today, why is it that everything that stands out—and I almost sensed the same back then—be it just a mere bag, a very simple one, comes to have an almost priceless value, and allows you to own that beauty only in secret, thanks to becoming one with it, even if nobody else will own it, because otherwise—there is nothing without begging and giving thanks.

I pondered over this wisdom in vain. Two nights and one day passed without food and sleep; realizing that I was already beyond salvation, that I would forever be a pariah for as long as I live and that my *Good morning!* would not be acknowledged by anybody.

Miloš's family was not only big land owners, but also quite cunning. A lot of property had been confiscated from them, but they kept

quiet and managed to make close connections with the new authorities as well. On Monday, during our first lesson, three members of the Local Council arrived; to investigate the case and find the culprit. One of them, with yellow eyes and dark appearance, brought vineyard shears with him, to cut off my fingers I thought. The second pretended to be a scribe of sorts, while the third requested, with sinister glee, that the pupil on duty bring him a cane, drumming his fingers on the desk impatiently.

I confessed to everything; the teacher wanted to pierce my eyes with two fingers.

I took the teacher, the members of the Council, and the whole class to the chopped woods for the school. That's where they found it, all filthy and wrinkled. A pale earthworm was slithering across the back of the bag, and the zip looked somewhat rusty, yet I will never forget its silky blue, its heavenly blue color; nor will I forget Miloš's face of sorrow and disgust while I was led up the school steps, all the while being chastised loudly, and even pinched so hard that I got bruises.

Teacher Gojko brought a shiny machine with which, in the presence of the representatives from the authorities, he shaved my head straight up and across, to make known to all in Gornja Psuća of a current and future thief. I stared at the polished wood floors, then at the blackboard, gaped at the map of Europe, already taking my farewell of all who knew me. The student on duty had turned the president's picture to face the wall, at the order of the teacher himself, and there was no saving me, no mitigating circumstances, nobody to provide a decent human understanding of it all. My hair fell in chunks in front of my feet. I didn't even know that it was so ugly and brittle, looking dead, nor that my scalp was covered with so much lichen. After that I was locked up in the cellar full of obsolete school desks and cribs, left behind by former married teachers who had been *relegated* to the Psuć school as a punishment. The cribs creaked hauntingly, as if rocked by somebody hidden behind the old wooden barrel, and narrow rat eyes glared at me from all the corners. I wasn't released until the shadows from the trees, which I was frightened of, had grown long; especially from one elm whose branches creaked like the teeth of the horse-thieves that used to be whipped underneath its crown.

At home, my mother Srčika, pressed my hands against the hot stove plate and whipped me bare-naked with a birch stick until I wet myself on the old cattail mat by the green Hoosier cabinet, and my father Bajkula finished my *haircut*, awkwardly and unevenly, when he stumbled home late that night; but at least he rid me of the cross on the head. I could not sit down because of mother's whipping and leaned, instead, against the door jamb, with my head falling to my chest ever so often; both mine and my drunken father's.

I went back to school on the third day, after all the events. The bag was shoved into my face by Miloš Sandarić, on the school steps. I was greeted with mocking chant and general ridicule; during the main break a mongrel had gotten entangled in the school's apiary so teacher Gojko broke two canes on me to force me to rush into the frenzied swarm of bees, almost naked, in only short sleeves and shorts, and free the dog from his chain.

The bee swarm was menacing like a gloomy hail cloud, and great darkness engulfed me and a terrifying buzzing sound rose to the skies.

I am told that my father Bajkula spent two days sitting on our doorstep, carving a new wooden leg from linden tree. They say that my uncles divided the property amongst themselves; that axes were thrown, and haystack forks drawn, and one-and-a-half meter oak fence panels wielded. They swore, legend has it, at everything on earth and at everything in the skies, and the wicked aunts are said to have removed the floorboards from the outhouse causing father, with his newly carved wooden *leg*, to plunge into brotherly shit up to his neck, so mother then bathed him in the tin tub and hurled the wooden leg far into the quiet starry night. They say that Nona the mare kept neighing throughout the morning; while the sun was getting warmer and the backyard was smoking like hot Bannock bread; while a hungry crow flew from a pillar, cawing like it had dropped *Damjan's hand*. The skies and the earth seem to have opened, but I saw nothing; and I heard nothing.

I had *swollen* into one big blister and my soul had *trickled* away somewhere. Bees had been pulled out of my mouth, my eyes, ears and nose. I was being seduced by, misled by and plunged into unconsciousness. Mother Srčika kept draping me in greased coltsfoot leaves and wrapping me in freshly skinned sheepskin. At dusk, shiny knitting needles flashed through the air and somebody was using a dull knife to cut off chicken legs, while a moth was circling a weevil on the sooty glass. I was shivering from chills, and then I felt a sudden draught from underneath the door: my aunt from Valjevo had arrived, and she kept lowering an orange, for hours it seemed, by my bedhead, at times tiny as an earring, and then suddenly as large as a pumpkin; she kept lowering it with her fine-smelling long fingers, as if reaching for me from the promise of a better world.

I swear it was like the whole of Gornja Psuća was pressing down on my eyelids, and my face had flared up in dark spots so doctor Banković was called. My folks were afraid of doctors, especially Mother, because when Father, after *that thing with the horse thieves*, ended up in hospital and had no way of paying for it, old Grozdanić, trackman and, woefully, dentist, yanked out three of her golden front teeth—to settle the

costs and save the livestock from sale at the Valjevo weight scales—with domes more beautiful than those on the Psač church. But doctor Banković did not take a dime, neither for the visit nor for the *medications*, and added to that: “I’m sorry for this,” and left a coin at my bedhead.

Somehow I managed to get well, and, in the fall, I was sent to town, to Valjevo, to master Poček Mate, to serve as a locksmith apprentice. In Psača they said: “This will do him good, him and his thieving hands and ways.” I quartered and had meals with an aunt on my mother’s side, in Klanica Street, across from the “MILAN KITANOVIĆ” tannery, which gave off a horrible stench, like the disrupted Psač graveyard. Well, this is where I got to see many a different bag: in the morning, my dozy aunt would—as I was breaking stale bread and dropping it in hot water with floating islands of stale oil, like spit, and once I saw something looking like a frog in the water—carefully open my uncle’s bag, a black, railroad worker’s, like a small travel trunk, and place a loaf of white leftover bread and a piece of cut salami in its darkness, full of unimaginable secrets from travels. This bag was not, nor could it be, like the blue one, Miloš’s, not even close, but I still regarded it with respect and would contemplate about the *far-away places* it had been to; until my aunt, from the window, had made sure that the red lights from my uncles last train wagon had disappeared in the distance, and until, as if summoned by a signal unbeknownst to me, Sergeant First Class, Jagoš Rakočević, *entered*; before his yellow bag I was prepared even to kneel, but not to touch, suspecting military things inside it and secret plans, while at the same time feeling grateful to the Sergeant for his deep trust in me and for leaving me alone with it in the kitchen, together with his boots, the garrison cap and the wet military raincoat, which probably even had some money in it.

Besides these, there were other, oh, so many different, bags that I got to see: generals’ bags, always guarded by twenty soldiers, which could by no means be subjected to insults; cashier’s bags, which always need to be properly hung, because we all get our *books inspected* at some point; ministerial bags, full of *documents* which convince, confirm, investigate, threaten, regret, and, now and then, even curse, just to make a confused man hold his head in frustration; students’ bags, somewhat *infamous*, as if they too were interested in verses in which anyone can find proof that the owner is a candidate for the loony bin; there were countless numbers of bags like that, bags with *character*, and I saw one just like made for me; right here, in Mislopoljska Street: made of blue plastic, had a yellow zip and those fringes—only, it was beyond my reach. Father did not give me any money, but kept sending my aunt half of his disability pension instead, and master Poček did not pay his apprentices, instead they paid him—for every broken file and drill.

And somehow I realized that everything in this fucked up world keeps getting eternally and infinitely repeated; it is only the sinful man and his desires that remain the same and unfulfilled. I got scared that I might pilfer something again, so I dared not think about *that* bag for a long time, nor of any other that might take its place in my soul, and even when a thought like that occurred, I would wince in fear that someone might ask for my documents.

But memories will not just disappear on a whim. I remembered my Gornja Psuća and its people; hoping for, at least, a note, even with just two words: *Father died*, so that I could take the old road home; if only to the funeral service at the altar of the Jeremiah Church, with all those depictions on the walls—tortured women, skeletal old men and devils with tails and billhooks, tridents, swords and whips of entangled snakes, in some otherworldly dark green light—painted as if a curtain had been raised, a curtain that shielded the sinner from hell, and in that hell I devised my own torture; hoping to see Miloš Sandarić at the bottom of the devil's kingdom: where else would we go one without the other!

Miloš must be a success; people with such a beautiful physique and neck never fail, I thought, wishing him, secretly, if hell, after all, both does and doesn't exist, a small place in the crowded train to Germany, which I boarded and headed to, as ordered after the army, after years of debating with myself, like talking to a dead man, about where to go and where to settle down.

In the narrow hall of that damned train, a young man—with a neck exactly the same as Miloš's and looking sort of beautiful in his own right, with that same bag under his arm—threw up blood right at my feet. I felt momentarily sorry for him and forgave everything, as if he was my closest kin, right then and there. Why on earth did I hold a grudge against him, except for the fact that the wretched bag belonged to him, and not me? But, seeing his face I realized: it is not Miloš and then I felt sorry it wasn't him...This haunted me all the way to Munich, and afterwards as well, whenever I thought about it. I shook my head in pity and in my mind tied a rope around the hook I intended to hang myself.

But, something almost slipped my mind: in the whole of Munich I saw not such a bag; blue, with a yellow zip and fringes on the side. Neither in Munich, nor in the whole of Swabia, so I made up my mind: I'll buy it in Valjevo when I get back. Only one thing troubled me: will they have it and did they still make such products? According to my calculations, I was aiming with an empty rifle because such bags had long been dead and buried, so to speak, but hope never left me.

Reaching goals does not equal bliss for man. Goals wear out over time, and become empty and ridiculous. Bliss, if it actually exists, can

be found in the eternal love for suffering. It's that rigid tenderness which kept crushing and exhausting me, throughout the land of Swabia, while seeing marvels I thought were only meant for my eyes—to make me understand my own nothingness.

I walked down Mislopoljska Street the moment I stepped off the train. And bought that bag. I found it in a small leather shop, by the bridge. It cost two thousand and seven hundred. In Deutsch Marks: around five... and some change. I was tired and saw in the shop windows that my face had a sickly color.

At last, I arrived at the crossroads from the beginning of the story. That way: Gornja Psuća, whose name cannot be uttered without a sneering surprise, this way: the road to Lajkovac, a railroad dive, where gambling and hard-drinking rules, and where the Lajkovac railroad workers once beat up some poet from the capital with lanterns. The bag had frozen in my hands; it had become stiff like a dead fish, but it had not to do only with the cold; something entirely different had happened; the bag itself had *deceased*, burned out. In vain did I hold it close to my chest and try to warm it with my breath: that silky blue, the heavenly blue color had simply burned out and no longer did it light up with all the colors of the rainbow.

It had become dark, and to Gornja Psuća and the Dražić house there were still three more hours of walking, unless one sprints like a madman, imagining that all the deceased and all the living, and even those not yet born, were eagerly waiting to see you—although the Psuć wretchedness will quickly clip anyone's wings so the only way to walk into the village is on all four, with a feeling that a mortcloth is about to cover your back at any moment.

Well, it's nice, I thought, after all it is nice to come to your old doorstep after ten years, even though my father Bajkula, and his linden leg, had long since gone to meet his maker, and my mother Srčika had done the same last year, on Saint Kyriakos the Anchorite. I didn't see them off to the altar in Jeremiah Church, nor to the Sakarkuća cemetery. My master denied me *urlaub* both times, but, to be fair, my requests had been put forward as if my deceased parents had been alive, but even then I believed that someone should have to be, *over there*, to shout out my name, even if it meant facing my hostile uncles—who had removed the roof from our shack, divided up the backyard, appropriated the property, sold Nona the mare and squandered the money—and my ill-disposed aunts who would gladly sprinkle my wine with poison and lure a longhorn beetle into my ear.

I realized, though, as the snow flurries melted in the air, that it would not be wise to walk into the village with that ridiculous bag clasped under my arms. I might be seen by Miloš's family. God knows

where in the world he was, but everybody is bound to recall because people in Gornja Psuća hardly ever forget anything since nothing ever happens there, and when it does, it is etched in memory forever: like way back when this guy Jepur swallowed a live goldfinch.

So I pick up some kind of stick and shove away dead leaves under a beech and then cover the bag with the leaves, just like I did once with the school logs.

Nobody saw me. The snow continued falling like in a fairy tale while I cackled with laughter, alone, stomping my foot triumphantly, until someone tapped me on the back and called me a fool.

Translated from Serbian by
Milana Todoskov

MIROSLAV ALEKSIĆ

FIVE POEMS

LABYRINTH

The labyrinth is not just
a perfectly trimmed hedge.
It's not the deafening cacophony of corners
Colliding with a bang
Like balls on a pool table
Whose tedious
Starting point is ordinary reality.
It is like a harmonic analysis of a smile
Which abruptly takes away your calm
And so you sit there,
With Ariadne's thread in your pocket
And a bull's head in sight,
Unable to ever again
Live anywhere outside the maze.

BETWEEN TWO REALITIES

If you look behind when you leave,
The words I gave you will turn to stone.
In vain you will open a window
And with your hands like shells on your lips
Beckon eternity on the horizon –
Only the shutters will clatter in the wind
And our square in the heart of Pompeii will be empty.

If you look behind when you leave,
The ashes will cover the days and nights
That stand in ranks like soldiers
And you won't be able to summon my face in your dreams
It will be the pale silhouette of a somnambulist
Walking a tightrope between two realities.
If you look behind when you leave,
You'll never recognize another embrace.
In summer eves, crickets will grow silent
And pointless fireflies will inhabit the darkness –
glitches on the sky display.
Instead of footprints, you'll leave behind holograms of longing
And they will shine light over this city like neon signs
When you leave.

THE RETURN

After the Great War in 1918
My great grandfather Mitar returned to his village
And found his house silent and abandoned
There were no suitors
No Penelope
No Telemachus
No faithful dog to die
He took a piece of old maize bread from the table
And, exhausted by hunger
Swallowed it without chewing
He lived only a couple moments more
And then
Died.

His wife Bosiljka
And his eldest, Nikola
Came back from somewhere, too late
And, even though he barely looked himself
His wife recognized him
Kissed him on his cold forehead
And shut his eyes, as is customary
Then she called the neighbors from the doorstep
Come, for Mitar has returned.

THE MOMENT

What did the moment look like
Measured by the clock
On a distant tower
While it trickled from an hourglass
And collided with water molecules
Somewhere in a clepsydra
Was it a fissure in scarce time
Or a gap in uniform space
At any rate, that sunglassed woman
walked across the terrace of a bar
Turning, beguiling,
Towards the old corners of the world
Looking back to see
If spring was dragging behind her
Like the trains of a wedding dress
And then she stopped cautiously
As if not to wake a child
I believe it was the moment

MY MOTHER IN PICTURES

My mother is trying to explain to me the past.
She transforms into pictures and looks at them intently.
Now and then, wind blows from memory,
Drifts of snow, hunger, disease, fear, someone's lie, poverty...
Everything's in that bag, in that uterus
Giving birth to ages, people, and more.
Only when she touches upon dreams, when she tells me
That she met my father as if in real life,
Between shame and fear as between two shores,
Hope is back, her look into herself comes alive
As if she's unsure for a moment
Whether they've met in that dream or they are yet to meet.
At that moment, I'm gone; I'm not sipping coffee with her.
The two of them are alone with the secret from which I also came to be.

Translated from Serbian by
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VLADIMIR GVOZDEN

THE CULTURE OF SERBIAN TRAVEL WRITING 1914-1940, BELGRADE 2011

The aestheticized encounter: modernity, pastism and cosmism

The preoccupation with time, a characteristic of modernity, is in fact the need of travel authors—in the name of legitimized aesthetic imperatives—not only to distance themselves from the world that surrounds them, but also to attempt to re-center a decentralized world. Travel authors are aware, or, in the very least, they sense, that after the Great War and the post-war crisis, and the ensuing boom in development of new means of transport and ways of communication, the category of ‘reality’ has come into question. Rade Drainac recognizes the nature of the new pluralism without hierarchy (with the exception of economic hierarchy): “There is a reason why the modern man is morose, weary, lost in resignation and despair, without ideals, faith or a cheerful disposition. Our age is electrified with ideas, none of which, however, symbolizes the epoch.”¹ Vinaver is very convincing in “Konačna Venecija” (“The Final Venice”) when he describes the exhaustion caused by the acceleration of modernity: “We cannot cope with miracles and chaos any more. We are looking for salvation in laws and regularity. Miracles are exhausting. Every miracle resembles one another.”² Ever since Baudelaire, aesthetics has been clashing with the lost terrain of social representation—in a conceptual sense—of modern sociability in arts,³ and this is reflected in the genre of travel writing, which traditionally

¹ Rade Drainac, *Lepote i čuda Pariza: evropski putopisi i reportaže*, ed. Gojko Tešić, *Dela*, vol. VII, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Belgrade, 1999, p. 219.

² Stanislav Vinaver, “Konačna Venecija”, *Evropa u vrenju*, ed. Petar Milosavljević, *Dnevnik*, Novi Sad, 1991, p. 261.

³ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009, p. 11.

counted on the possibility to place reality, or at least some aspects of reality, within the covers of a book. In his renowned “The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays”, the neoclassical ideal of unchanging beauty becomes undermined by a vivid sense of flux and movement of life in the present. By bringing together the metaphysical and the temporal, Baudelaire invents a poetics of sudden ‘correspondences’, of moments when a swift change of forms which characterizes contemporary experience suddenly becomes illuminated by an intuition of the atemporal or the spiritual.⁴ In the hectic society of modernity, nothing is able to reach the status of sacredness; the perpetually moving population will not allow any aura to be attached to its social stratification—and it is this very stratification that unrelentingly affects the nature of art. This is why modernist literature is characterized by the ever-shifting processes of assimilation, revision and rejection of reality in its attempt to establish a point of balance between (often conflicting) requirements of sociological awareness and modernist aesthetics.

Baudelaire’s forebodings saw their full extent developed a few decades later: the *belle époque* marked a phase of accelerated consumerism in which the world of goods and new media, including ‘estheticized’ everyday consumer products, began replacing the written word, which was built on strict models of social hierarchy and limited access to consumer goods, including works of art.⁵ The postwar years bear witness to a growing interest in ‘order’ and ‘structure’, albeit with variable results, because the world of ‘transparent’ communications also generates the opposite to learnability in the form of secrets in the midst of an increasingly complex social context, which is illustrated by a travel writer in Paris as he invites us to travel with him: “So, join me for one more group walk through this city of beauty and endless secrets.”⁶ A similar flipside to the rational civilization taking the form of mysteries is also noted by Rade Drainac in his Paris travelogue where he writes about the rise of crime and the respective literary genres reflecting that rise.⁷

⁴ Ibid, p. 5.

⁵ “So, why not admit it once and for all, books in our current society, with the exception of the few who truly need them, are of less importance even than a night out in a tavern, a sports event, or 1-2 hours film watching”, writes Momčilo Nastasijević (*Eseji, beleške, misli, prir.* Novica Pekovid, *Sabrana dela Momčila Nastasijevića*, book IV, *Dečje novine – SKZ*, Gornji Milanovac – Belgrade, 1991, p. 401).

⁶ Momčilo Milošević, *Pisma iz Pariza*, Knjižarnica Gece Kona, Belgrade, 1931, p. 26.

⁷ “In the age of radiotelegraphy, television and airplanes, the world is ruled by phantoms, criminals, and one does not really know when somebody is a victim or a murderer. And instead of reaching a clarification of the situation, the horizon of life seems ever darker.” (Rade Drainac, *Lepote i čuda Pariza: evropski putopisi i reportaže*, ed. Gojko Tešić, *Dela*, vol. VII, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Belgrade, 1999, p. 199).

In the interwar period, literature was most certainly faced with an excess of objects and an excess of people, and the chaos of modernity, as we have tried to show, was registered by our travel writers both on a conscious and an unconscious level. Naturally, the obvious question looming over travel writing discourse is how to counter the chaos of modernity? What is the warranty for creating values which will transcend the immanence of the contemporary world? Is it still possible to have a 'real' and 'true' encounter between text and the world? It is an irrefutable fact that contingency is eminently linked with modernity, and that this is reflected in the tropes for the chronotope of encounter in Serbian travel books from the interwar period. As Dragiša Vasić in his travel book from Germany points out, "this world [...] lives and does everything in a panic of wasting time".⁸ Modernity opens the question of the new economy of time of a human life, warns Isidora Sekulić: "There is, after all, something primal in humans that resists this new technology. Man, the intelligent, thinking man, is not gifted with the power to eradicate distances, any more than he can hold back time. Time passes, people say. But it is actually not time that passes so much as people do. And, it is not distances that a traveler eradicates but rather a part of his life. He sits constricted, tied down, idle, alien and redundant, among other constricted, tied down, idle and alien people."⁹ Does this, then, mean that chronotopes of encounter are, in fact, tropes, synecdoches, in which a part is meant to represent the whole, concealing thereby the inability to convey the true complexity of reality?

We have already mentioned that there was a surge of communication among European artists in the age of Modernism and that information was disseminated easier than ever before. In line with this wide trend, Serbian travel books too were filled with numerous recounts of encounters with modern art: Isidora Sekulić raves about Grieg;¹⁰ Dragiša Vasić listens to Brahms' 'Requiem' in Munich feeling "elated to his very fingertips"¹¹ Momčilo Milošević talks with the animalist sculptor Paul Jouve about his impressions of Paris;¹² Rade Drainac is captivated by the performance of Michael Chekhov in the role of *Hamlet*¹³

⁸ Dragiša Vasić, "Utisci iz današnje Nemačke", *Srpski književni glasnik*, book VII, no.5, 1923, p. 356.

⁹ Isidora Sekulić, *Pisma iz Norveške i drugi putopisi*, eds. Zoran Glušević and Marica Josimčević, Stylos, Novi Sad, 2001, p. 258.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 166.

¹¹ Dragiša Vasić, "Utisci iz današnje Nemačke", *Srpski književni glasnik*, book VIII, No. 6, 1923, p. 434.

¹² Momčilo Milošević, *Pisma iz Pariza*, Knjižarnica Gece Kona, Belgrade, 1931, p. 13.

¹³ "Chekhov, this man with nerves as tight as violin strings, was a revelation to me. The whole ensemble looked like one single nerve" (Rade Drainac, *Lepote i čuda Pariza: evropski putopisi i reportaže*, ed. Gojko Tešić, *Dela*, vol. VII, Zavod za

in Riga; Berlin is inundated with music,¹⁴ Vienna as well,¹⁵ but Paris is the world's true center of music.¹⁶ In his travelogue on Vienna, Vinaver speaks highly of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9,¹⁷ while Isidora Sekulić in her *Pisma iz Norveške* (*Letters from Norway*) favors Symphony No. 5, and Drainac goes to visit Beethoven's room in Baden-Baden.¹⁸ It is, also, important to point out what is not mentioned. For example, nobody speaks of the 'Russian ballet', the main attraction in contemporary Parisian avantgarde circles, with the exception of an allusion made by Crnjanski: "Russians are everywhere. Their ballet is adored".¹⁹ Even though our authors, as we will see, are focused more on the past in terms of understanding the place and role of art, on occasion it becomes evident that they understand things and know that much is changing in the arts.²⁰ Regardless of the examples mentioned, the travelogues leave the impression that the past does not penetrate the present; quite the opposite, the present seems to undermine some presumed stable orders governing both the area of content and the area of expression.

The relationship between the economy and classical prose is broken and attempts to re-establish itself through intersubjective networks of social languages which stand witness to the loss of a common horizon.

udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Belgrade, 1999, p. 125; there is praise elsewhere in the book as well, for example on p. 126)

¹⁴ "With a belly full, tango, Rachmaninoff, Lehár, Korngold, mulatto songs – the lot – were devoured" (Miloš Crnjanski, *Knjiga o Nemačkoj, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L'Age d'Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, pp. 289-290).

¹⁵ "In the early evening it is crowded in front of the Opera. [...] I went to another opera house as well. There was a celebration in the honor of Beethoven there. It was filled to the last seat." (Miloš Crnjanski, *Pisma iz Pariza, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L'Age d'Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, p. 11). "Vienna's revenge on all those who tore it down is not in blood, nor even in the form of satire. Vienna's revenge is the fact that it is still Vienna, and the loveliest of Vienna is: the operetta. Vienna took revenge – with the operetta." (Stanislav Vinaver, *Beč: staklena bašta na Dunavu*, ed. Gojko Tešić, Narodna knjiga – ALFA, Belgrade, 1999, p. 7).

¹⁶ "Still, Paris is the biggest center of music in the world today" (Momčilo Nastasijević, "Beleške s boravka u Parizu", *Eseji, beleške, misli*, ed. Novica Peković, *Sabrana dela Momčila Nastasijevića*, book IV, Dečje novine – SKZ, Gornji Milanovac – Belgrade, 1991, p. 166).

¹⁷ Stanislav Vinaver, *Beč: staklena bašta na Dunavu*, ed. Gojko Tešić, Narodna knjiga – ALFA, Belgrade, 1999, p. 250.

¹⁸ Rade Drainac, *Lepote i čuda Pariza*, ed. Gojko Tešić, *Dela*, vol. VII, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Belgrade, 1999, p. 250.

¹⁹ Miloš Crnjanski, *Pisma iz Pariza, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L'Age d'Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, p. 28.

²⁰ "America can make an exhibition of a better collection of modern artworks than they themselves" (referring, of course, to the French, and primarily to the French impressionists; *Ibid*, p. 32)

Modern writing seeks to commit violence of sorts over the very language and forms of social life it is supposed to promote.²¹ With the exception of the odd delight in new technologies and fashion, the modern world is, to our travel writers, most often seen as a pseudo world, and the size of their issues with the present plays a significant role in the textuality of their travel writing. A part of this problem with the contemporary society is well described by Dragiša Vasić in his *Utisci iz Rusije* (*Impressions from Russia*):

Because everything can be seen by the piece and heard by the piece. Because everything that you see is the present, it's disconnected, just like everywhere else. And in the end, in your own country, where not even the smallest of facts elude you and where you tremble before every occurrence, who can say: that's the place to go, or that's what's going to happen, or that's how it's going to end. [...] And the streets are full of people just like everywhere else: this one is poor, there's a lady with a puppy, that one is splendidly dressed. A machine races by you, with a man in a fur coat behind the wheel. While the inside of Kremlin is populated with ministers, in front of the same Kremlin shivering cleaners shovel last night's snow, and beggars are all around you. So, what is it that you have seen, may I ask? And isn't it like that everywhere else? Well, you would be wrong, very wrong indeed!"²²

The world is perceived as overly complex, and the reality as something that is not able to establish a solid order in the ever-fluctuating contemporary world whose status is elusive to the traveler, or as observed by Rastko Petrović in his travel writing on Libya: "There is something apocalyptic, like in a dream, in this inability to complete things that are characterized by the swiftest transience. One feels the urge to cry bitterly and rejoice at the same time."²³ That is why, as we will show, the dominant selective type of temporal quality in chronotopes of encounter is tied to the past—whether in the form of narratives about the heritage of visual arts (architecture, painting, sculpture) or through admiration of ancient ruins as preferential places in an area where the travel writer happened to find himself. For example, Dragiša Vasić applies this model when he aestheticizes the revolution by way of likening the soldiers of the Red Army to "Donatello's Gattamelata".²⁴

The present is most often understood as the moment of destruction of the Other and self, hence the travel narratives about a concrete place

²¹ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009, p. 59.

²² Dragiša Vasić, *Utisci iz Rusije*, Život i rad, Belgrade, 1928, p. 51.

²³ Rastko Petrović, "Libija", *Putopisi*, eds. Milan Dedinac and Marko Ristić, *Dela Rastka Petrovića*, book V, Nolit, Belgrade, 1977, p. 131.

²⁴ Dragiša Vasić, *Utisci iz Rusije*, Život i rad, Belgrade, 1928, p. 12.

often contains a timeline going backward. Naturally, the past too needs a present, it cannot exist without it as Rastko Petrović laments: “I don’t want to hear about anything from the past anymore. I have no time to learn anything more about it if I want to live the life which was, in all its beauty.”²⁵ This is a contradiction often seen in travel writers between the two wars: if he (or she), for example, views a landscape that Theocritus was preoccupied with, does this mean that he should read Eclogues or that he should surrender to direct observation? The encounter in this sense is dependent on the intermediary, but it is obvious that the intermediary strategies, even when referring to the past, are linked to the present moment: modernity is simultaneously a culmination of the past and the tipping point for change in socio-cultural relations and aesthetic descriptions.²⁶

The social phenomenologist Alfred Schütz provides a good explanation to the problem of the nature of encounters in this time period. He likens social groups to ‘communities of time’ which are formed by growing up together, creating thereby a ‘we-relation’ as a temporal frame for face-to-face encounters during social activities taking place here and now, i.e. in concrete space and time: “consociality based on temporal and spatial *presence* has become the paradigm of social interaction”.²⁷ Modernity introduces a cut, a paradox, into human relations: everyday immediate encounters, which should be the carriers of real and true social interaction, become routinized and, therefore, transcend into normative rituals. This reification of social action facilitates the ‘disembedding’ of social relations from their face-to-face context and displacing them along the temporal and spatial axes.²⁸ The paradox lies in the fact that it is the very structure of everyday encounters that alienates people from true closeness, i.e., from authentic individual expression for the sake of a normative communication setup. If one applies this to the field of travel writing, it would roughly mean the following: on the one hand, travel writers attempt to position their encounters with foreign places as the opposite of tourism and beadeker discourses; on the other hand, the reaction to the crisis of immediacy is often manifested as an escape into historicism and aestheticism, i.e. as an attempt to aestheticize everyday life with means and figures from the past.

²⁵ Rastko Petrović, *Sicilija i drugi putopisi: iz neobjavljenih rukopisa*, ed. Radmila Šuljagić, Nolit, Belgrade, 1988, p. 90.

²⁶ Peter Childs, *Modernism*, Routledge, London, 2000, pp.11-16.

²⁷ Alfred Schütz, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theories*, ed. Arvid Brodersen, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1964, p. 23.

²⁸ Barry Sandwell, “The Shock of the Old: Mikhail Bakhtin’s Contributions to the Theory of Time and Alterity”, ed. Michael m. Bell and Michael Gardiner, *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences*, Sage, London, 1998, pp. 201-202.

Before we focus our attention to the dimensions of an aesthetic encounter and its influence on temporal templates in travel writing, there is a need to answer a constantly looming question: why are there so few interpersonal encounters in travel writing? There are, of course, certain locations where such encounters are not possible due to the geographic distribution of the population: “the final piece of information is that you can travel through several parts of Norway and barely run into a person”.²⁹

In other cases, the possibility for direct encounters is marred by the requirements of science, for example by the rules of ethnography, whereby the individual inevitably becomes the representative of a group: “Out of all things I had the opportunity to encounter on this unusual trip, nothing excited me more than meeting the most primitive man that exists on the planet today, the first Eskimo wanderer we happened to come across.”³⁰ Furthermore, there are various forms of behavior in which one only pretends to like directness, which often brings out ironic reactions as described by Jelena Dimitrijević: “When you arrive in Kairo and get off the train, you immediately get surrounded by endless acquaintances and, even, friends.”³¹

Schütz’s argument explains the key problem regarding the crisis of interpersonal encounters to a large extent: namely, the structure of everyday encounters becomes ritualized facilitating thereby communication; however, the ritualization also makes it anonymized and removed from the traditional context.³² This process is linked to the issue of separation of private and public, which is accordingly noted by a French author: “On a train or in any other public place well-mannered people do not commence a conversation with strangers...In the presence of a stranger, the topic of conversation among relatives and friends should not be about intimate things.”³³ At the turn of the century, especially after the Great War, life became divided into three uneven parts: a public life pertaining mainly to the sphere of work, a private family

²⁹ Isidora Sekulić, *Pisma iz Norveške i drugi putopisi*, ed. Zoran Gluščević i Marica Josimčević, Stylos, Novi Sad, 2001, p. 42.

³⁰ Mihailo Petrović, *Kroz polarnu oblast*, SKZ, Belgrade, 1932, p. 133.

³¹ Jelena J. Dimitrijević, *Sedam mora i tri okeana: putem oko sveta*, Državna štamparija, Belgrade, 1940, p. 81.

³² The extent to which an encounter can be superficial is well illustrated by a paragraph in the Russian travel book by Dragiša Vasić in which he explains that he has forgotten the name of a likable American writer because he knew that the American would not remember his either (Dragiša Vasić, *Utisci iz Rusije*, Život i rad, Belgrade, 1928, p. 39).

³³ Baronne Staff, *Usages du monde. Règles du savoir-vivre dans la société moderne*, Victor-Havard, Paris, 1893, pp. 317, 320, 342,. Qtd. in: Antoan Prost, “Granice i prostori privatnosti”, *Istorija privatnog života*, vol. 5, eds. Phillippe Ariés and Georges Duby, Clio, Belgrade, 2004, p. 14.

life and a personal life even more private than the family life.³⁴ This correlation between the internal and external was reflected in the travel discourse as well. In fact, it displays a certain level of confusion among writers regarding the nature of the relation between the private and the public, leaving an impression that their descriptions of contemporary social exchange are fraught with deep contradictions. Socialization, based on knowing one another, is the basis for this exchange, as well as for travel rhetoric because “when we meet someone, words [...] make us feel that we exist, that we are seen, that we are recognized, that we are respected and valued.”³⁵ Travel writers are happy to meet their countrymen because they remind them of their homeland, the start and end point of their journey; at the same time, they are aware that such meetings would never happen anywhere else.³⁶ On the other hand, this genre is part of a broader movement in which privacy steadily moves from behind closed doors to the area of anonymity that can be found in certain public places—friendships from group hiking or love affairs at the seaside are a great novelty of the 20th century.³⁷

Anonymity is primarily linked with big cities, but big-city patterns are swiftly spread to other places. Benjamin’s important analysis of the Flâneur lifestyle and mindset points to the consequences from the writer’s stepping out to the town square and the founding of panoramic literature. The consequence of stepping out into the square is a political one because it is based on the idea that life, with all its heterogeneity and rich diversity, can grow “only on the gray cobbled streets”. In addition to the political dimension, there is also a dimension of senses, which was first mentioned by Georg Simmel and then endorsed by Benjamin—it has to do with the fact that, due to public transport, relations between people in big cities become characterized by a dominance of activities based on sight over hearing.³⁸ The dominance of the eye has, naturally, an effect on the nature of interpersonal encounters which, in turn, become uniform and superficial due to the pressure of the visual. In his *Estetička pisma* (*Aesthetic letters*) Marko Car observes the importance of such dominance, but remains optimistic regarding

³⁴ Antoan Prost, “Granice i prostori privatnosti”, *Istorija privatnog života*, vol. 5, eds. Phillippe Ariès and Georges Duby, Clio, Belgrade, 2004, p. 56.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 88.

³⁶ “Had we met somewhere else, we would not have looked at one another. But here in the Far East, where one is happy to meet anyone with whom one can communicate and understand at least a bit, it is like having met one of your nearest and dearest.” (Milorad Rajčević, *Na Dalekom Istoku*, Printing shop “Đ. Jakšić”, Belgrade, 1930, p. 92).

³⁷ Antoan Prost, “Granice i prostori privatnosti”, *Istorija privatnog života*, vol. 5, eds. Phillippe Ariès and Georges Duby, Clio, Belgrade, 2004, p. 6.

³⁸ Valter Benjamin, *Estetički ogledi*, trans. Truda Stamać and Snješka Knežević, ed. Viktor Žmegeč, Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 1986, p. 45.

the possibility of true communication: “Only simple chattering, which the French call *flâneur*, can bring the traveler in closer contact with people and their habitats; within that, one can find encouragement to *think with his eyes* and, on occasion, notice things which he would otherwise miss, and which are not only a joy to the eyes but, sometimes, also a whole new discovery in the world of beauty.”³⁹

“A kiss is the most glorious encounter of all”, wrote Jovan Dučić in his “Pesma ženi” (“A Poem to a Woman”). The poem does not seem to be addressed to a particular woman, but rather to an abstract and elusive being from the world of male fantasy. In fact, this line, which has in the meantime become commonplace, takes us a further step into an important dimension of modernity embodied in the abstract generated from the existence of an elusive and unimaginable multitude which threatens to overpower the writer himself, who can no longer count on the existence of the Archimedean point to view the world. In one of the most famous poems from *The Flowers of Evil*, the sonnet “To a Passerby”, Baudelaire evokes the roaring sound of big cities enveloping the poet when he unexpectedly notices a nimble and lovely passerby. Only their eyes meet for a fleeting moment, but this is sufficient to feed the poet’s fantasy of unimaginable sensual pleasures, while still being aware that life will keep them apart because this encounter is typical of the big city—brief and transient. The potential of eternity is mentioned only as a metaphysical sense of uniting.⁴⁰ According to Benjamin’s analysis, the crowd in this case is a shelter for love which seems to escape from the poet: “*Never*, is the peak of an encounter, where passion, only seemingly averted, actually flares up in the poet like a fire.”⁴¹ Love and the encounter are stigmatized by the big city which erases traces of private life. The problem, however, is not only the big city itself; it lies also in the patterns of behavior towards one another and in the interpersonal relations imposed by the big city spirit, together with other peripheral modern trends. This is very important to the understanding of encounters in travel writing because it clearly illustrates how the privacy of an encounter with a woman clashes with public mold, whereby the depiction becomes part of the demonstration, and in which the crowd forces conditions on the chronotope of interpersonal contacts. In short and metaphorically speaking, the woman in travel writing is seen as *a passerby* which speaks volumes about modern economy of time and space, which is a participant in the de-

³⁹ Marko Car, *Estetička pisma*, Geca Kon, Belgrade, 1920, p. 37.

⁴⁰ Šarl Bodler, “Jednoj prolaznici”, *Izabrane pjesme*, trans. Nikola Bertolino, Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1989, p. 97.

⁴¹ Valter Benjamin, *Estetički ogledi*, trans. Truda Stamać and Snješka Knežević, ed. Viktor Žmegeč, Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 1986, p. 52.

velopment of the chronotope of encounter. There is also a backside to the idealization of women and it has to do with the already mentioned immanent sociological traits contained in the travel writing genre. Male travel writers are fascinated with prostitution, which is, as is well known, a particular mixture of the private and the public, and which stands as a testimony to superficiality and repetitiveness of the patterns of encounters in concrete time and space.

It is worth pointing out that there is one more type of interpersonal encounter that is almost never mentioned. Travel, seen as a mature and serious activity, has produced a glaringly obvious omission of children in travel literature. It is perceived as a business for mature persons and travel writers are seen as lone figures (they travel alone, as a rule, or so they try to present themselves). Even when they have children of their own, it goes without saying that they do not travel with them, because children are part of home life—which means domestic chores and everyday routines from which the travel writer must distance himself. That is why Rajčević, for example, is shocked by the sheer number of children he encounters in Egypt and refers to them as “a whole tribe”.⁴² Linked to this topic is another important point of tension in travel writing. Namely, the writer often searches for his own childhood, or, figuratively, for the childhood of mankind: “Childhood is a palimpsest of memories, wishes and impressions—a manuscript of the past forming the basis of the travel narrative while at the same time serving as its guide. The childhood is a temporal dimension of the space that once was home. Rooted in the collective origin of migratory animals, myths about the initial innocence and memories of years gone by, together with the urge to travel, drive the writer further and further away from home while he, at the same time, searches for a different, more fundamental perception of the home. Wherever the external, physical, journey might take us, the internal journey eternally relies on the presence of our inner child.”⁴³ It is, nevertheless, worth re-emphasizing that travel literature, just like travel writers, attempts to conceal just as much as it wants to reveal: their ‘factual’ discoveries and confessional tone are simply visible forms of the motivational doubt and fears connected to personal participation in the discourse on modernity. We already mentioned that, when we talk about aestheticization, we mean an unspecified surplus that a variety of players in the field of literature want to add to their own products. This surplus refers both to the actual reality, the ‘truth’, as well as to the manner in which

⁴² Milorad Rajčević, *Iz žarke Afrike I*, Grafički zavod “Makarije”, Belgrade, 1924, p. 68.

⁴³ David Espey, “Childhood and Travel Literature”, *Travel Culture: Essays On What Makes Us Go*, ed. Carol Traynor Williams, Praeger, Westport, 1998, p. 57.

the reality is addressed, but most of all, perhaps, it refers to understanding history and the role of art in the past and in the present.

Historians have noticed the following: “when travelling through Europe during the first few decades of the 20th century, Serbian artists showed more fascination with the numerous signs of historic remains of authentic European past than with new spaces of the modern city. Idealized and romanticized epochs generated greater interest than the reality which they perceived as inconsequential and mundane in comparison with history. Giving preference to *duration* over *a moment* clearly indicates their conceding to the role of passive observer of the big city.”⁴⁴ In the absence of an authority in the present, writers look for it in the past giving their texts often an elegiac tone in the sense of longing for lost visions of ‘authentic’ experience. Chronological, linear learning about new geographical areas is faced with history, with a return to the past which, as a rule, provides the identity and legitimacy to the travel writer’s itinerary. Through the search for the forever-lost past, the feeling of nostalgia releases the dialectics of desire. What makes the past so seductive seems to be its very incorrectness, manifested in the necessary reduction of the forces of history and their adjustment to the needs created by present times which the writers seek to escape. Modern travel writing, almost as a rule, generates nostalgic feelings for past times and for certain aspects of space, or rather, for the aura of that space, while at the same time claiming that the aura is lost. It is often the case with travel writers, as we have seen, that they give off a feeling of being late, because, without a doubt, they look to their predecessors and seek refuge from the troubling present in cultural myths about the glorious past.

Pastism is the common denominator of travel literature from this period and it is part of broader literary movements in Europe, the USA and Latin America. The expression ‘pastism’ stems from the Romance languages and its content can be described as: “the cult of a distant and different past, idealized to a greater or lesser extent.”⁴⁵ The beginnings of modern pastism reach back to the 19th century and were, in the first phase, linked to the aesthetic ideology of ‘art for art’s sake’ as seen in the works of Théophile Gautier, Leconte de Lisle and Flaubert. The basic idea of pastism starts with the premise that the modern society is politically dubious and contemptible with regards to culture, and sees the periods from the past as attractive and worthy of true attention. The

⁴⁴ Simona Čupić, “Privatni prizori kao svedočanstva epohe (1900-1941)”, *Privatni život kod Srba u dvadesetom veku*, ed. Milan Ristovic, Clio, Belgrade, 2007, pp. 689-690.

⁴⁵ Džin H. Bel-Viljada, *Umetnost radi umetnosti i književni život*, trans. Vladimir Gvozden, Svetovi, Novi Sad, 2004, pp. 238-239.

backdrop to this approach is the writers' aching feeling that "painstakingly written verses have no function in the new bourgeoisie industrial system which, they felt, depreciated them, while lyrical art truly played an important role in some old regimes which they looked up to and longed for."⁴⁶ The artistic cornerstone of pastism is expressed in the foreword by Théophile Gautier for his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835): "I would gladly, as a Frenchman and as a citizen, renounce my rights if I could see an original painting by Raphael....or the princess Borghese...I would gladly agree to have the maneater Charles X back if he were to bring me a basket of Tokaji wine...from his castle in the Czech Republic...I much prefer the sound of violins and Basque percussions over the President's bell."⁴⁷ This extract shows contempt for the pettiness of new bourgeoisie values and bourgeoisie objects, in favor of aesthetically attractive institutions, objects and works of art from the pre-bourgeoisie time.⁴⁸ These statements, closely linked to the issue of aestheticization of everyday life with fragments from the past, are to a large extent reflected in the attitudes present in the travel writings we are concerned with.

"The past exists, and so does its duration," writes Crnjanski in his novel *Ljubav u Toskani* (*Love in Tuscany*)—this sentence could serve as the motto for the majority of travel writing discourses in the interwar period.⁴⁹ As can be expected, the topic of the past is predominantly linked to travels in Italy, even though it can be seen elsewhere, sometimes even in surprising places. The travel in question is a pilgrimage to culture and art,⁵⁰ in which the traveler less often "observes modern life and life in the streets, and much more often shows interest in historical attractions and works of art; our traveler through Italy will bring back a travel book on history and a travel book on arts before anything else."⁵¹ Although a flash of contemporary politics can be seen on occasion—travelling between the two wars takes place in an age when forceful ideologies, including fascism, dominated—the general approach is one of admiration towards urban historical entities and creations of art from the past. As a rule, the travelers perceive modern life as quite shocking and disruptive to their peace of mind for contemplation:

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 239.

⁴⁷ Qtd.in: Džin H. Bel-Viljada, *Umetnost radi umetnosti i književni život*, trans. Vladimir Gvozden, Svetovi, Novi Sad, 2004, p. 237.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 237.

⁴⁹ Miloš Crnjanski, *Ljubav u Toskani, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L'Age d'Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, p. 89.

⁵⁰ Predrag Palavestra, "Odanost Jugu", *Politika*, June 21, 1971.

⁵¹ Olga Stuparević, "Srpski putopis o Italiji", *Uporedna istraživanja I*, Institut za književnost i umetnost, Belgrade, 1976, p. 172.

“Today, Italy seems gaunt and poor somehow, because everything that was before is now gone.”⁵² In Luka, as reported by Stanislav Krakov, an ideological sign spoils the impression of eternity: “Below great arches, at the corners of churches built in the age of Longobardi, quite unexpectedly one runs into Mussolini with his fist raised in the air, declaring: *There is only one duty..., Hail to the black shirts..., Hail to the Gold Medal* ...as the first sentences read on posters of fascist candidates plastered to the walls of the amphitheater, where memories of blond Gallic gladiators fade as swiftly as cheap perfume [...]”.⁵³ Modernity is rejected because of what Lévi-Strauss aptly calls “insipid details, insignificant events”.⁵⁴ In short, this country is viewed through a selective view focusing on artwork from the past, i.e. it is seen as a museum or a gallery, or, as a marginal travel writer deftly described it adding a dimension of sociolect: “Venice is today a museum of the past. It lives in the past. It is the idealization of romance. That is why poets and painters, and all kinds of artists flocks to it.”⁵⁵ Marko Car’s stay in Italy coincided with a big exhibition of contemporary art but it was considered “too modern for the lovers of Rome and its classical and Latin tradition”.⁵⁶ The most common manner of depicting Italy is by way of synechdoche linked to the topic of ancient ruins (or as Rade Zaklanović refers to the Palatine Hill, ‘the remains’),⁵⁷ which is a fragmentary view and one which has to rely on the imagination to complete the temporal ellipsis. In line with such a chronotype, the classical period extends over a tremendously long time; ‘eternal youth’ existed for a long time and then suddenly disappeared.⁵⁸ One illustrative statement can be seen in the travel book by Car *U Latinima (In Latin Countries)* (1894): “To see this glorious city, to hear the one’s footsteps echo under the very vaults and among the very pillars where once Cicero’s Philip-pics and Horace’s satires resonated—that is what my soul has forever

⁵² Rade Zaklanović, “Fijorenca. Sa puta po Italiji (II)”, *Reč*, no. 1151, 1928, p. 7.

⁵³ Stanislav Krakov, “U Luki”, *Srpski književni glasnik*, vol. XVIII, no. 4, 1926, pp. 290. Similarly, Zaklanović writes: “Moreover, today’s Italy is repulsive because the government and fascism are utterly unbearable” (“Fijorenca. Sa puta po Italiji (II)”, *Reč*, no. 1151, 1928, p. 7).

⁵⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tužni tropi*, trans. Srećko Đamonja, Zora, Zagreb, 1960, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Staniša Stanišić, *Putnička pisma sa puta po srednjoj Evropi*, Rajković i Đuković, Belgrade, 1925, p. 89. The museum plays an important role with Serbian writers between the two wars: A collage of pictures made by one of them, Marko Ristić, entitled “The Great Pilgrimage” (1929), consists of, among other things, a ticket to the Munich Alte Pinakhotek, tickets to an Albrecht Dürer exhibition, day tickets to German museums, train tickets and tram tickets.

⁵⁶ Marko Car, *Estetička pisma*, Geca Kon, Belgrade, 1920, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Rade Zaklanović, “Rim. Sa puta po Italiji (III)”, *Reč*, 1928, No. 1152, p. 7.

⁵⁸ Marie-Madeleine Martinet, *Le Voyage d’Italie dans les littératures européennes*, P.U.F., Paris, 1996, p. 7.

been yearning for”.⁵⁹ Further in the book he writes that he “has come to Rome more for the dead than for the living”,⁶⁰ and this attitude was adopted by many other travel writers, as well as by other great writers such as Jovan Dučić, who wrote about Car with praise, and Miloš Crnjanski, who debated with him.

The travel writers’ dominant approach to time is reflected in their tendency to contrast the topic of meaningful ancient ruins with the shortcomings of contemporary reality.⁶¹ Such turning to the past is directly linked to the present and reflects its state of crisis: “The times we live in are fraught with constant trepidation for the future and for the destiny of mankind and its culture. But, that is precisely what attracted me so strongly to Italy and its treasury of arts.”⁶² In *Love in Tuscany* it seems like there are two dimensions of time, the past and the present, which rarely converge: “My first days in Pisa are passing by. The past and my present life touch now and then.” They touched, quite unexpectedly, during something utterly modern—a football match between Pisa and Genova; the crowd—the same as always, in the past as well as in the present, with their bloodthirsty roar evoking memories of conflicts between Italian city-states.⁶³ As a rule, travel writers do not see continuity but rather occasional points of convergence between the past and the present, which can be interpreted in two ways: as an expression of nostalgia, but also as a need to establish their own point of view as important, or, rather, as qualified to observe ‘real’ and ‘true’ values to present to the reader back home.

The past can be viewed as a privileged source of identity, because this generation was looking to it in their search for stability amidst the contemporary chaos of rapid technological, cultural and social changes.⁶⁴ Even before World War I, in his short essay “The Ruin” (1911), German sociologist Georg Simmel drew attention to the sensitivity of high culture towards the function of architecture in its role of keeper of stability of forms from the past. According to Simmel, ruins are the actualization

⁵⁹ Marko Car, *U Latinima*, printed in “S. Artale”, Zadar, 1894, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 27.

⁶¹ “It is very strange that Italians, people of the arts and lovers of beauty, do not make sure that their cities and villages are beautiful, but only care for artworks and—cemeteries. Their cemeteries are more beautiful than lively cities[...] It seems that Italy lives in the past, through their deceased sons, their past glory, so their *campo santa* becomes a synonym for those ideals” (Staniša Stanišić, *Putnička pisma sa puta po srednjoj Evropi*, eds. Rajković and Đuković, Belgrade, 1925, p. 75).

⁶² Olga Palić, *Na putovanju (misli i doživljaji)*, Ukus, Belgrade, 1939, p. 5.

⁶³ Miloš Crnjanski, *Ljubav u Toskani, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L’Age d’Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, p. 59.

⁶⁴ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 2000, p. 37.

of the past in the present; the peace that we feel in the presence of ruins stems from the resolution of tension between different events in time: “the past with its outcomes and transfigurations convenes in a moment of aesthetically visible present”.⁶⁵ This insight is important to the understanding of Serbian travel literature between the two wars. Also, we have seen in the previous chapter what the status of Goethe’s *Italian Journey* was among travel writers. If we take it that this text has the force of a template, then what Hans Mayer said about it can be applied to our authors as well: “What was Goethe looking for in Italy and what did he find? [...] It seems that, in Italy, he was constantly trying to see and view landscapes, evidence and monuments as non-historical entities, in other words, to see and understand them in their ‘real’ self, which is to say in a suprahistorical existential manifestation.”⁶⁶ Goethe’s need to read Tacitus in Rome is the key; it affects the search for true meanings in the past, and it affects the attempt to look at people and their work supposedly in their true self, almost beyond any historical context.⁶⁷ To understand landscapes and cultural monuments in their purest form requires, of course, a broad knowledge of historiography, as well as a particular sensitivity towards the chimeric modernity.

That is why the chronotope of encounter is dependent on the perception of the author’s ability to rise above the current events of time and space. Miloš Crnjanski feels unease because he knows that his stay in Italy will be too short—and, if judging by the original edition from 1930, it seems that it lasted three months—because he sees that there is no change: “Already in Rome I felt that my travels in Tuscany were just a fleeting phantasy and my journey through the area in vain.” The real, ‘earthly’ time is not enough because the grounds for the whole journey is the search for arts from the past; the narrator claims that he knew that in “Florence he would sit in museums to his heart’s content” and in Ravenna he would descend “into the dust and mold of thousand-year old tombs”.⁶⁸ The past, abundant in artwork and noble purposes of human activities, is set up against the immediate past which the traveler has brought with him in his arms. It is also characterized by the strive to rebuild the feeling of identity, which should, above all, contain a civilizational and civilizing thread: “So I took the train down the Alpes, with the wretched and horrible former time in my arms, so

⁶⁵ Georg Simmel, “Die Ruine”, *Philosophische Kultur*, Alfred Kröner Verlag Leipzig, 1919 (2. Auflage), p. 133.

⁶⁶ Hans Mayer, *Gete: ogled o uspehu*, trans. Tomislav Bekić, Svetovi, Novi Sad, 2000, pp. 29-30.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 31.

⁶⁸ Miloš Crnjanski, *Ljubav u Toskani, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L’Age d’Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, p. 149.

bloody and plague-like that I too felt disgusted and fearfully began whispering into the air along the road: Graves, roads, cities, I'm travelling for the good of this world, in which birds sing and lizards yawn, the stars drip and armies pass by, like dead leaves. Here and there I started playing blue streams, like playing the flute. I want to build a people."⁶⁹ This is about an aesthetic encounter: a utopian moment in which art would attempt to aestheticize modern politics. Moreover, aesthetic products of the past create an illusion of ideal communication in which selection is done much easier than in the complex present: "Martini's paintings are full of light, like Dante's sonnets, while at the same time pure and otherworldly and disdainful, like the unsettled thoughts and works of Cavalcanti."⁷⁰ The category of aesthetic encounter can be likened to what Nietzsche in his *Untimely Meditations* calls the 'suprahistorical' spirit, i.e. the ability to rise mentally above beliefs and needs of modern times. Stanislav Vinaver, who was the travel writer with least affinity for the past, is also one of the few critics of the validity of such approach to time and space (albeit, occasionally prone to it himself): "The return to the past would not be the same as being in that particular past. Because this past would not be alive, it would be conjured up by force. No living force fits in the past. Any other solution is better for the artist because it means moving forward, it means life. [...] The past had its own forces of life. These forces would not be there anymore, their destiny is different."⁷¹

However, such comments are few, and in Italy, but not only there, the subject can witness to the fact that he is surrounded by such evidence from the past that is often more famous than anything the present has to offer. Monuments with a backdrop of bright, blue skies and stone pines are everywhere, as are magnificent architecture and ancient ruins. This is why travelogues about this country contain privileged examples of the aesthetic encounter.⁷² The travels are closely linked with museums; one could even go so far as to say that the travels of certain writers, in a way, reach the ideal of a perfect museum or private collection. The new significance of aesthetics in 19th century culture, accompanied with

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 65.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 103.

⁷¹ Stanislav Vinaver, *Nemačka u vrenju, Evropa u vrenju*, ed. Peter Milosavljević, Dnevnik, Novi Sad, 1991, p. 219.

⁷² The statement by Isidora Sekulić has the power of a commonplace: "The aesthetics of Italy of that era is the highest form of aesthetics [...] The international spirit of that age had contours which were never seen again" (Isidora Sekulić, "Zapisi s putovanja", *Pisma iz Norveške i drugi putopisi*, ed. Zoran Gluščević, Marica Josimčević, Stylos, Novi Sad, 2001, pp. 340-341). "Everything seems beautiful..."; these words by R. Zaklanović is a commonplace and the best description of the perception of Italy ("Firenca. Sa puta po Italiji", *Reč*, no. 1150, 1928, p. 7).

a renewed interest in art, artists and important works of art, has to do with the development of a complex set of relations, practical and imaginary, between the rising North and the politically weak but culturally rich South.⁷³ Pilgrimage to the depths of art is at the same time a journey to the depths of time because all the artwork described was, without exception, created in the past. If we take it that pilgrimage, as a form of journey, inherently contains transformation, an aesthetic pilgrimage achieves this transformation through the mystique surrounding encounters with art, creating an illusion of departure from concrete space and time. The main element of a travelogue on Italy is, thus, an ekphrasis (a verbal description of visual materials), and the result are iconotexts.⁷⁴ A typical example is Crnjanski's description of the green biblical harvest by Benozzo Gozzoli, a Medici painter, from which we share an extract for illustrative purposes: "Kings and queens on the wall are returning from the hunt. Their horses neighing in fear of the coffins blocking their path in front of them. In the distant hills I see monks, carefree and content, milking hinds amidst the silent mountain greenery."⁷⁵

The influence of Italian art on European art in the past had been so crucial that its revival was seen as a return to the roots. The narrator in *Love in Tuscany* is interested in the "old-growth forest of Tuscan arts",⁷⁶ so he mentions and analyzes the painters Giotto, Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Duccio, Sodoma, Botticelli and the sculptors Cellini, Canova, Bernini. While tracing the footsteps of culture he also mentions Nicola Pisano, the restorer of Italian sculpture, and Borgundi, the first illustrator of Pandects.⁷⁷ In his "The Final Venice" Vinaver expresses particular admiration for Palladio and Carpaccio, while he criticizes the 'newer' painters, Turner and Whistler, for making the city seem evanescent, and the 'older' Bellini, Titian, Veronese, Tiepolo for creating "auxiliary Venices".⁷⁸ Olga Palić talks about painters who painted Isabella d'Este: Mantegna, Titian, Raphael, Leonardo.⁷⁹ In France, a visit

⁷³ Jonah Siegel, *Haunted Museum: Longing, Travel and the Art-Romance Tradition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2005, p. 5.

⁷⁴ This is observed in European travel writing tradition on Italy by Marie-Madeleine Martinet (*Le voyage d'Italie dans les littératures européennes*, P.U.F., Paris, 1996, p. 2).

⁷⁵ Miloš Crnjanski, *Ljubav u Toskani, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L'Age d'Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, p. 69.

⁷⁶ Olga Palić, *Na putovanju (misli i doživljaji)*, Ukus, Belgrade, 1939, p. 39.

⁷⁷ Miloš Crnjanski, *Ljubav u Toskani, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L'Age d'Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, p. 60.

⁷⁸ Stanislav Vinaver, "Konačna Venecija", *Evropa u vrenju*, ed. Petar Milosavljević, *Dnevnik*, Novi Sad, 1991, pp. 258-259.

⁷⁹ Olga Palić, *Na putovanju (misli i doživljaji)*, Ukus, Belgrade, 1939, p. 84.

to the Louvre was an absolute imperative precisely for its collection of Italian Renaissance masters, and even in Africa, during a wedding in a village, Rastko Petrović had the opportunity to see the Italian 'classics': "It was suddenly filled with naked bodies, barely lit, in fantastic movements. Pure Michelangelo or Luca Signorelli!" Given that Italian art serves as a measure of true art, this aesthetic encounter with Italy can be seen as the principle of appropriation of the foreign, the radically different: black bodies "give the same sense of immensity, of rivalry between the immensity of space and landscape, as seen in Michelangelo's David".⁸⁰ In the end, beauty permeates the journeys of travel writers so much that it often causes fatigue from art, from museums.⁸¹ 'Museum fatigue' is a concept that was most deeply researched in the interwar period when the rise of cultural tourism became noticeable, and it got its name at that time.⁸² To a certain degree, this then calls into question the originality and exclusivity of aesthetic encounters which during the 1920s and 30s became fashionable, and which survive to this day in the form of different types of cultural tourism.

Considering that aesthetic encounters rely on timelessness, they are fitting to travel writing because they 'cancel' the need for action as is well illustrated by a sentence by Stanislav Vinaver: "Now I know: everywhere in Venice events can and must take place, but they only serve as decoration."⁸³ Furthermore, a frequently used rhetorical gesture is the expression of current perception of time and space through artistically interpreted reality. In *Love in Tuscany* one can, via a famous painter, compare the local landscape to that of Provence: "The plateau under Assisi, where the traveler finds himself when he gets off the train, is an endless garden, with thickly planted olive trees, more silvery in color than those in Tuscany, but just as old and wiry as in Van Gogh's paintings from Provence."⁸⁴ Travelogues about Italy are filled with

⁸⁰ Rastko Petrović, *Afrika, Putopisi*, eds. Milan Dedinać and Marko Ristić, Dela Rastka Petrovića, book V, Nolit, Belgrade, 1977, p. 335.

⁸¹ "Becoming tired from beauty sounds peculiar, but it does happen," notices Velimirović in far China (Milutin Velimirović, *Kroz Kinu*, S. B. Cvijanović, Belgrade, 1930, pp. 131). "Well, I was," writes Olga Palić, "tired and exhausted by art! My eyes were closing from fatigue." But only a few moments later, the power of an aesthetic encounter completely transforms the traveler's nature for a moment: "A feeling of pleasure, an exciting tension rose within me and everything became bright again. I suddenly saw something beautiful, something wonderful. I saw a building on the main square," Olga Palić, *Na putovanju (misli i doživljaji)*, Ukus, Belgrade, 1939, p. 79).

⁸² See: Gareth Davey, "What is Museum Fatigue?", *Visitor Studies Today*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2005, pp. 17-21.

⁸³ Stanislav Vinaver, "Konačna Venecija", *Evropa u vrenju*, ed. Petar Milosavljević, Dnevnik, Novi Sad, 1991, p. 256.

⁸⁴ Miloš Crnjanski, *Ljubav u Toskani, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L'Age d'Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, p. 133.

moments of epiphany in which the traveler's 'earthly' time blends with imaginary rhythms of timelessness, like in the extract in which Olga Palić, who experiences art in a particularly conventional and expected way, suddenly realizes the power of architecture, which she had until then failed to understand: "But that architecture could have a similar effect was completely unknown to me. (...) Yet, at the square in Sienna, where the cathedral stands, architecture entered into my heart. It leapt into my heart with force and power and made me happy."⁸⁵ The real Italy is a confirmation of that which one brings in one's intellectual baggage, which affects the narrative of time and space like communicating vessels producing a mixture of tradition, reading topics and encounters with the selective past displayed in museums, archeological digs, ancient ruins and ancient architecture. The poetics of travel in Italy hides an inherent memory of being enchanted, but it is actually a memory evoked by the encounter with art.

There are many travelogues about other countries which, too, are based on the aesthetic encounter, or so they present themselves at least. Some straightforward examples are contained in the first few chapters of the Russian travel book by the sculptor Sreten Stojanović in which he presents a portrait of modern engaged art in the Soviet Union, and includes photo reproductions of certain works.⁸⁶ He does it mainly through direct encounters, by visiting artists in their art studios. Aesthetic encounters, as well as intertextual encounters, can manage a journey, they can guide it, play the role of 'leader', like in the example from the travelogue by Rastko Petrović on Libya in which earlier aesthetic experience blends with both previous and current ideological encounters: "The house gates are open much more widely, allowing us to see scenes, people, clothes and groups in the thick blue or purple yards in the exact same colors and movements as in Delacroix paintings. Until now, after encounters with our Turks, I was of the opinion that Delacroix' visions of the Orient were just a wonderful dream conjured up by the painter."⁸⁷ It is not the painting that looks like the world; quite the opposite, in fact. Of course, the nature of an aesthetic encounter one can experience in Africa is quite different from elsewhere, but it is still connected to expectations, generated by the fashion of primitivism, in the travel writer's mind and sensibility. During his journey, the traveler reaches the city of Bouaké in the Ivory Coast, the capital the Baule tribe which is well-known for its masks: "This is the famous

⁸⁵ Olga Palić, *Na putovanju (misli i doživljaji)*, Ukus, Belgrade, 1939, p. 37.

⁸⁶ Sreten Stojanović, *Impresije iz Rusije*, publisher unknown, Belgrade, 1928, pp. 5-18.

⁸⁷ Rastko Petrović, "Libija", *Putopisi*, eds. Milan Dedinac and Marko Ristić, *Dela Rastka Petrovića*, book V, Nolit, Belgrade, 1977, p. 121.

tribe one thinks of when one talks about African art.”⁸⁸ (The ideological moment, however, remains ignored: the tribe is falling into decadence and alcoholism, yet nobody opens the question of why this is so, leaving the impression that such a state is considered natural, normal.)

Olga Palić seeks for the ideal reader, who is expected to be an aesthete,⁸⁹ and even the lawyer Anka Godevac believes in parallel realities and the heterochrony produced by art: “Holland is one country on post cards, and a different one in Dutch paintings.”⁹⁰ There are also multiple circumstances of intercession in which art as an intermediary showcases history better than archives: “Nobody who has only once seen the drawing *Unconsciousness of St. Catherine* at the Uffizi Gallery will ever forget it. This fainted woman is the most beautiful body that has fallen.”⁹¹ Intercession can, also, bring the travel writer back to the art which is created in his own native culture, like in the case of Krakov’s experience in Sumatra: “What surprised me the most was that in the middle of this treasure, I found modest jewelry made of silver filigree: jewelry boxes, necklaces, ornaments [...] exactly the same as silversmiths make today in Peć, Priština, Skopje and Prizren.”⁹² The examples are numerous and it is quite clear that the economy of space, and thus the chronotopes of encounter, in Serbian travel writing between the two wars is, to a great extent, if not even fully conditioned upon the knowledge of the arts. This gives the impression that human existence is justified by aesthetics.

When viewed as one more type of selective temporality of the travel writing discourse, the encounter with history is similar to an aesthetic encounter, in particular when writing about the perception of ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Palestine or Greece.⁹³ Jelena Dimitrijević expresses this in a typical fashion: “Oh! I’m going to see Misr, both the one from history and the one from the Bible! Especially the one from the Bible. Didn’t we all as children listen to the story of forefather

⁸⁸ Rastko Petrović, *Afrika*, ibid, p. 241.

⁸⁹ “The person who loves to travel, who has [...] an aptitude and love for art, will understand me” (Olga Palić, *Na putovanju (misli i doživljaji)*, Ukus, Belgrade, 1939, p. 6).

⁹⁰ Anka Godevac, “Zabeleške o Holandiji”, *Srpski književni glasnik*, vol. XXXIV, no. 5, 1931, p. 373.

⁹¹ Miloš Crnjanski, *Ljubav u Toskani, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L’Age d’Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, p. 113.

⁹² Stanislav Krakov, “Dva sata na Sumatri. Jedna šetnja između bogova, zmajeva i pagoda”, *Vreme*, no. 3218, 1930, p. 4.

⁹³ True aesthetic beauty exists in the past, and one needs to meet it: “Modern Athens has lost its style and aesthetic beauty” (Rade Drainac, *Lepote i čuda Pariza: evropski putopisi i reportaže*, ed. Gojko Tešić, *Dela*, vol. VII, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Belgrade, 1999, p. 47).

Jacob and his 12 sons [...]”⁹⁴ In Misr, for obvious reasons, “everything earthly is transient”;⁹⁵ while Petrović, in his novel *Africa*, writes: “everything I touched was ancient, ancient and ancient”.⁹⁶ It is believed that history which is built on unique moments can be generalized in an almost theoretical discourse searching for the essence. Pictures of Hellas and Rome, but also of other countries or cities, including the African images by Rastko Petrović, most often bring a reconciliation of different historical dimensions leaving an impression of transcendency. All this requires something like a quasi-religious mentality which would shape the travel writer’s and the receiver’s culture of the eye.⁹⁷

The question of interpreting time can also have a strong political dimension, as can be seen in the fantasy of Miloš Crnjanski who, finding himself one day on one of the bridges of Paris, imagines: “If I were to start reading the newspaper out aloud from this bridge, I am certain that the crowd would rise up with a roar and storm the walls and burn everything down.” Although he wants to leave the impression of a person who believes that the critical mass needed to change the current political state can be found in large social groups, not in the elite, he still concludes this passage with the following words: “Actually, I am not being honest; I don’t believe in the future. I write like this just because it is fashionable, and the current fashion is to believe in the future.”⁹⁸ Travel writers are, of course, aware of the fact that politics exists not only as politics of the present, but also as politics of the past. This is particularly obvious in the frequent discussions about the Byzantine and its importance to the development of art in the west.⁹⁹ Crnjanski brings his influential tone to these discussions with the following statement: “In vain did Italian aesthetes try to erase traces of Byzantine traits and replace them with Lombardian.”¹⁰⁰ The cosmistically inclined narrator believes

⁹⁴ Jelena J. Dimitrijević, *Sedam mora i tri okeana: putem oko sveta*, Državna štamparija, Belgrade, 1940, p. 12.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 129.

⁹⁶ Rastko Petrović, *Afrika, Putopisi*, eds. Milan Dedinac and Marko Ristić, Deal Rastka Petrovića, book V, Belgrade, 1977, p. 317.

⁹⁷ “But there is one thing we must not forget, that we always have to view this art with our inner eyes, because the art originates in the artist’s inner self, his faith, his holy and fiery piety” (Olga Palić, *Na putovanju (misli i doživljaji)*, Ukus, Belgrade, 1938, p. 17).

⁹⁸ Miloš Crnjanski, *Pisma iz Pariza, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L’Age d’Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, p. 7.

⁹⁹ The discussions about the Byzantine Empire were blooming in the period between the two wars as can be seen in the travelogues by Stanislav Vinaver and Stanislav Krakov on Venice, Aleksander Derok and Rastko Petrović on Istanbul, Crnjanski on Tuscany.

¹⁰⁰ Miloš Crnjanski, *Ljubav u Toskani, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L’Age d’Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, p. 66.

that the divisions in art are imposed from the outside and that behind all there is, at least conceivably, a general aesthetic communication, which leads us to a striking utopian picture of a Renaissance bazaar.¹⁰¹

Through the aesthetic encounter “one experiences feelings of salvation and happiness. This is how beauty and man meet and become one big experience of passionate feelings”.¹⁰² This approach is based on the belief, as the author herself says about Ravenna, that only art is eternal and immortal, which is a typical feeling about travels in Italy.¹⁰³ In a similar fashion, when in the ‘eternal city’, Rome, she writes: “The eternity of time and space dominates over the transience of objects and human aspirations.”¹⁰⁴ The opinion about the elements of space *sub specie aeternitatis* is of great importance to travel writers.¹⁰⁵ For example, Crnjanski is convincing in his description of the Pisano pulpit as a typical blend of aestheticism and perennialism: “Beauty with no face, nor body, that is not knowledge, nor speech, not on Earth, nor in Heaven, not in any other thing, but is eternal and exists for and of itself; Beauty which, while others blossom and fade, never grows, nor diminishes, but remains constant.”¹⁰⁶ In “The Final Venice” Stanislav Vinaver fills the gap between the past and the present with the idea of eternity: “Now I am looking in one direction, and the houses are telling me of one mood of floating and gold, tying together two completely unrelated notions, like one single bundle of old-fashioned and most modern enthusiasm at the same time.”¹⁰⁷

In his *Aesthetic Letters* Marko Car claims that his topic is the “kingdom of beauty“, or rather a Greek-Latin genius “without whom—in the recent words of a French writer—everything in the kingdom of beauty is ‘sad and fickle’”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ “Pre-Renaissance, the Pisa Renaissance, innumerable hypotheses, a huge collection of essayists. The Ravenna landscape with the drawing of Indian caves, the Gothic period, full of Persian influences [...]. The Trecento influenced by Japanese lacquer, Leonardo’s landscapes under the school of Iranian primitives – tired brains of art historians. And all these connections are, in fact, one simple and eternal unity of earth, hills, arts” (Ibid, p. 67).

¹⁰² Olga Palić, *Na putovanju (misli i doživljaji)*, Ukus, Belgrade, 1939, p. 34.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 57.

¹⁰⁵ “You already know that I’m a bit prone *a priori* to view every object in this classical environment, and in particular arts, *sub specie aeternitatis*, which means from the point of view of what importance the objects may have to eternity” (Marko Car, *Estetička pisma*, Geca Kon, Belgrade, 1920, p. 16).

¹⁰⁶ Miloš Crnjanski, *Ljubav u Toskani, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L’Age d’Homme, Belgrade-Lausanne, 1995, p. 88.

¹⁰⁷ Stanislav Vinaver, “Konačna Venecija”, *Evropa u vrenju*, ed. Petar Milosavljević, Dnevnik, Novi Sad, 1991, p. 254.

¹⁰⁸ The writer is of the aesthetic conviction that it is best displayed indirectly through a quote from Carducci’s poem *Le Primavera Elleniche*: “Muoiuno gli altri dèi:

As we have seen, Jovan Dučić perceives his stay in Rome as the height of existence “because this city blends, in the most vivid and palpable way, that which it has always deemed most important: eternity and presence, history and art, paganism and Christianity”,¹⁰⁹ Rome as a space of eternity helps one find one’s own identity in the past, as illustrated by Stanislav Krakov in the travelogue “Naš sentimentalni triptihon” (“Our Sentimental Triptych”): “Once more we met our past selves there and understood the sorrow of parting”.¹¹⁰ Andrić paints a powerful picture of the trickling of time in Rome: “As I walk down these streets, narrow, forever rather wet and dark, and built not for life but to channel off dark times, I remember each day and each night spent in this city of joy, because more than anything else in the world it is joy that supports and rejuvenates us.”¹¹¹ When deliberating the issue of dominance of perennialism, we have to ask the following question: how can man, despite his metaphysical optimism, know eternity?

There is a need, therefore, to think carefully about the, seemingly, most convincing artistic chronotope of encounter, which at the same time wants to present itself as a form of overcoming the actual chronotope of experience. It is the need to overcome the concreteness of time and space for the sake of different types of narrative symbols which can be categorized as ‘cosmism’ (as Miloš Crnjanski called it in *Pisma iz Pariza* (*Letters from Paris*))¹¹², which is the belief that there is such a thing as the essence of time, space and existence which is hidden from the ordinary view but which travel writers can see thanks to their highly-developed ‘culture of the eye’. The cosmic feeling can be achieved through certain symbols like in the well-known case of the Virgin Mary in *Love in Tuscany*, which serves as an agent of overcoming the aestheticized, not the concrete, manifestation, because such visuals are numerous in the Italian Renaissance: “Isn’t it so that now, from the waves of the chaotic, the sulphuric and the mindless, they have started showering us with immeasurable time and countless lives waiting for us to hug them and put them together. [...] In the general, eternally flickering

di Grecia i numi / Non sanno occaso; ei dormon ne materni / Tronchi e ne’fori, sopra i monti i fuimi imari eterni” (“The other gods may die, but not those of Greece. No setting know; they sleep in ancient woods. In flowers, upon the mountains, and in the streams.”)(Marko Car, *Estetička pisma*, Geca Kon, Belgrade, 1920, p. 55).

¹⁰⁹ Slobodan Vitanović, *Jovan Dučić u znaku Erosa*, “Filip Višnjić”, Belgrade, 1991, p. 231.

¹¹⁰ Stanislav Krakov, “Naš sentimentalni triptihon”, *Srpski književni glasnik*, book XX, no. 3, 1927, p. 177.

¹¹¹ Ivo Andrić, “U radosnom gradu”, *Staze, lica, predeli*, eds. Petar Džadžić and Muharem Pervić, Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1977, p. 191.

¹¹² Miloš Crnjanski, *Pisma iz Pariza, Putopisi I*, ed. Nikola Bartolino, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. VIII, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L’Age d’Homme, Belgrade – Lausanne, 1995, p. 28.

transience and void, peace and immortality, in the new mother.”¹¹³ Such cosmic feeling is the cornerstone of simultanism, which was accepted quite widely, because the Virgin Mary is perceived as someone who transcends the boundaries of Christianity and is compared with Venus and numerous other pagan goddesses before her. Crnjanski also develops a discussion about the origins of painters’ motifs and links them to the Byzantine period, which is an excellent illustration of all the directions, temporal and spatial, the concrete aesthetic encounter branches off to. Narrators sometimes try to create the impression that they get imbued by cosmic feelings when they find themselves in certain, privileged landscapes, or, in other words, that they cannot resist such overpowering feelings. Thus Stanislav Krakov narrates about aesthetic encounter in Taormina, where the space forcefully aestheticizes and draws the narrator into its own chronotope: “We get captivated by grandiose beauty, enthralled by the endless blue skies and sea, intoxicated by colors, now gentle and soft, and then burning bright, disturbed by the sun and shadows; we don’t understand anything at such moments, but we feel overwhelmed by the intensity of feelings, causing our whole being to tremble, not knowing whether to laugh or cry from excitement and joy.”¹¹⁴

“Venice is a triumph. In the grandest, cosmic sense”, writes Stanislav Vinaver.¹¹⁵ According to the cosmic key, a concrete scenery transfigures into celestial spheres: “The train careens in tears, black fields cover the shores, it is no longer clear if the stars are in the sky or among the olive trees, everything becomes blurred in the dark, and only the sky remains as a sorrowful lake high up.”¹¹⁶ In his travelogue on Spain, Andrić attempts to go behind the concreteness of time and space into the imagined spheres of ‘the real’ reality which distorts the usual sensual perceptions.¹¹⁷ At the beginning of *Osećanja i opažanja* (*Feelings and Observations*) under the heading “Putniku” (“To the Traveller”), Julka Hlapec Đorđević reaffirms, in lyrical prose, the cosmic understanding of travelling as a form of search for transcendence: “You

¹¹³ Miloš Crnjanski, *Ljubav u Toskani*, ibid. p. 97.

¹¹⁴ Stanislav Krakov, “Naš sentimentalni triptihon”, *Srpski književni glasnik*, book XX, no. 3, 1927, p. 177.

¹¹⁵ Stanislav Vinaver, “Konačna Venecija”, *Evropa u vrenju*, ed. Petar Milosavljević, Dnevnik, Novi Sad, 1991, p. 275.

¹¹⁶ Stanislav Krakov, “Naš sentimentalni triptihon”, *Srpski književni glasnik*, book XX, no. 3, 1927, p. 178.

¹¹⁷ Watching the scene before me, I wondered mystified whether somebody invisible had spread a celestial carpet over the distant plain ahead, or over what had remained uncovered after he had covered the skies above, or if it was a myriad of lights from an inviting city that were lit in the dark blue twilight. [...] A new reality commenced its dance with our senses” (Ivo Andrić, “Španska stvarnost i prvi koraci u njoj”, *Staze, lica, predeli*, eds. Petar Džadžić and Muharem Pervić, Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1977, pp. 205-206).

walk the roads of your life in murky dusk and boredom. Days, months, years go by before you notice it. [...]. You're neither happy, nor unhappy. Daily horrors grind you down. "¹¹⁸ One needs to escape from boredom and routine because only so do conditions arise for the traveler to see a sudden light: "Like a sudden spark of the universe"—making him realize the magnificence of life. Stanislav Krakov experienced moments of cosmism in Perugia, and describes these moments through a starry metaphor resembling, at least in the sense of feelings, the one which made Crnjan-ski famous: "Watched from a transparent Umbrian sky, condemned by the condottieri and Popes to confinement within its high walls, Perugia is a red star with five rays."¹¹⁹ The same region, Umbria, in the interpretation of Isidora Sekulić, gets elevated to stellar heights: "This landscape is removed from the world. Foreigners pass through like shadows, like clouds."¹²⁰ In the memorable description of Provence by Raško Dimitrijević, reality obtains oneiric and cosmic dimensions: "Everything looks like a dream in which colors and shapes blend, everything is illuminated by a strong light and even if there are days without sunlight, everything simply lives, feels and understands without looking for confirmation in feeling, reason for understanding, nor cause for life..."¹²¹

At the beginning of the third part of the travelogue *Ljudi govore* (*People Talk*) there is a description of a lake which seizes to be part of the landscape, i.e. of something marked with human experiences, and becomes nature in its purest form, presenting itself to the superhuman poet as such: "I do not see the picturesque here, only existence and reality. With all my being: It is not a scenery I behold, but part of nature [...] I could still hear an inner voice ask: Is it beautiful? Maybe! I don't see the picturesque, harmony or poetry. Numerous elements, or numerous expressions of the same element, live tragically and heroically around me. [...] Knowing life in general. Knowing a higher beauty, knowing one's own death. [...] Aquatic encounters in a boat at night. The meeting of two destinies. All around me, until eternity, only water, air, earth and heavenly fires."¹²² What the subject is feeling is, in fact, the eternity of genesis, the cosmic principle of creation.¹²³ A similar type of

¹¹⁸ Julka Chlapec Đorđević, *Osećanja i opažanja*, Život i rad, Belgrade, 1935, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ Stanislav Krakov, "Pet zrakova Perude", Srpski književni glasnik, book XIX, no. 6, 1926, p. 412.

¹²⁰ Isidora Sekulić, "Rodna gruda sv. Franje iz Asiza" (1927), *Pisma iz Norveške i drugi putopisi*, eds. Zoran Glušćević i Marica Josimčević, Stylos, Novi Sad, 2001, p. 287.

¹²¹ Raško Dimitrijević, "Kroz Provansu: beleške s puta", *Književni sever*, vol. 6, 1929, p. 222.

¹²² Rastko Petrović, *Ljudi govore*, Geca Kon, Belgrade, 19231, pp. 121-122.

¹²³ "Yes, this is the thing that is eternal, this constant novelty of genesis, this presence of creation, while that which sees, feels salutes and confirms it—my spirit and my whole being—is only fleeting; constantly on its deathbed," (Ibid, p. 124).

cosmism takes Krakov from the concreteness of nature to the intoxication of the senses when he visits Sintra: "Suddenly, after a sharp turn in the road around the mountain ridge we were hurled into a green abyss. Cypress trees, palm trees, pine trees, sugar cane, agave and rhododendrons, the oddest tropical and northern vegetation, stones covered in green moss, tree trunks green from lichen, steep slopes green from fern, and valleys covered in soft, wet grass. Intoxication, madness, a whirlpool of greenery."¹²⁴

It is, therefore, a fact that despite the various types of dependence on the material world, which we pointed to in the first part of this study, the dominant thread of Serbian travel writing between the two wars is a depreciation of the immediate temporal and spatial present. We can name a few more 'poetic' examples. The first sentence in the Spanish travelogue by Ivo Andrić reveals an interesting intervention related to the usual geography in travel writing: "If you wish, in your mind, to find an area of typically Spanish reality, in addition to and different from that which is common to Spain and the rest of Europe, you need to make a daring projection into the imaginary."¹²⁵ Travel writers are in a constant search for a higher reality: "We were in a reality which was grand and magnificent [...] one glance sufficed to realize how utterly exceptional and valuable this scenery" described by Pindar, Sappho, Theocritus was...¹²⁶ As he enters Acropolis through the Propylaea, Miloš Crnjanski feels like he is leaving the material world of history and ascending the steps into the heights.¹²⁷ The travel writing narrative seeks to go beyond the world, like in the description of Marko Ristić's sleeping cat: "The cat slept in the warm embrace of the sun's rays, in the intrauterine lap of dreams, beyond man's conventional spatial and temporal coordinate system, beyond human geography and history, beyond topography and chronometry."¹²⁸ In geography and topography there are points which cannot be touched by time, and this is what writers essentially are in search of: "that good, old, gaudy Venice, which cannot be killed, or even eroded, by either kitsch or politics, looked ever so beautiful, never more sweet than that month of August, which was already

¹²⁴ Stanislav Krakov, "Čar Sintre", *Vreme*, no. 3335, 1931, p. 6.

¹²⁵ Ivo Andrić, "Španska stvarnost i prvi koraci u njoj", *Staze, lica, predeli*, eds. Petar Džadžić and Muharem Pervić, Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1997, p. 202.

¹²⁶ Rastko Petrović, *Sicilija i drugi putopisi: iz neobjavljenih rukopisa*, ed. Radmila Šuljagić, Nolit, Belgrade, p. 51. It has been assessed that "destruction of temporal and special coordinates" is the main trait of the "associative and polylogical" travel writings of Rastko Petrović (Ibid, p. 245).

¹²⁷ Miloš Crnjanski, *Putopisi II. Putevima raznim*, ed. Nikola Bertolino, Dela Miloša Crnjanskog, vol. IX, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – BIGZ – SKZ – L'Age d'Homme, Belgrade – Lausanne, 1995, p. 354.

¹²⁸ Marko Ristić, "Iz noći u noć", *Pečat*, no. 10-12, Zagreb, 1939, p. 354.

fraught with horrors of the inevitable September bloodshed”.¹²⁹ In contrast with the fatal incapacity of the present to achieve completion, Venice is, in the words of Vinaver, final. As a believer in the power of the “educated taste”, Milan Savić, in similar manner, gives this city an oneiric dimension: “Sometimes I feel like I’m leaving the familiar grounds beneath me and floating up into magical heights, such as we only get a glimpse of in our dreams sometimes, but which leave a sweet trace in our souls that we can feel until it gets wiped out by daily grind.”¹³⁰ The reconciliation of heterogenous spatial and temporal elements from the past creates an impression of transcendence. And if something that is considered as part of the natural order of things becomes eternal, then it will not cause discomfort to the individual, nor will it make him feel uncomfortable under foreign skies (provided that the individual can remain indifferent to the maelstrom of everyday life).

“Laugh as much as you like; I will say it again: poetry is the only *reality* which is not completely false”, expresses his beliefs Marko Car in his *Aesthetic Letters*.¹³¹ A similar belief applies to the genre of travel writing as well, although it seems that in this case the bourgeoisie laughter, which contributed skillfully to the mythologization and commercialization of travel, might be omitted. If cosmism is understood as a belief that there is something beyond our reach, some sort of artistic metaphysics, then it is clear that the role of the artist is that of a privileged observer who is capable of seeing things which are invisible to others and who then has to report about that. Absolutization of space and time is connected to the belief in the literary absolute of romanticism, as aptly expressed by Vinaver in his “The Final Venice”: “And what remains, in the end, is that which was the culmination in Byron: the poet’s ultimate direction of all exaltations and rages, a poetic logic and poetic justification for action, poetic, not social motivation, of that which takes place in the magnificent heart. Never would a simple man be able to find poetic reasons [...]”¹³² Isidora Sekulić, too, is a supporter of the literary absolute because she believes that poets are not only ‘the unacknowledged legislators of the world’(Shelley), but also the builders of the world. One who knows how to speak well, knows how to build a world as well.¹³³ Such mythologization of the subject in the first half of the 20th century cannot have the same meaning as it did one century

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 355.

¹³⁰ Milan Savić, “*Ulomci iz mojih putopisa: Mletački trenuci*”, Zastava, no. 244, 1927.

¹³¹ Marko Car, *Estetička pisma*, Geca Kon, Belgrade, 1920, p. 29.

¹³² Stanislav Vinaver, “Konačna Venecija”, *Evropa u vrenju*, ed. Petar Milosavljević, Dnevnik, Novi Sad, 1991, p. 268.

¹³³ Isidora Sekulić, *Pisma iz Norveške i drugi putopisi*, eds. Zoran Gluščević and Marica Josimčević, Stylos, Novi Sad, 2001, p. 204.

earlier: it is now only a residuum of the Romantic rebellion confronted with an order in which the 'building of the world' has primarily become an economic enterprise of citizens who believe that the economy dictates the measures for aesthetic judgements, now no longer based on metaphysical values but rather on changeable consumer practices.

The nature of modernist aesthetic encounters is to a certain degree explained by George Steiner in the book *Real Presences* (1989) where he attempts to "elucidate hermeneutics as defining the enactment of answerable understanding, of active apprehension".¹³⁴ An interpreter is somebody who deciphers and communicates meaning; he translates between languages, culture, performative conventions. He is an executant who 'acts out' the material before him in a manner which gives the material intelligible life—so as to make it, simply put, visible by bestowing on it the 'present present'.¹³⁵ On one level Steiner's book is a criticism of modern translation practices: "we crave remission from *direct encounter* with 'real presence' or the 'real absence of that presence', the two phenomenologies being rigorously inseparable, which an answerable experience of the aesthetic must enforce on us. We seek the immunities of indirection."¹³⁶

The main thesis of Steiner's book is that the immediacy of a true encounter with aesthetic objects has been lost: "The 'great books', the pre-eminent works by the masters of music and of the arts, are accessible and widely communicate as never before. Yet, it is this accessibility and consensus which diminish the potential for immediate encounter with the aesthetic experience and for the absolute freedom without which such encounter remains spurious." The encounter, similarly to Schütz's argument, in the public education system is assigned social and cultural functions causing it to "belong less to the sphere of commitment than it does to that of decorum."¹³⁷ In a modernist manner, very similar to our travel writers from the interwar period and their aesthetic encounters and prejudices, Steiner argues for the return of directness in the name of human freedom: "These intuitions and ceremonials of encounter, in social usage, in linguistic exchange, in philosophic and religious dialogue, are incisively pertinent to our reception of literature, of music and of the arts. [...] We are the 'other ones' whom the living significations of the aesthetic seek out."¹³⁸ In short, this author gives the concept of encounters a status which embodies the

¹³⁴ George Steiner, *Real Presences*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989, p. 7.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 13.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 39.

¹³⁷ Ibid, pp. 66-67.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 147.

deepest experience of freedom, whose bases are, paradoxically, non-linearity and unpredictability. In line with this thesis, the streets of Rome seem different after reading Car, Crnjanski or Dučić, because the artistic experience, the experience of art, is part of the total experience of the individual. Nevertheless, Steiner claims that an aesthetic encounter can never be fully conveyed and, as such, always requires approximation, which in the case of travel writers often translates to a break in writing due to loss of words in the presence of the sublime: “Magnificent! Two eyes and one memory are not enough, neither is a modest quill.”¹³⁹

There is no doubt that escape into the indefinite past is a deflection of sorts from banality, which indicates that there is a wish to make the impression of searching for that which is essential and deep, and which Steiner calls, as we have seen, the ‘real presence’. As one travel writer tries to convince us, “the 20th century is deprived, horribly deprived of many things”,¹⁴⁰ creating the strong need to travel through time, not just space. The questions of the past and of eternity, as privileged forms of selective temporality of travel writing, are connected to the attempts of finding oneself in a broken, hostile world (hostile to artists and art), like Krakov writes in his concluding point on Perugia: “Lost between centuries and legends, between drama and mystique, in our excitement we feel so close to, so connected with objects and memories, and we feel like we have found our true self in the past.”¹⁴¹

Travels are, from the viewpoint of cultural history, a collection of valuable information, and it is important to be mindful of the manner and choice of aesthetic form this type of evidence should be displayed in (“One who knows how to speak well, knows how to build the world”). Behind all is a deep concern for the topics of alienation, fragmentation and loss of common values and common sense, along with the search for alternative systems of belief in myths, mysticism and primitivism, and, above all, in art, “which numerous modernists see as a privileged sphere of order and a sublime epiphanic revelation”.¹⁴² The story about travelling was, in the first few decades of the 20th century, still viewed as an optimistic and positive act, succeeding in conveying something about the traveler’s possibilities and willingness to observe time and space of other people in order to understand the unity of human spirit

¹³⁹ Isidora Sekulić, *Pisma iz Norveške i drugi putopisi*, eds. Zoran Gluščević and Marica Josimčević, Stylos, Novi Sad, 2001, p. 145.

¹⁴⁰ Rade Drainac, *Lepote i čuda Pariza: evropski putopisci i reportaže*, ed. Gojko Tešić, *Dela*, vol. VII, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Belgrade, 1999, p. 11.

¹⁴¹ Stanislav Krakov, “Pet zrakova Perude”, *Srpski književni glasnik*, book XIX, no. 6, 1926, p. 415.

¹⁴² Paul Poplawski, “Preface”, *Encyclopedia of Modernism*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 2003, p. 9.

and diversity of the societies and the shape of the collective life: the traveler still believed himself to be one of the key interpreters of the world and of history.¹⁴³

Critics have emphasized that travel writing in the 20th century tends to dive into subjectivism whereby only the inner experience seems to matter; in other words, there is a movement in the travelogue genre in which the writers' personal visions become more important than the picture of the country they are travelling through. In the interwar period "there is a change in the poetics of travel and, hence, in the poetics of travel writing as well. The world becomes internalized and turns into the inner world of the travel writer. This forceful surge of poetic subjectivity (which is in its essence different from regular subjectivity, typical of travel writing as a genre) emerges with the Italian travelogue by Crnjanski and continues as a general tone accepted as the only possible, but with texts of significantly less poetic power".¹⁴⁴ Crnjanski is undoubtedly a key figure because he has located the roots of such transfiguration—in Flaubert's writings which establish a strong relationship with the modern aesthetic regime of literature: "[...] in November a new man appears. The whole world belongs to him. The past and distances disappear in him. Even that which existed many centuries ago—that too is his. His pain is connected to all the suffering in the world: he no longer has a homeland; and all the landscapes make him sad with their gloomy views. Having traveled over land and sea, he knows that neither laws, nor borders, nor distances can stop the dark fog that disperses through everything that is human."¹⁴⁵

Still, this "incursion of poetic subjectivism" contains also negative sides of the residuum of the self-confidence typical of romanticism: after World War I and the subsequent social and economic crisis, it could not be expected of history to adjust to the (travel) writers' needs and wishes. An encounter may be the root of secrets and elusiveness, but we must not forget that the idealism of encounters takes place at the core of its materiality, even when it develops as an aesthetic experience which supposedly gives purpose to existence. As a matter of fact, travel writers, as we have seen, attempt to convince us that their encounters matter despite materiality: "the experience was—leaving aside some utterly insignificant external, material moments—in its very core, both

¹⁴³ Daniel-Henri Pageaux, *La Littérature générale et comparée*, Armand Colin, Paris, 1994, p. 32.

¹⁴⁴ Olga Stuparević, "Srpski putopis o Italiji", *Uporedna istraživanja 1*, Institut za književnost i umetnost, Belgrade, 1976, p. 171.

¹⁴⁵ Miloš Crnjanski, *Eseji i članci 1*, ed. Živorad Stojković, *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, vol. X, Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog – L'Age d'Homme, Belgrade – Lausanne, 1999, p. 231.

the first and the second time, one and the same—and that is why I remember it fondly and write about as such”.¹⁴⁶ The travelogue narrative is after all, the language of the privileged, an elite language of socially and culturally privileged individuals, and it is only such authority that permits hiding, travesty and an implicit homogenization of experiences. Freed from local ties, the subject of the travelogue wishes to be part of a wider system of ideas, signs, associations, behaviors and communication. A paradigmatic idea of an organic whole can be seen in the travelogue *People Talk* by Rastko Petrović in a moment when the narrator watches bees and wishes to be like them: “I would so love to create one day, by collecting the best from the riches around me and processing them into one unique homogeny.”¹⁴⁷

Aesthetics is positioned as a privileged carrier of the metaphysical truth and as a substitute for the flaws of a given moment. Travelogues are filled with feelings of nostalgia for one’s origins, seated in an imaginary culture, and motivation epitomized in the pursuit of something pure and unsoiled. The key question travel writers implicitly pose in the best of moments is: how does one make a valid separation between true art and the bourgeoisie society? How does one create a culture in which the spirit is not separated from everyday sensual experiences? The attitude of our travel writers towards art seems elitist and quasi-aristocratic, but is, in fact, part of a deeper change within the very regime in which something is denoted as a work of art. The second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th century witnessed a rapid acceleration of awareness that value should be determined through aesthetic sensibility, not through privileges bestowed upon in advance, divine right or holiness. As a reaction to the change of the status of art, which was the inevitable outcome of educational and economic democratization, artists responded by escaping into the past which created an illusion of the ‘real’ place for their products.

This aporetic process was described by Castoriadis in an important article, placing it in the period between the two wars: from 1930 “we claim that we are conducting revolutions by copying and creating bad pastiche – due to the ignorance of a hypercivilized and newly illiterate public, grand moments of Western culture are a thing of the past while contemporary culture is inadequate. Liberal societies are characterized by maximization of consumerism, power, status, prestige... This gave birth to the idea that great art must be subversive, that it has to re-examine and probe the values of society.”¹⁴⁸ Subversive or not, Serbian

¹⁴⁶ Todor Manojlović, “Jesenje večer u Asiziu”, *Vreme*, no. 2887, 1930, p. 27.

¹⁴⁷ Rastko Petrović, *Ljudi govore*, Geca Kon, Belgrade, 1931, p. 63.

¹⁴⁸ Cornelius Castoriadis, “Transformation sociale et creation culturelle”, *Sociologie et sociétés*, vo. 11, no. 1, 1979, p. 37.

interwar art of travel writing shows an irrevocable penchant for history in spite of the incapability of language to regain the world of lost things. A memory reconstructed in the present becomes a moment beyond reach of the “real presence”, while at the same time presenting itself as an alienated past.¹⁴⁹ Pastism was accepted also by authors who prefer the present time, like Momčilo Nastasijević; he truly knows how to see the new organically intertwined with the old in Paris, and likes to point out that this metropolis contains so much history that “even today’s positive man cannot walk by in indifference, but he stops—he finds it unusual—and inadvertently immerses himself in the long gone past”.¹⁵⁰

An irrevocable penchant for history naturally opens several important questions about the nature of the narrative. Literary images are temporal images placed somewhere between historical memory and imaginary construction, revealing an ancient strive of the arts to achieve mythical status. In contrast with the multitude of the present time, which is the result of the wheel of progress, a myth provides the desired passage between private and public.¹⁵¹ In line with that, the objective of mixing historical times is to provide a certain degree of ‘impersonality’ of the author, but also to remind the reader of the civilizational lack of awareness, because travel writing discourse was a constant reminder of the fact that culture, even when we try to hide it, is partly guided by that which lies on the other side of the discourse—death.¹⁵² Expressed in semiotics, cosmism wishes to speak about the fringe of semiosphere, about the edge of sense and about the borders of culture; however, it seems that it does not have the explosive strength that production of new information should generate to cause significant shifts or changes in the codes and structures.

Lastly, it seems that travel writers are aware that cosmism represents more of a distinct literary rhetoric than a true escape from the whipping of time and power, which brings us back to Baudlaire’s diagnosis in the “Painter of Modern Life”. One of the more important writers ends as a disappointed traveler, sharing his sentiments, which many others authors would agree with: “I’m losing every sense of reality of the world as a concept because of the blinding reality of my constant travel. [...] And I would wish bankruptcy on all my pursuits

¹⁴⁹ Mihail Bahtin, “Vreme i prostor u Geteovim delima”, trans. Aleksandar Pivar, *Krovovi*, no. 33-35, 1995, p. 171.

¹⁵⁰ Momčilo Nastasijević, “Beleške s boravka u Parizu”, *Eseji, beleške, misli*, ed. Novica Petković, *Sabrana dela Momčila Nastasijevića*, book IV, Dečje novine – SKZ, Gornji Milanovac – Belgrade, 1991, p. 171.

¹⁵¹ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009, p. 279.

¹⁵² Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000, p. 109.

to happen in one of life's quiet harbors."¹⁵³ The same author poses the question of the purpose of travels: "People travel, changing cities, continents, deserts, jungles and the poles, but to what end? We get an earful every day of stories of progress and a better future, but, in fact, nothing ever changes. The walk of mankind is that of the tortoise which Achilles (peace and happiness) could not overtake. And suddenly it dawned on me, like I had not traveled but lived in a personal nightmare. [...] Enough! ... All travels today are without value and goal!...And now, really, other parts of the continent, which I rushed through in the pursuit of elusive happiness, should be forgotten as well."¹⁵⁴ The beginning of the 20th century was marked by the desire to interpret, to decode societies, brilliant minds and personalities, but this optimism grew progressively silent before the failure of a culture faced with war, thereby definitely and without reservation confirming Nietzsche's view that mankind's strive for metaphysical values invariably end in egoistic wishes and interests.

Cosmism and pastism end in failure before the materialism of history. Writers, as keepers of the past and aesthetics, manage to leave only a weak impression that they are exempt from the world in which they live. All is based on the idea that literature plays a key role in creating the impression that something is eternal just if it is old, forgetting in the meantime that the same old was once modern and new. The background to everything is political: modern intellectuals find themselves in a hopeless and alienated position because the world is ruled by principles of political realism, and they cannot find footing above and beyond the immanence of life which would be accepted in the broader civil society. Although writers dream the noble dream of a common world of culture, the fact remains that modern industrial society in the interwar period actually strengthened the borders between nations. During the period of agrarian societies, cultural politics used to belong to the literati, whereas our travel writers write in times when literacy has long seized to be a speciality and become more of a precondition for other specialities. "Modern hierarchies are *a priori* empty hierarchies",¹⁵⁵ because in theory, albeit not always in practice, anybody can take up any position, leaving our interwar travel writers to choose to be Odyssean posers as their main strategy. The dominant impression is that Serbian travel writing reflects the agonizing feeling

¹⁵³ Rade Drainac, *Lepote i čuda Pariza: evropski putopisi i repotaže*, ed. Gojko Tešić, Dela, vol. VII, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Belgrade, 1999, p. 241.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 289.

¹⁵⁵ Luc Ferry, *Homo aestheticus: otkriće ukusa u demokratskom dobu*, trans. Jelena Stakić, Izdavačka knjižarnica Zorana Stojanovića, Sremski Karlovci – Novi Sad, 1994, p. 250.

of not being able to escape from modern structures to a pure state, and such longing for the metaphysical is, as always, faced with compromises imposed by modern history and its narratives.

Georg Simmel claims, in a Hegelian manner, in his essay 'On the Concept and Tragedy of Culture' that the spirit can realize itself only in forms that alienate it and which follow only their own inner logic.¹⁵⁶ It is in light of this claim that one should view the fact that reality in mature modernity becomes alienated from the travel writing genre. More often non-reflective than prudent, our travel writers can occasionally sound like Nietzsche, Freud or Simmel, who all shared the idea that civilization is a life that has turned against itself. Within that frame, cosmism represents just one more sublimation, the emergence of a sense of unease in culture which takes place at the amphibolic place of struggle, or, in this case, on the level of travel writing texts which are dependent on the idea of 'hard' referentiality and nostalgia for the real.

"And all our hopes are on the other side," reads the last line of Andrić's essay "Mostovi" ("Bridges").¹⁵⁷ The hope is reflected in the belief that a surplus of objects and people can still, by analogy, be confronted by a surplus of sense. "Our islands of victorious art sense", hence, exist, but are no longer of this world, which is both a curse and a blessing. Cosmism and pastism, as forms of aestheticization attempting to break loose from reality, actually amount to hope, not to a real possibility of realizing its purpose in modernity. It is a typical contradiction of idealism that modernity often finds itself in: "Bourgeois society is awash with admirable ideals, but structurally incapable of realizing them. [...] Since this stalled dialectic between an impotent idealism and a degraded actuality is inherent to the bourgeois social order."¹⁵⁸ We have mentioned that the travel writer finds it important to be at the right place at the right time, to which we then added that he finds it equally important to be at the right place with the right book in his hands, only to realize that the 'right' time, through aesthetic and aestheticized encounters manifested in the absolutization of the subject, is what takes him far away from the concrete place. Hence, the travelogues that were the subject of this research paper are best described in the comments by Rastko Petrović about Vinaver's *Gromobran svemira* (*The Lightning Rod of Space*) as: "a workshop of a magician watchmaker where countless clocks of different sizes and different

¹⁵⁶ Georg Simmel, "Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur", *Philosophische Kultur*, Alfred Kröner, Leipzig, 1919 (2. Auflage), pp. 223-253.

¹⁵⁷ Ivo Andrić, "Mostovi", *Staze, lica, predeli*, eds. Petar Džadžić and Muharem Pervić, Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1977, p. 201.

¹⁵⁸ Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2003, p. 208.

sounds endlessly tick. Countless. Clocks with mounted time bombs set to go off at different times throughout eternity”.¹⁵⁹ The main characteristic of a true encounter in the Serbian interwar travelogue culture is the abandonment of concrete time and space in the name of purportedly disinterested metaphysical surplus, which to the greatest extent resembles a modernist secular faith in the sense of the aesthetic experience, which supposedly can still create an intersubjective community, i.e. sociability that produces measurable criteria other than those set by the political and economic standards of the period. Thus, the travelogue, whose main element is an active attitude towards reality, finds itself in the sphere of utopia (non-place), and the chronotope of encounter, at its best, turns into a picture of an imaginary landscape that, at least in the form of epiphanic illusions by ‘magician watchmakers’, suppresses and regulates the chaos of modern life and manages to cope with the contemporary excess of texts, objects and people.

Translated from Serbian by
Milana Todoroskov

¹⁵⁹ Rastko Petrović, “S. Vinaver: *Gromobran svemira*”, *Radikal*, Belgrade, I/21, November 8, 1921, pp. 2-3.

ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIĆ

FROM POETIC REQUIEM TO POETIC LITURGY

Over the poem *The Blue Tomb—Vido* by Milosav Tešić

Over the lowered sky in a dusky verge,
When marble thins out, and dripstone fails to hold,
Through a Name in Letters for Them to emerge,
On the Second Coming, of which the Book foretold.

Milosav Tešić: *Vido*, at Dusk

On the hundredth anniversary of the Salonika Front breakthrough, Milosav Tešić published his poem *The Blue Tomb—Vido*, in the *Politika's Culture Supplement* (September 15 2018, p. 6). The poem has been rightfully ranked both in terms of the contemporary poetic moment, as well as in terms of the spiritual vertical of Serbian poetry and culture. First readers and listeners of the author's reading have instantaneously recognized its beauty, permeation of luminous patriotic sentiments with the specter of melancholic sensuality, and the devout appeal of two of the poet's great predecessors, Milutin Bojić and Ivan V. Lalić. The poem has subsequently been published in the collection *Apparition of a Circle*, accompanied with, according to the poet's well-known custom, certain notes provided in the 'Glossary' at the book's end.¹

It is an exceptional case in Serbian poetry that one poem, canonized long ago and widely acknowledged by literary and cultural memory, should entice the emergence of another two, while all three of them—once

¹ Glossary

they are created—becoming recognized as outstanding and representative renderings of the Great War, its thematic-motive framework and messages that do not waver when faced with frontiers of literature and culture. *The Blue Tomb* by Milutin Bojić (1917) has been carried forth in *The Blue Tomb* by Ivan B. Lalić (1985-1989) and, now, in *The Blue Tomb—Vido* by Milosav Tešić (2018)—lending them its title, its verse-strophic organization, its thematic-motive content, and its evocative tone. But then again, all the three poems are unique, sung in the deepest concordance with the poetics of their authors, reaching the poetic summits of Serbian literature. This was made possible by the very fact that we are dealing with three great Serbian poets, whose exceptional poetic mastery is interwoven with powerful sentiments of cultural patriotism.

The conception and architecture of Bojić's *The Blue Tomb* have been almost immaculately laid out, particularly if one is cognizant that it represents the work of a young poet on the point of death, who, alongside with his army, political and cultural elite, has found himself in exile. The poem consists of fourteen quatrains, ten of which are trochaic hexameters, while the four remaining stanzas—two flanking and two regularly arranged within the poem (with its famous opening verses 'Halt, imperial galleys! Ease your sterns of might, / Let your walk the silence pave! / For I hold a requiem proudly amidst the dead of the night / Over this holy wave') consist of iambic heptameters, while those in first and third verse are geminated. His *The Blue Tomb* has symbolized the Albanian Calvary for decades, and together with Dis's *Among One's Own*, possibly the only more widely known poem written by our great poets about the Great War. The poetic subject-matter of Bojić's poem is a contemporary to the moment he describes and a brother-in-arms to the fallen who lie buried at the bottom of the sea. He views their sacrifice as an epic drama of his people, and their choice to die as the consummate ethic consistency and beauty. The horrors of what has been experienced and witnessed have 'forced' the poet to transfer this visible-invisible blue tomb ('in the shadow of the waves / 'tween the earth's bosom and the heaven's sphere') into the future, as an important count of a never interrupted collective memory. What we have at work here is Bojić's apotheosis of sacrifice and tribulation by his contemporaries, incorporated into Serbian people's historical sense of continuance. It is only by having endured so, that all the unthinkable collective travail can find its justification, and that all the horror can be transfused into a hymn.

From there follow the great words the poet uses when addressing the fallen warriors: 'Prometheuses of hope', 'the apostles of despair', 'an epic most terrible', 'the cradle shall be fairy tales for ages', 'a history', 'holy water', and alike. Its compositional assemblance, versificational

skill, solemn tone and rhetoric impetus, have accomplished that a history of an entire generation's sacrifice, as a pledge of an unbreakable bond between the forefathers and the descendants ('And a new and great change will come / To make a home of splendor on the pile of graves'), has extendedly radiated a dying message to the warriors of the Salonika Front ('And for the dead to hear the roar of the embattled molten ground, / Frothing their blood with a glowing stir / Their children, wreathed in glory, sallying forth the sound'), at the same time exceeding the role of the poet's call to future generations to confirm the reason and meaning of sacrifice ('Hither, over a father, death presides, / While thither, over his son, glory resides').

The Blue Tomb had been, for decades on, utterly unfortunate. Instead of becoming 'a history for all times', following both world wars, it was being expelled from our cultural and educational system, for nearly the same reasons. When at the turn of the last century it returned back to us, and we did so to it too, new readings and new understandings of the Bojić's covenantal poem were necessary. Not only courageously, but also poetically challenging, Ivan B. Lalić had stood before the Bojić's poem seven decades later. One had to give a befitting tribute to the previous poem, confront it with the new times at work, as well as to write one's *own* poem. Lalić nearly entirely repeated the verse-strophic organization of Bojić's poem. Before the poetic subject of Lalić's *The Blue Tomb*, while residing within the spaces of Bojić's poem, within the same landscape, therefore, but with a seven-decade long historical and poetic memory, powerful sentiments of betrayal and thoughts of the unfulfilled *promises* arise. Following generational and temporal crosschecks, as well as the uncertainties stemming from the future, the contemporary poet is commenting and repeating the famous verses within himself: the initial two verses are often by Bojić, the final two by Lalić ('Here lie at rest the wreaths of afore / And a transient joy of one entire race... / Only for the grandchildren in their shadow / To bleed further, for the same, distant fruit with no trace'). Instead of Prometheus and apostles, here we can see the likes of Sisyphus and Tantalus at work: 'For this is why Sisyphus and Tantalus embrace'. Not even the landscape remains unscathed. What Lalić sees is entirely de-sacralized and in full discord with his internal memory. Instead of the astounded nature and magnificent *imperial galleys*, his gaze discovers banal signs of a remembrance-cancelling indifferent civilization: profane and dirty water, furrowed through by an occasional freight-tugboat. ('Beneath the water, sacred to me, upon which / a ferry scurrying ashore froths the main, / An orange peel, and an oil stain').

As much as Bojić sang in the name of the perished generation, he even more intensely sang in the name of the nation's collective spirit,

of supratemporal and of supragenerational, Lalić on the other hand seems to be entirely alone in the midst of the Corfu touristic bustle. But, only seemingly: the poet has proved many times over (beginning with the poems *Predecessors*, *Requiem for the Seven Hundred from the Church in Glina*, *A Rusty Needle*, *Melisa*, up to *Military Cemetery*, these poems and *The Four Canons*) that the ancestral voices are not dead voices and that: ‘I, myself, carry them within me’. They were with him in the year of 1985 above the Corfu waters. The knowledge he acquires—identical to his emotional experience—is complex and contradictory: this knowledge begins with the despair caused by the betrayed sacrifice of one entire generation, reaching the urge to whisper to the ancestors a soothing message (‘Yet still, rest in peace’, with an emphasis on the initial word *yet*, that is, despite all that has taken place since you have perished). The deceptive and banal maritime landscape cannot sever the connections between the ancestors and the posterity, nor can it forfeit the importance of the act of sacrifice itself, instead it only further sharpens the reminiscence. The warriors from the bottom of the sea and their descendant, despite of everything—for still, *blood is thicker than water*, particularly this water, so much desecrated with peels and tugboats—are unbreakably bonded with a common sense of belonging to the same history and same culture.

If Lalić needed audacity to create his poems, then writing of *The Blue Tomb—Vido* for Tešić represented a double challenge, requiring double the strength. After the first and second poem, it was necessary that a new poem should maintain certain relevant properties of theirs, but also to make a certain verse-strophic and motive breakthrough. And Tešić did it. The poem here is given in its entirety. In it, the poet has made several *minor* alterations in reference to its first and second publication:

*In hope that the Spirits and the Lord have forgiven:
for other names in the Three Dots are given...*

Nor the imperial galleys, nor boats,
nor arks, ever loiter or stall, but scurry and dash—
in the irate fever of touristic farce—
towards the shells of leisure and the adventure’s rash.

Heaven’s ocean, radiant from its Core,
is on the verge of cleaving the peach,
and the invisible Archer—lethally true—
registers the gleam of moment’s reach.

The Matter is cleft in the well-lit shred,
and the sunflower blossoms from the water palm—

altering the state budding in the thread
into the obituary broader than the summer's calm.

Over the water's roar, the flower of sorrow bellows:
... Stanko of Takovo... and Jevrem from Tmava...
Jakov from Draginje... and Momir from Temska...
the corn ripens—and the plum mellows.

... Lazar from Orašje... followed by nurses:
Novka and Ljubica Savić... Dragutin from Klenje...
The Sun itself suffers noble curses!
Aloes sparkle their healing terses.

... Živko from Rogače... Gvozden from Bobova...
Stocks of the worthy reminiscent justly ooze.
... Kosta from Božurnja... Obren from Kremna...
and Stojković Boško from Žitni Potok...

Let the pain flinchingly prick and luminesce,
Radiant Mistress, bring the breath of frankincense,
to the Vido Island from Corfu and from the shore,
over the *blue Tomb* and the Bone-mausoleum.

... Filip from Sibnica... Stevan from Zlatovo...
through the Bitter Reader, and the resin's hint,
through a Corfu downpour, the Lord's Prayer to sing,
... Belgrade... and Prizren... Niš... Šabac... Topola...

Here the meadows, blue with the bells bloom,
remain on beyond, distant—in glow:
... Branko from Žukovac... Simeun from Gvozac...
and Raković Pavle from Stanina Reka...

Where one Desperate *braces* the Other,
a witless cricket sips the heat of fever,
hastening the gale, the air is crushed
while the throat tightens, and tears granulate.

Those *imperial galleys* neither loiter, nor stall hard,
nor it gets mentioned what Bojić already said
and Lalić anewed: of flames to stand guard
once the requiem starts—ecstasy is not to be had.

*It is the Temple of mysteries, where brethren are laid,
and father next to his son: where the spirit is honed,
a moment of illumination and understanding is made,
what is truly one's own—and what by others owned.*

They are bonded in blood—under the sign of the Cross—
the torments of death and Holy freedom,
the seeds perish so the species suffer no loss,
for there is no shortcut to Heavenly fiefdom.

... Ognjan from Dobrača... Petko from Kolar...
Mladen from Grocka... Trifun from Grkinja...
Marko from Grčić... Cvetko from Devča...
and *there far away*, the lemon is not in bloom.

Colorful pumpkins, and ripen grapes,
honeycrisps tumble and feverfews breathe,
... Joksim from Crvenje... Đorđe from Brus...
Rajko from Brajkovica... and Mačužić Radič...

Branch out, poem, my precious herb,
for our memory grows weaker by day,
... Bogdan from Barič... Miljko from Popovac...
Ajduković Vlajko from Ribarska Banja...

Where time feeds into the Eternal Friday's flow,
the nauseating question splits the bark's wedge,
from letter to letter, from row to row:
Could this be truly the new tribulation's pledge?

Imperial galleys, speedboat-comets, or various vessels,
neither loiter, nor keep still or stall,
Life on the run elaborates the breakdown,
in rhythmic movement and circular illusion for all.

Where houses stop, and views cease to show:
... Josif from Pirot... Sava from Drenovac...
Vojin from Užice... Stojiljko from Vranje...
The field is wide, upon which grasses never grow.

The Psalmist cries, and praises and calls:
... Milić from Lapovo... Ivan from Jagnjilo...
Petruš from Bresnica... and Janča from Žbevac...
Živan from Carina... Milan followed by Milan...

And corporal Dragutin... through the battle lines –
with maritime breath caught within in the dark—
and Stevan, the captain from Gornja Dobrinja...
as well as all the others resting under the question mark.

In a silent-feel, they silently nestle:
and our future history *on a pile of graves*,
flotillas making haste, sirens that blast –
and general senses of foam and dust.

And as silence grows into a furling wave:
... Jovan from Vrđnik... Stanko from Banjevac...
Andrej from Vinča... and Petar from Blaca...
and Cvejo from Tešnje... and priest Ranko.

The straits come often, the paths are frail—
the line of death is long and pale:
... Damjan from Boleč... Milutin from Rumska...
Burmasović Marko from Veliko Selo...

Along with tillage, birds begin to chirp,
... Veljko from Ratar... and Dušan from Kloka...
Jovan from Virovo... then Jaćim from Ličje...
and many more thousands from abysmal murk.
When heart begins to beat and mind blooms,
the bitterness crumbles and discomforts rifts,
the bones flinch from their marble-cliffs,
from maritime deeps, and their bunkered rooms.

Evangelical certainty—as the Scripture foretold—
where there is no sea, the names get hold
towards pastures New, and their mindless being—
when the Lord unleashes, the Revelation streaming.

Those *imperial galleys* never loiter when off the coast,
nor do so the oddities that float, as relics they seem—
from God's own ark when beacons beam—
they glow from the blackness of the Heavenly post.

Tešić wrote his poem of extended title and of extended duration in twenty-eight quatrain stanzas, in the hexameter form, but not as a trochaic, rather as an amphibrachic (which is entirely his own contribution to our metrics). Such procedure and such extensions of the poem is deeply motivated not only by the need to make a difference, but also

by a more profound poetic reason. First of all, the Blue Tomb of Corfu and its water/maritime space has been expanded with the rock-strewn island of Vido and the Mausoleum-Ossuary with 1,232 compartments containing remains of known warriors (previously buried all over the 27 Corfu graveyards), as well as the two outward flanking bunkers containing the remains of additional 1,532 unknown warriors. The poem does not cease when faced with the peculiarity and magnificence of burial in the *blue tomb*: the suffering, in its horror and magnificence, was so abundant that it could barely be accommodated within all the expanses of land and sea of the Ionian waters. Tešić's poem has encompassed, thus—at least symbolically and as much as it was able to—the entire Serbian maritime-terrestrial world of the dead at the end of the Albanian Calvary, and that (all)encompassing property has been consistently executed from its first to its final stanza.

Secondly, the poem consists of two comparable and motive-wise entirely blended undercurrents. Fourteen out of twenty-eight Tešić's stanzas relate to the length of Bojić's and Lalić's poems. Among them, there are four stanzas in whose initial verses the author invokes and quotes *imperial galleys* ('Those *imperial galleys* neither loiter, nor stall hard'). Tešić did not, as opposed to his predecessors, separate these stanzas in terms of metrics, instead he wrote them in amphibrachic hexameter. Quoting Bojić's and Lalić's verses, i.e. their verse phrases (the poet never took over an entire verse), as well as the reminiscence of the most popular Corfu (*national*) poem, are provided in italics, and are thoroughly clarified in the footnotes.²

Unlike Lalić's and Bojić's poems, whose openings are given in imperative: "Halt, imperial galleys!", Tešić's poem starts with a description which is not emotionally neutral, but rather based upon a feeling of betrayed expectation: 'Those *imperial galleys* neither loiter, nor stall hard'. In times bounded by superficial and hectic interests, epitomized in the banality of touristic spirit, it is superfluous to halt what simply will not halt:

Imperial galleys, speedboat-comets, or various vessels,
neither loiter, nor keep still or stall,

² Although we are discussing verses familiar to any educated poetry reader, Tešić believed it was useful to make entirely clear his borrowings and reshaping. This, on one hand, indicates his yearnings to enable the reader to completely dedicate themselves to the poetic text, not to search for its source, but rather for its new role and additional meaning. On the other hand, his *glossaries* receive their broader educational character: with quotation sources, lexical and toponymical explanations, they all invoke and renew the cultural layers they originate from, creating precious context, significant by itself, as well as for the reader's experience of culture at work within the poet's verses. (More on the nature and role of the poet's remarks and clarifications can be found in: Jovanović 2018: 142-146, 192-193, 266-267.)

Life on the run elaborates the breakdown,
in rhythmic movement and circular illusion for all.

This consumeristic and for any deeper experiences uninterested spirit, the one which would see and touch everything, but without any wish to pause and understand what it sees, has been recognized by Ivan V. Lalić in his *The Blue Tomb* as meaningless chatter within a holy place ('Here, where loitering tourists shoot the boats, / with their straw hats tilted to the side, / I discern the temple, real under the summer tide / of the sea that murmurs while I whisper the requiem. // I whisper it within me, not to appear silly / in the eyes of the guide who routinely chatters / about Nausikaya, as if it did not matter / what becomes of my requiem and of the ill fate of Serbs'). Tešić sees this spirit as a sign of distorted time, breaking through with its conformity ubiquitously where forces of Evil are at work in their efforts to take over and deface the world. Even so, at moments infused with God's energy and vegetative exuberance ('Heaven's ocean, radiant from its Core, / is on the verge of cleaving the peach'), the forces that would hold all things together and point, in no way falter (and the invisible Archer—lethally true—registers the gleam of moment's reach'). Abolishment of human authenticity and prevalence of the apparent over what is real, is based upon the absence of culture memory and of the purposeless, pointless acceleration, without any possibility of movement along the diachronic channel of one's own culture.³

³ *'Imperial galleys, speedboat-comets, / or various vessels, neither loiter, nor keep still or stall. / Life on the run elaborates the breakdown, / in rhythmic movement – a circular illusion for all',* stands in the poems eighteenth stanza. The title of the entire collection of poetry containing this particular poem originates precisely here. Just like Tešić's other collections, this one also sings of Evil and the breakdown incorporated within the very foundations of human existence.—Maybe at this moment, one's attention should briefly be turned to the cycle *In Images and Words*. Within its nine poems, the author sings of a distorted Orwellian-neoliberal time, with its structures and mechanisms of accelerated depersonalization of values and deconstruction of meaning, in which oligarchic mind absolutely holds sway ('And this is the motto, axiom and binomial: / Even the stars are there to appear trivial'). Suffice to list some of the poems' title verses, 'All things operational—nothing valid', 'With glorious robots and computer's allure', 'For the honest to weep, and guileless to squeal', 'What is there—does not exist, what is worth—has no worth', in order to see the meaning baseline and the world's poetic image, in front of which the one singing these verses feels horror. 'The Values' are also sentenced to brief duration and constant production of new ones, equally short-termed within the programmed media and virtual nature of our world, in which there can be no room for memory: 'In images and words, valid for a moment's hold, / the truth turns into fool's gold'. The cycle is organized into hexametric amphibrachic couplets, as if providing a playful tone with their rhythm, while also accelerating the poem towards the final confirmation of the distorted time. Thus, all until the ultimate couplet with its response uncertain, without which this poem would have no meaning: 'And the One walking on water, who gives food and drink, / when omits or counts—what does he think?'

When in the third stanza we face the image overflowing with light above the water, thrusting the banal maritime glimpses, inner spaces of the poem start to open before us:

The Matter is cleft in the well-lit shred,
and the sunflower blossoms from the water palm—
altering the state budding in the thread
into the obituary broader than the summer's calm.

Metonymic usage of the word *sunflower* additionally reinforces and luminously moves and vivifies the sun's reflection upon the sea water. Nevertheless, the presence of the divine is guessed from the description ('The Matter is cleft in the well-lit shred, / [...] / altering the state budding in the thread'), lifting the landscape as if it floats in the air, while the image of sunflower can epiphanically, one might comprehend it that way as well, refer to the native land of the entombed warriors and their descendants. Divine and epiphanic transforms what one sees into a vivid recollection of the poetic subject, equaling the recollection with light, and singing with recollection. 'The obituary broader than the summer's calm' is one of the verses through which the poem denominates itself, but also testifying the luminous announcement of what, suppressed with oblivion, resided within the darkness. The notion 'broader' is not conditioned solely by the number of warriors it has to embrace, but rather, even more so, by the strength of light it radiates forth.

Fourteen secondary stanzas (alternatingly following the initial ones in somewhat less strict of a manner: No. 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24 and 25) are a poetic *requiem* to the warriors buried within the mausoleum-ossuary on the island of Vido. They are the ones for whom the poem transforms into 'the obituary broader than the summer's calm'. These stanzas contain some of the most essential poetic headways by Milosav Tešić in reference to his great predecessors. Bojić's and Lalić's martyred generation, *a transient joy of one entire race*, has been individually named in Tešić's poem, as if in a real commemorative service. The verses, with the poet's all due respect and observance, provide their names and places they come from: ... Veljko from Ratar... and Dušan from Kloka... Jovan from Virovo... then Jaćim from Liče... and many more thousands from abysmal murk'. Four verses provide full personal and place names ('Stojković Boško from Žitni Potok...', 'and Raković Pavle from Stanina Reka...', 'Ajduković Vlajko from Ribarska Banja...', 'Burmasović Marko from Veliko Selo...'), contributing to the solemn tone's additional uplift.⁴ In concordance with the author's motto of the

⁴ In the original text, 'All the names (apart from one: for metric reasons the name *Andreja* has been altered into *Andrej*) and family names in this poem, as well

poem: ‘for other names in the Three Dots are given...’, each name is proceeded and/or preceded, without exception, by a three-dotted ellipsis preserving all the unmentioned known and unknown names of the warriors (‘as well as all the others resting under the question mark’ [...], ‘and many more thousands from abysmal murk’) which had to, due to poetic and metric reasons, remain before the verses. This is why both words of the phrase ‘*Three Dots*’ begin with capital letters: their generality does not wish one single personal name or family name to be annulled, nor to be omitted during the service. Fifty-one names are mentioned in these stanzas, within their thirty-one verses. They should be added the verse entirely dedicated to toponyms, as well as the verse elaborating the poem’s motto. (Both verses are provided within the following paragraphs in the text).⁵

as the toponyms, have been provided in the same form they had been carved into the headstones of marble compartments’ (Tešić 2019: 113). In his Glossary, Tešić provides the data on each of the places the warriors mentioned in the poem originate from. Although readers can relatively easily inform themselves on their own, the poet does not do it by chance: the poet’s toponymic rosary—entirely in accordance with spirit of his own poetry—is confirmed by the precise geographical determination. The beauty of such poetry and nearly scientific precision provide a very special hue to Tešić’s poetry and represent one of his trademarks.

⁵ The unmentioned *other names*, despite more than obvious poetic and rational reasons why they cannot all make it into the poem, have since the creation and publication of *The Blue Tomb—Vido* (and we can also freely say, personally as well), obsessed the poet to return to them once again and additionally follow up (which is otherwise his usual poetic procedure). Several years following the creation and publication of the poem, Tešić added its motto and wrote the poem *Vido, at dusk*. He added one more verse ‘for other names in the Three Dots are given’ (already included in the text) to the one preceding the poem ‘*In hope that the Spirits and the Lord have forgiven*’: which is used from the very beginning to chant the prayer of a poetic act insufficient to preserve each and every individual suffering and sacrifice *within the obituary broader than the summer’s calm*. Although we are talking about a special and, judging by numerous standards, a well-rounded poem, *Vido, at Dusk* is, in a manner of speaking, a *daughter-poem*: it receives its full meaning only on the basis of the poem *The Blue Tomb—Vido*, to which it is added in terms of motives and in terms of tone. It requires a more detailed analysis, and here we provide only several necessary notes. In its fourteen stanzas (suitably responding to *mausoluem stanzas* of the underlying poem), names of the fallen warriors and names of the places they come from are extendedly liturgically sung (‘where each name is liturgically heard’) in order to, at least somewhat, diminish the space of un-remembrance *the Three Dots*, that is: ‘For this catalog to grow into an idea / on Excavation of treasures from the memory that fades’. Emotional-spiritual experience of the poetic subject has been passed and concretely realized within the atmosphere of the summer twilight (‘The dream of distant Lands are in bloom here’; ‘While St. Peter’s Eve bonfires are lit’, ‘Moon over Serbia’; ‘While fireflies pass and the crops dawn’; ‘Over the lowered skies in the twilight zone’), through which uncertain and strong forebodings of the Christ’s Second Coming radiate, of the total transfiguration of the world and of the final justice (‘Through a Name in Letters for Them to emerge / On the Second Coming, of which the Book foretold // [...] / and the rest of them in the glimmer of the Lord’). The verse ‘and the rest of them in the glimmer of the Lord’ first and foremost names all the mentioned and unmentioned from the Ossuary on Vido, including with their all-encompassing property all those perished during the Albanian Calvary, and the image itself in *the glimmer of the Lord*—so conspicuously closing the

Nothing has been left to chance: along with metric severity (and thanks to it), several streams of thought are being cut across, masterfully assembled in accordance with the poem's poetics and the role which was intended to it by the author. The most obvious is the toponymic one. Almost none of our characteristic names ('... Jovan from Vrdnik... Stanko from Banjevac.../ ... Andrej from Vinča... Petar from Blace...'; 'Živan from Carina... Milan next to Milan...'; 'and corporal Dragutin... through the battle lines—[...] and Stevan, the captain from Gornja Dobrinja...'), nor a single one of our counties and cultural-historical places, including our symbolic capitals ('... Beograd... and Prizren... Niš... Šabac... Topola...'). It is a *poetic anthropogeography* of its own kind, incomparably more thorough than the necessary identification. Thus, the Serbian wreath of names and places is created, a toponymic rosary or braid of its own kind, in which an individual is inseparably patriotically unified with his brothers in arms as much as with the place of his birth, from which many of them had been away for the first time during the war. From each verse, even from each half-verse, a breath of human destiny reaches us, of which we are told nothing more than that is interrupted in the moment full of painful longing towards life and homeland, all of which are left behind *far away*.

This has conditioned numerous and multiply motivated recastings of poetic images (one more of Tešić's trademarks) and transitions of time plans, while at the same time painting the poem with intensive melancholy and dramatics. The poetic subject is a contemporary poet within the moment and space in front and inside the Mausoleum-osuary, with his historical, cultural and poetic memory—conscious that invoking and singing of his predecessors is an act which largely goes beyond poetry and culture, and that it, without exaggeration, touches upon the people itself to whom it unconditionally belongs. Almost epiphanically, he takes over the warrior's longing for homeland under the olive trees, as well as his fears that, it would appear so, all this is forever lost. The moment of contemporary singing and the Corfu-exiles' longing to be back home and *among one's own* are amalgamated into one voice, simultaneously belonging to predecessors and to the poet:

Here the meadows, blue with the bells bloom,
remain on beyond, distant—in glow:

They remain on *beyond* and *in glow*, primarily, from *the other* side and from the *deep murk* for the warriors to see them, but at the same

poem—is exceptionally suitable to accommodate the fate of Serbian warriors that comes later, the destiny constantly stretched between the memory and oblivion, in a moment that—through the poem—transforms into eternity.

time to take over the look of the poetic subject, which equally and even more evidently relates to *those far away*. Numerous antagonisms, here-there, abroad-homeland, close-far, near-beyond establish unnoticeably, they last and intertwine, melting with the names of the warriors as their extended breath, halted a century ago, possibly at the moment filled with precisely the images that now return to them in the poem ('Over the water's roar, the flower of sorrow bellows:/ ... Stanko of Takovo... and Jevrem from Tmava.../ Jakov from Draginje... and Momir from Temska.../ the corn ripens—and the plum mellows'; 'and *there far away*, the lemon is not in bloom'; 'Colorful pumpkins, and ripen grapes,/ honeycrisps tumble and feverfews breathe,/ ... Joksim from Crvenje... Đorđe from Brus.../ Rajko from Brajkovica... and Mačužić Radič...'; 'Along with tillage, birds begin to chirp:/ ... Veljko from Ratar... and Dušan from Kloka'). At least for a moment, the rocky landscape with olive trees transforms into the native land meadows, vineyards and orchards, furrowed seas enliven up another tillage, in its full audio-visual synesthetic experience and through homelessness purified from peasants' toil.⁶

One can hardly overstate the poetic, almost mathematical precision of Tešić's verses. They are, typically of him, multilayered poetic images, emotionally and mentally intensively colored, but are often at the same time poetic code words. Despite of its conciseness and encroachment, the verse offers us numerous possible directions of understandings, which do not exclude, but rather strengthen and fulfill each other, and are always in full harmony with the poem they are in. Here we see two such instances singled out.

The poem's fourth stanza, already provided in its entirety, begins with the verse 'Over the water's roar, the flower of sorrow bellows', which, following this, does not leave us throughout the poem. It serves to, primarily, name the outlook of the poetic subject and its emotional relationship towards what it sees: the space of the poem and both tombs in it. Besides, *water's roar* has been a rarely successful—equally unexpected and at a grasp's distance—metonymic image of the *blue tomb*, while the *sorrow bellows*—possibly—is again metonymical naming of the warriors in the mausoleum, although within the expression *flower of sorrows bellows* one finds a concrete breath of their longing from beyond. We are referred to this by the concluding verse: 'the corn ripens—and the plum mellows', first among those evoking and celebrating the native

⁶ It is precisely through its flow that *The Blue Tomb*—*Vido* invokes two anthological poems about the very same period: *Pantelija* by Stanislav Vinaver and *Among One's Own* by Vladislav Petković Dis, and with its concise images of native landscapes, place names and native plants, it truly is a great hymn to Serbia, which, with all its conditionality and differences, joins the great patriotic poems such as *Serbia* by Oskar Davičo, *Serbia is a Great Secret* by Desanka Maksimović, *The Night Before the Departure* by Tanasije Mladenović, and *1804* by Ivan V. Lalić.

country. And this is not an end, since everything in the poem that belongs to the space and its memory, at the same time equally represents tangible emotions of the one who sings: *sorrow bellows* names his experience before the memorial ossuary which, it would appear, also contains awareness on the necessity of poetic addition of his predecessors and ethic dimensions of Tešić's poetic act: the magnificence of burial in maritime depths should not be allowed to suppress the size of the sacrifice of those who stayed ashore forever. This is why the requiem commences in the next verse already. Nevertheless, such or different readings of this verse might contribute to a more complex reader's experience and understanding, but are never able to fully explain its beauty and everything else radiating from within. The verse 'Over the water's roar, the flower of sorrow bellows' is one of the core verses of this poem, but could also be—with good reasons—found as its motto right in front of it.

And yet another example. When in the poem's second part we read: 'The straits come often, the paths are frail—/ the line of death is long and pale', the reader's mind immediately creates the image of a winding column of Serbian warriors pulling through the Albanian ravines and perilously fluttering on the snow-covered trails above the abyss, but also which is simultaneously grasped as a symbolized trajectory of our wanderings and muddlings, especially in the previous and in this century.

One of the essential properties of Tešić's poetry is the presence of an intensive meta-poetical flow in nearly each of his poems, even regardless of the the topic or motive. The poem which arose from two magnificent classics of Serbian poetry, singing on singing itself has necessarily been incorporated within its foundations and is one of the constantly permeating flows. 'Stocks of the worthy reminiscent justly ooze' is what Milosav Tešić says in the sixth stanza, interrupting only briefly the ongoing tribute within it ('... Živko from Rogače... Gvozden from Bobova... / Stocks of the worthy reminiscent justly ooze! / ... Kosta from Božurnja... Obren from Kremna... / and Stojković Boško from Žitni Potok... *Oozing*, since everything is born from within it: the breath of life the perished warriors, their significance, all they have brought with them and the *remembrance* that transcends into a poem.

A tribute and singing, however, at one of the most sacred places of Serbian history and poetry is not, nor it can be, merely an individual memory, but rather a full moment of reckoning with what we used to be and what we are not anymore, but ought to become:

Those *imperial galleys* neither loiter, nor stall hard,
nor it gets mentioned what Bojić already said

and Lalić anewed: of flames to stand guard
once the requiem starts—ecstasy is not to be had.

It is the Temple of mysteries, where brethren are laid,
and father next to his son: where the spirit is honed,
a moment of illumination and understanding is made,
what is truly one's own—and what by others owned.

They are bonded in blood—under the sign of the Cross—
the torments of death and Holy freedom,
the seeds perish so the species suffer no loss,
for there is no shortcut to Heavenly fiefdom.

Almost throughout the entire poem, Tešić's verses and images name the absence of our historical and cultural memory, as well as a strong urge to invoke it and continue it. Such role has been precisely intended to poetry and to its power to confront the oblivion found in the defaced presence ('Branch out, poem, my precious herb, / for our memory grows weaker by day'; that is: 'of flames to stand guard / once the requiem starts—ecstasy is not to be had'). Evangelical, historical and poetic motives, clearly indicated within the underlying text of these verses and the entire poem, make the very pledge to *flames to stand guard* and to the establishment of unified flow between what pertains to the ancestral, and what to the future. Acknowledgment of predecessors, through subtle quotations, but also through most direct naming ('nor it gets mentioned what Bojić already said / and Lalić anewed'), is not only a significant praise to their singing, but a kind of repayment of one's own poetic debt.

At the same time, the poem *The Blue Tomb—Vido* sings of a heroic and a stoic relationship between an individual destiny and a defense of the collective existence, such as we know from our epic poetry or Rakić's *Kosovo Cycle* ('They are bonded in blood—under the sign of the Cross—/ the torments of death and Holy freedom, / the seeds perish so the species suffer no loss, / for there is no shortcut to Heavenly fiefdom'). There can be no salvation of homeland without a personal stake and a decision not to retreat at the moments we fathom that everything that determines us is endangered. What we witness at this point once more, is the *healing* power of poetry, which Tešić does not compare with a plant by chance, and its property to summon us to the *sacred* space through its *oozing* singing ('*It is the Temple of mysteries, where brethren are laid, / and father next to his son: where the spirit is honed, / a moment of illumination and understanding is made, / what is truly one's own—and what by others owned*').

Milosav Tešić sings of sacred spaces from within a desecrated space and time. Therefrom stems the gloom, even physical discomfort of the poetic subject and its constant bewilderment over our collective destiny, which seems to be foreordained to eternal suffering:

Where time feeds into the Eternal Friday's flow,
the nauseating question splits the bark's wedge,
from letter to letter, from row to row:
Could this be truly the new tribulation's pledge?

Verses above are the expression of the anxiety felt by the one who sings, but at the same time this is a dynamic image of the poem itself and the moment of its creation and shaping ('the nauseating question splits the bark's wedge, / from letter to letter, from row to row'). *The nauseating question* can indeed accommodate many things, starting from discomfort and anxiety of the one who sings, while splitting of the bark is what represents an act of liberations through singing ('from letter to letter, from row to row').⁷

The final three stanzas are the singing of the cathartic and epiphanic moment of the poetic subject and the poem itself at the moment where all its lines of meaning have crossed:

When heart begins to beat and mind blooms,
the bitterness crumbles and discomforts rifts,
the bones flinch from their marble-cliffs,
from maritime deeps, and their bunkered rooms.

Evangelical certainty—as the Scripture foretold—
where there is no sea, the names get hold
towards pastures New, and their mindless being—
when the Lord unleashes, the Revelation streaming.

Those *imperial galleys* never loiter when off the coast,
nor do so the oddities that float, as relics they seem—
from God's own ark when beacons beam—
they glow from the blackness of the Heavenly post.

In an emotional and intellectual illumination ('When heart begins to beat and mind blooms'), *in the moment*, in Tešić's words, which has no price, the poetic subject releases itself from the bitterness and con-

⁷ It would be worth comparing this verse of Tešić with the verse by Ivan V. Lalić in *The Blue Tomb*: 'There is a bitter thought I wish to disassemble'. 'A bitter thought' bears the same meaning with the Tešić's verse 'nauseating question'

finement ('the bitterness crumbles and discomforts rifts'). This is, however, also a moment in which—just like in the wondrous paintings by Milić of Mačva—bones from marble compartments, bunkers and the ocean's deep, from *the Blue Tomb and the Bone-mausoleum*, become holy relics, while half-forgotten martyrs are elevated to 'new Native land', to Heavenly Jerusalem ('when the Lord unleashes, the Revelation streaming') and their transfiguration into saints occurs. It is a road from the blackness to the Light, from oblivion to remembrance, from anxiety to calmness, from the historic doom to the insight of the permanent meaning and suffering—all of which are traversed through by the warriors and their poet together.

A complete unity between the posterity and their ancestors has been established through heavenly illumination and gratitude, and in Lalić's words, *the statics of obstacles* has been overcome. From the *poetic requiem* and *tribute*, the poem turns into *the poetic liturgy*, into uncertain singing, hopeful of both personal and collective deliverance.

Since Lalić's appearance, as well as now, Tešić's poems, our three 'Blue Tombs' have been inextricably connected and require parallel reading and understanding. Mutually balanced, they are invaluable not only for the sake of perception of Serbian poetry's developmental trajectory in the World War One, as well as of our poetic development in general, but also for consideration of Serbian history's destined progression. The misgivings that our dying poet had on the Corfu shores, have all been assumed and further resumed by contemporary poets seven and ten decades later, though not free from melancholy and bitterness, but with the same patriotic sentiment of the uninterrupted history.

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ĆOSIĆ ON DEMOCRACY, POLITICS, HISTORY, MAN

Views on democracy. Democracy is an order of society which guarantees the free flow of political ideas and programs, the right to found political organizations which fight for their vision of social reality through peaceful means, and whose institutions have procedures ensuring that all individuals and groups can realize their way of life. Democratic institutions ensure the separation of state institutions from the social autonomy of groups and individuals. In the democratic decision-making system all citizens have equal rights by law to participate in the political regime (Tocqueville, A., 1990, Bryce, J., 1931, Aron, R., 1965, Dahl, R., 1994, Bobbio, N., 1990, Duverger, M., 1968, Vasović, V., 1973. More in: Avramović, 2000, 2002).

Great thinkers on democracy have established that there are no advance guarantees in the democratic order and that there are historical situations in which groups are not capable of harmonizing their interests before their conflict turns serious, even volatile. National affirmation and aggression can thrive on democratic soil. (Mannheim, K.: 1981).

Despite some normative and experiential differences in understanding the concept of democracy, several basic elements can be identified as common to the traditional views on democracy: (a) it is a form of controlled government, (b) it has a system of institutions which protect individual and general interests, as well as the citizens' rights and freedoms, (c) it allows competition and confrontation of political and nonpolitical groups for power without the use of force, (d) it is a system of rights allowing individuals to meet their intellectual, moral, aesthetic and hedonistic needs, and (e) it has a free public.

Democracy is not a model of government without internal problems. Its flaws have been highlighted from the times of the old Greek philosophers to today. Numerous theoreticians have pointed to the following weaknesses: formality, the problem of large numbers, slow decision-making processes, incompetency, manipulation. In modern society "democracy is in trouble" (Anthony Giddens) due to the complexity of the globalization process, strengthening of localism, "rebellion of the masses" and spreading of multinational corporations. Also, to be added to this list is the absolutization of the individual and his rights. The experience with the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 has a significant learning value to the future of democracy. This was a case of democratic countries launching an armed attack on a country with democratic institutions that had not attacked another country.

Dobrica Ćosić's views on democracy are a testament to the complexities of theory and practice not only of this type of political regime, but also of public behavior. From a fighter for communistic ideals, he turned into a fighter for a democratic state. Initially for a social democracy and then for a civic society. His mannerism of both praising and criticizing the democratic order and the players who merely claimed to be democrats is not exclusive to him. Far from it. This is the use of antinomies to democratic ideas, theory, order and practice.

The champions of democracy in the one-party systems of Yugoslavia and Serbia (and this was true for other countries as well) lived under the illusion that democracy was a type of political regime that would bring general harmony to the whole society or, at least, ensure non-conflicting relations. However, it turned out to cause the cancellation of political silence and the introduction of a state of uncertainty for the authorities and the society. Instead of a one-party peace and certainty, democracy brings unease, unexpectedness and puts everything into motion. It unleashes the flow of different convictions, beliefs and swiftly changing attitudes. And political parties get the freedom to fight for support of their ideas and social development programs.

Ćosić's views had a developing arch in terms of concept and politics on this issue, too, from revolution to democracy. "In a revolution democracy has to be prescribed" (1952). This attitude shows a lack of understanding of the concept in question: revolutions and democracy are opposite entities. When Aleksandar Ranković was relieved of duty, Ćosić criticized the Stalinist methods used in the establishment of democratic socialism. "I no longer believe in any higher cause if it is not fought for by democratic means" (27.06.1966). He has a completely different view on the relation between force and freedom after the 1980s. "Democracy cannot permanently defend itself by force; it can only be achieved through understanding" (1983). In his conversations with

Giorgio Torki (1989) when asked what democracy was, he says: "That would be a state with the citizen at its core, not the nation. Yugoslavia can exist either as a democratic society or there is no reason for it to exist" (*Conversations*, 2005).

Ćosić engages in an open fight for the democratization of society after Tito's death, not so much by focusing on the concept of democracy as by criticizing the authorities and defending persecuted intellectuals and citizens. He steps up as a public champion of the democratization of Yugoslavia and Serbia through opinion journalism and practical activities. He supports every initiative aimed at changing repressive legislation and decisions by the communist authorities without reservation, and advocates for the freedom to hold opinions and freedom of speech. In the year of the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia he notes down "Yugoslavia and democracy are irreconcilable" (February 1991). Then, while looking back at the communist period from the perspective of the DOS (the Democratic Opposition of Serbia alliance) democracy, he concludes that they had been naïve to believe that socialism and Titoism could be democratized (2007).

After 1990, his defense of democratic values begins to include criticism of their practical application. Ćosić, simultaneously, supports and criticizes democracy in Serbia from 1990. His thoughts on the Serbian democracy are laid out in his *Lična istorija jednog doba (A Personal History of an Age)*. He observes and participates in the political life, and writes down his views on personalities and events as well as criticism of certain manifestations in the system he had fought for. He draws attention to some processes which had been explained by theorists of democracy. "Democracy has become a political regime of mediocrates and manipulators; it is an order with no ethics, no heroism, no truth. Today's democracy in the world is a legitimized 'rule of organized lies'. Wise men and creators have been replaced by television and its showmen (November 1993).

What is it that Ćosić criticizes and what is it that he defends from 1990 to 2000? The abolishing of a single party system opened the doors for political organizations to engage in organized activities and to start fighting for power. The public scene becomes crowded with people full of talk about democracy. Ćosić does not miss the opportunity to draw attention to the issue of mass conversion. Many of the formerly most vocal and staunch supporters of the SKJ (the League of Communists of Yugoslavia) are now among the new democrats, as are those previously branded as 'enemies of socialism' (March 1990). This circumstance was to remain a stone in the shoe of Serbian democracy after 1990 as well. Serbian politics was riding a wave of anticommunism. A democrat would prove himself legitimate by criticizing the rejected communism.

Ćosić is right in his claim that a democratic society cannot be built on anti-communist hatred and intolerance (March 1991).

Ćosić writes that democracy in Serbia never existed, neither prior to nor during the years of armed conflict on the territory of the chaotic SFRY. In some entries he claims that the country was living in a “continuation of communism and Titoism”, in others that democracy had unleashed the Chetnik ideology, and in, yet, others that there is no tolerance in the society. He believes that it is “our historical duty” (May 1991) to be critical of all politics and all political parties.

Understanding democracy idealistically, as a political regime based on truth and justice, he criticizes liars and villains, but does not name them. These tumultuous years were the years of a delinquent democracy in Serbia. The streets saw more activities than the parliament. Ćosić writes: “We are living in a horror democracy, a horror freedom” (1991). Certain events provided good grounds for such claims. But a young democracy does not count on a generally accepted truth and justice. Who would ever claim not to support these values?

Between 1991 and 2000 he becomes a passionate critic of political personalities and of the practical application of the new regime, particularly of Milošević for failing to democratize Serbia. Milošević has ruined Serbia and the opposition is reactionary (Drašković, Šešelj), according to him. Despite being critical of the Chetnik ideology advocated by Vuk Drašković, he does not call for its ban. “The Serbian Chetnik mentality has erupted. (But this is) an expression of democracy and proof of freedom” (10.05.1998). He is also critical of the attempts to restore monarchism. The democracy in the Serbian society is characterized by mediocracy and manipulation.

It is clear that Ćosić is not satisfied with the state of democracy in Serbia. His dissatisfaction is aimed at individuals in the political arena and at public behavior while disregarding, to a great extent, institutional democracy. He is interested in the individual actor.

How does he assess democracy in Serbia after the 5th of October coup? What does he criticize and what does he support after 2000? He calls the October overthrow and takeover of power by DOS a “democratic revolution”. He believes that he has “once again stepped into a new political order, hopefully a democratic order” (6.10.2000).

In his books *U tuđem veku 1, 2* (*In a Foreign Century 1, 2*) Ćosić moves away from his original elation with the 5th of October coup through descriptive criticism of politicians and political parties in Serbia. In a conversation with Koštunica he concludes that there is “an obvious crisis of the democratic revolution, lacking clear and harmonized ideology” (11.10.2000). If they want to complete the “democratic revolution”, there has to be a change in those who had implemented the changes and

the goals have to be clearly defined. But democracy has many faces. Mondialists and Serbophobes have entered the scene spreading lies. What kind of lies? "They put the blame on Serbs. The revolution has been exploited by domestic enemies of the Serbian people" (November 2000). So, in the Serbian democracy there are those who openly blame the Serbian people, and there are the issues of the expansion of mediocracy and manipulation. The truth, morality and courage have disappeared. "Orchestrated lies" dominate the scene. Creators, scientists, and wise men have been replaced by television, Facebook, twitter, the Internet, fun, sub-culture, trash and kitsch.

He becomes even more critical the following year. He condemns the politocratic bureaucracy of DOS and its unconditional orientation towards the West and EU integrations. "Now we can 'democratically' opt for slavery" (March 2001). He is a supporter of the 'democrats' but concludes that 'the Serbian democratic revolution' had not happened in its true sense and that 'the democratic government' is turning into a growing disappointment to the people. "It is an absolute party government" (April 2001).

Ćosić criticizes both the western and the Serbian democracy. Western democracy is turning into its opposite, freedoms are suppressed by totalitarianism. "Jefferson's, Washington's and Roosevelt's democracy is becoming a police democracy" (October 2001). The West is going through a "swift and planned introduction to a totalitarian democracy" (July 2002) and Serbia has been occupied by such democracy. "The new democratic leadership" is subjecting the Serbian society to the process of Europeanisation, while, in fact, sacrificing Serbian cultural and spiritual values. The end of History has arrived: a democracy for concentration camp prisoners and outcasts—they elect the parliament of their killers. Ćosić claims that there are no signs of change for the better under the "new democratic leadership" (October 2001) but provides no explanation for such claim. He observes the inherent trait of a democracy—the confrontation of good and evil on the open stage. The energy of "democracy" is more utilized by evil than by good (November 2004).

Looking at the democratic reality in Serbia after 2000, and feeling disappointed with the politicians and their politics, he writes that the new order has proven to be his delusion. "My faith in democracy is no less of a delusion than my former faith in socialism was. Democracy, too, is a chimera" (15.10.2007). He goes even further to state that the Democratic Party, which now included some of his former comrades, had become a "crypto-Titoist party". "The Democratic Party is in many ways and ideas a retarded Titoism in its anti-Serbian sentiment" (01.12.2009).

As of 2001, Ćosić begins writing the word democracy with quotation marks, and using the word as an attribute to the leading politi-

cians of DOS. This means that he knows what real and true democracy is, and that the one he shares his opinions about is not.

How does Ćosić, as a pro-Democrat, criticize Serbian democracy? His criticism is not coherent, but rather conditioned upon concrete social and political situations. His critical views on Serbian democracy does not entail in-depth explanations. Assessments and claims are presented without concrete evidence, and often emotionally charged. He did not restrain his immediate thoughts about events and individuals.

Ćosić pays much more attention to individual politicians than to institutional solutions. His fight for democracy amounts to stressing the differences in the value systems and policies among politicians and political parties and by openly advocating for his own political values: social democracy and republicanism.

However, his basic argument is that of a substantialist. He envisages a real, true democracy and objects to the democratic solutions applied in the current model. He does not claim that there is no democracy in Serbia, like some theoreticians did in their papers (Avramović, 1992), but merely points to the flaws in practice.

Objections to such a position can be voiced from the perspective of social and political reality. There is no black and white in society. The substantialist critics of Serbian democracy, consciously or unconsciously, reject the procedural character of democracy. If democracy is understood to be a system of control for collective decision-making and for the equality of political rights of citizens, then it is not difficult to prove that Serbia was a democracy—only one with functional problems. Ćosić himself often emphasized the importance of human nature in understanding society and politics.

Ćosić is wrong to reproach Milošević's socialists for being undemocratic after 1990. Institutional democracy had been established, but if the facts that this was the time of the breakdown of SFRY and that the statehood and the national question topped the historical agenda are overlooked, then the objection about lack of democracy is misplaced. The fact remains that *basic* democratic institutions had not been abolished in Serbia in the years of international isolation and wars. For a broader survey we could use Schumpeter's criteria on the (dis)functionality of Serbian democracy since 1990. The criteria include the quality of politicians, the limited reach of politics, qualified bureaucracy, demographic self-control, tolerance, loyalty to one's country, national consensus (in Avramović, 2002). But this would require a wider and more thorough analysis of Serbian democracy in the time of Ćosić.

The real political problem in the Republic of Serbia was not whether or not democracy existed, but rather how it is practiced or how well it functions. I discovered a way to assess the basic element of quality of

the democracy in Serbia in an idea by Vilfredo Pareto who believes that emotions should be utilized “instead of wasting energy in futile attempts to eliminate them”. Pareto had, without a doubt, in mind reasoning as a mental activity capable of taming emotions. In a democracy, politicians use both emotions and reason in their activities, but the dominance of one over the other clearly speaks to its character, or to, what we in this case call, its quality. The premise here is, as based on experience from recent history, that a shortage of good sense and surplus of emotions, as a rule, lowers the quality of a community’s political life. And vice versa, the dominance of reason increases the value of politics, simply because it provides that which is essential to successful politics—the functioning of institutions and a relatively high degree of predictability of possible consequences in decision-making.

If we follow the logic of Pareto’s idea, we can easily conclude that the political life in Serbia involves too many emotions and that the political champions, and their followers, do their best to take advantage of these emotions for practical benefits to their parties. The strategy of this type of politics is to ingrain itself in emotions and take advantage of those emotions for its own interests. The fact that the politician’s personality and his supporters are in the center of public and private debates and that the personality factor is more important to obtaining votes than the ideas, principles, and values their parties stand for, unambiguously points to the conclusion that the role of the psychological factor in Serbian politics is tremendous. Political opponents get discredited, their programs purposefully ignored, and all this with mass participation of the public. So, when the personality of a politician is the cornerstone of the fight for power, the eruption of emotions and volition becomes inevitable. This is the key reason why Serbia lacks the quality of democratic policies based on social life, on a realistic understanding of situations, trends, people and on respect of rules. The role of politics is to solve practical problems of the people and citizens; it is supposed to open new perspectives for the population and the authorities should be just an instrument in the achievement of good goals. The triumph of politics of emotions has turned politics into a fight for executive power and made it its main purpose.

This perverse obsession with power forgets that the executive power makes up only one branch of power in a state, just as it forgets that there are multiple forms of power in the society and a diversity of ways to influence the authorities and its representatives.

Views on politics. Ćosić spent many years actively engaged in the practical part of politics, but he also took time to reflect on actions taken and on himself and his contemporaries. His thoughts on politics remain unchanged over time and can be divided into several levels, as follows: general, national, personal.

The general level. He sees the Janus-faced aspect of politics. On the one hand, he understands politics in its original meaning, from ancient Greece, as concern for the human good, freedom and justice, for a fair and creative life (1973), while on the other hand, he knows that in practice it involves use of force, immorality, deceit, selfish interests (April 1992).

In his private notes he claims, relying on his own experience, that power, in and of itself, is evil. In comparison with other human passions, the hunger for power runs deepest and wields most energy. His criticism of power as a source of evil is continued in his *Personal History of an Age*. "Power is still, without a doubt, the source and strength of greatest evil. No evil is so powerful and long-lasting as that of political power; evil in the name of governance; evil for power" (July 1966). Here, too, he shows occasional tendency to make general assessments: "all governments in the world are most persistent in wielding power and in stupidity" (1986). To summarize, politics is evil because its basic concept is the fight for power. On the other hand, politics is also characterized by shaping and defending general interests. In addition to the problem of defining general interests, politics is also characterized by individual and group interests.

Such contrasting views on politics cannot be resolved by theory. Ćosić has no answer to the question he himself poses: How does one harmonize personal and group interests with general interests? (March 1990). This question can only be answered in practice. The players in the political arena give preference to one or the other face of the god Janus. Ćosić knows that general interests often outweigh personal. "Politics is the human occupation in which a person sometimes, most often due to general interests, has to act against his own interests" (February 2008).

After several decades of theoretical and practical engagement in the political area Ćosić arrives at the conclusion that everything is conditioned upon politics. "Everyone gets freely engaged in politics—as an occupation, as a mandatory topic in all conversations. It brings money, jobs, privileges, social positions. It is a passion, a pain, a spiritual banality. It is the energy of interpersonal communication..." (13.11.2007). This claim, quite accurate for the most part, brings into question the idea of the eternal evil of politics. Experience confirms that there is a permanent confrontation of these two opposing views on society and man.

The national level. Ćosić is right in his observation that politics is one of the key characteristics of the Serbian national core. Serbs are passionately engaged in politics. It is "our torturer, our disease and obsession" (1972).

Unfortunately, there are no quality politicians in the Serbian political arena. Furthermore, Serbian political culture is underdeveloped and outdated, and, in order to overcome these flaws, good politicians are

needed. "It is of vital importance for Serbs to find capable, honest, real and brave politicians. However, Serbia does not have such persons for this age" (17.09.1994). Ćosić writes this in a period of pluralization of political life. After the abolishment of a monopolistic system of power, Serbian political culture shows no signs of progress. "Everything has become devalued. Public discourse has turned into a mixture of lies and the truth, facts have become irrelevant. Total nihilism prevails" (01.08.1998).

At the time of growing pressure on the FR Yugoslavia (Serbia) by the West, right before the NATO bombing, he realizes the importance of language in political initiatives. Man does not live only in a natural and social environment. He is surrounded by language, speech, concepts. With this approach, he discovers a linguistic disorder in the politics of world powers, changes in meaning and inconsistency. And this change in language affects other nations and states and, more or less, ties together national politics with foreign politics. "What is this inversion and reversal of concepts, language, and events? The new world order uses fake language, a new language. Concepts have become devoid of meaning. A paradoxical conversion of meaning of concepts and words is happening. This is the beginning of a negative history of the world in which evil is not good, in which slavery constitutes—freedom; a lie—the truth; occupation—peaceful resolution of a crisis; loss of national and state sovereignty—exercising human rights" (17.10.1998).

Ćosić's political activism is in line with his conviction that the role of politics is to shape and serve for the good of the nation, the citizens and the state. The implicit political views contained in his texts are in favor of national rights and freedoms, rationalism, wisdom, dignity. This is the political standpoint of the opposition, which he has championed since 1968 with democratic socialism as the leading political idea. He is a free citizen after 1990. He fights for democracy, freedom and rights of man, but keeps, also, constantly bringing up the question of the national position of the Serbian people. The Serbian national question in Yugoslavia was a democratic question, by which he meant "the freedoms and rights of the Serbian ethnos to exist in its full spiritual, cultural and historical identity, regardless of the current borders of the republic" (1992).

He shares his critical views on Serbian politics soon after leaving the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in the 1970s. In the book *Moć i strepnje (Power and Trepidation)* (1971) he claims that power and politics have been the two main preoccupations in Serbian society since 1804. And that Serbs perceive politics like a religion, as "the key instrument to social power and success, the creator of evil and good, an intellectual sport and the only newspaper that we read".

Before and after 2000 he has very little good to say about politics. Milošević's reckless radicalism had been substituted with opportunism and DOS had capitulated before the national question. Ćosić had supported the "democratic authorities", but after only a year in power he claims that the new regime had turned into a total party government and that it was leaving people disappointed (April 2001). A few months later he writes: "There are no signs that things have changed for the better under the new democratic leadership" (October 2001). In other words, while the political parties in power change, their social and anthropological essence does not. Does such perception of power illuminate the Serbian approach to politics, which is solely focused on grabbing power, or does it illustrate Ćosić's continuously critical attitude towards politics?

In his opinion, Serbian state politics lacked wisdom, courage and an understanding of the world we live in. Belief in myths and a Serbian version of Manichaeism are deeply rooted in the Serbian political thought. "People's trust in politics is like a faith containing poison at the bottom" (23.02.2004). Another deflection from politics as evil. Politics is both as a destroyer as well as a builder of values. The claim that Serbia fights for survival through politics shifts the focus to its positive functions. He comments with irony: "they use politics to fight for a new future—the accession to the EU" (November 2007).

Personal level. Ćosić demonstrated his attitude towards politics through public actions both as a member of the party and, later, when he left the party.

During his communist period, he was a politician who fought for his ideas by applying them *in practice*. He became a politician because he belonged to the political establishment and to the ruling party. He participated in the revolution and was part of the state authorities from 1945 to 1968. In the text "The Order and Message of Our Revolution" (1961) he understands the revolution as a path to a society that will eliminate violence against people; the Revolution is a Promethean act of history. "The important thing in Prometheism is not the act of sacrifice but the act of creation...one who fails to admit that culture and humanity are the essence of the revolution, does not recognize the revolution itself; he sees it only as power, as mere replacement of one power and one regime of violence against people for another."

Despite being fully immersed in politics, Ćosić is capable of recognizing its importance to Serbian society and conveys his views on the government and on political power. How does Ćosić understand politics? He said in an interview that he had never wished for power. "I was obsessed with ideas, not with the desire to be in power...I have never been willing to dedicate myself to politics as much as was required and expected of me" (Đukić, 2014).

This statement is not something that can be taken as “biography laundering”. He views on politics were almost exactly the same 40 years earlier. He was neither greedy nor power hungry. His claim that he was “troubled by the destiny of the people he belonged to” had been re-confirmed throughout his life. His care for the general well-being of the Serbian people had caused him serious suffering. In order to draw a clear line between his own perception of politics and that of others, he emphasizes his attitude towards power. “The type (of politics – Z. A.) which gives power, political authority and privileges, I despise. I loathe such politics” (April 1973).

Dobrica Ćosić practiced politics in a revolutionary and democratic manner. Thus, to him politics was a line of work which utilizes both force and rhetoric in the fight for general good and for the interests of the state and the nation. This does not mean that all its players side with evil. If politics were a permanent place of evil, then the society would turn into the animal kingdom. In other words, why would politicians and the public engage in any kind of confrontation in this area of society?

Ćosić is more focused on political power and the people in power than on the manner in which power is used. There is no politics without political authority and power; the question is how to institutionalize and control it. The shifting views on politics in his texts can be explained by changes in social and political circumstances, as well as by occasional strong emotions on his part. Wishes become emotionally charged. In the last book of *In a Foreign Century 2* he becomes aware of this problem and notes down: “I must not allow emotions to take hold of myself when deliberating about the political reality in Serbia” (28.04.2006).

The political thoughts of Dobrica Ćosić are characterized by a mixture of accurate observations and emotionally charged opinions. He has a tendency to see only evil in politics, but cannot deny its positive functions either. After all, he was engaged in politics himself and justified this engagement as a means to fight for freedom, justice and equality. If the core trait of politics is evil, then: 1) there is no room for honest people in politics, and 2) the whole society will be colored by evil.

* * *

Ćosić’s political views fit into that which is crucially important to political thought. Every form of politics is contingent on tradition and current circumstances, as well as on its internal characteristics: the fight for power, striving for national harmonization, freedom in and responsibility for actions, irrational potential... Cooperation is in the nature of politics, as are occasional conflicts even in totalitarian systems,

which can go as far as the elimination of the opponent. Differences and conflicts are present in single-party systems as well.

A nation's understanding of politics depends on its historical experience, not only theoretical knowledge, as well as on the legal framework of that which is referred to as "engaging in politics". After 1990, Serbia became inundated with new political parties—there were over 150. While some European countries ran their political lives with only a few political parties (some countries have only two), Serbia had numerous parties vying for the job. The natural question here is whether such numerous political divisions in a country is good or bad for the quality of politics. The fact is that all of them were focused on taking over power, and the ruling party and the opposition had different interpretations of good and evil. Such understanding of power, as the only cause worth fighting for, creates the illusion that issues in society can be solved only by assuming power. This is wrong. More efficient results would come from having a ruling party and an opposition who would fight for the control of power and for a better balance of powers. This would be a way to meet realistic expectations, instead of harboring illusions of easy and swift changes.

Ćosić's views are part of the Serbian political culture, in which opinions about individual leaders are more dominant than opinions about party values, ideas and institutions. Emotions prevail over reason. Envy and hatred are common motivators for political actions. All of which points to the fact that vanities are strong in Serbian politics. And vanity is the worst possible trait in a politician. It impairs the sense of measure and responsibility, and fuels passions.

Whether politics is perceived as a fight for power and governance, or as a means to participate in discussions about the general good of the society, it is always, in essence, about freedom and responsibility. Common sense tells one that politics is not a subject-matter outside of the society, that its internal conflicts and compromises reflect deeper social interests and needs. Public sector investments are, only on the face of it, an area of fighting for power. Politics is, in fact, the daily creative solving of practical situations in life, either with a conservative or a reformist approach. If politics were to be reduced to the sheer fight for power, its essence would remain obscure: it is a line of work aimed at preserving and changing the human perception of justice, freedom, responsibility, the law, all of which help form the human character.

When one finds oneself in the political arena, one is faced with having to take responsibility for the decisions one takes or supports. This responsibility applies both to the level of goals and the level of resources. There are no ready-made formulas that can be applied to solve numerous contradictions in the life of a community and the individual. Everything

in politics is in turmoil, while at the same time striving for stability. To work in a turbulent society one needs freedom, which includes responsibility and creativity because politics requires constantly taking positions towards new, immersing circumstances. In this regard, a difference has to be made between goals and resources used in politics. The resources are the rhetoric of the truth and lies, legal use of force or violence in breach of laws, relying on legal or illegal devices, using facts or prejudices when campaigning.

Ćosić notices that there is an irrational element in the political activities of certain individuals and parties. There is no other area of life where voluntarism and rationalism are so mixed as in politics. It contains both passion and principles: the love of freedom, equality, independence is intertwined with special interests, people are favored over ideas, individual interests dominate over general interests, rough language is common, and consequences are more important than principles. The political arena is a witness to passions, impulses, envy, flattery of the leader and the people, spite, hatred... While principles want to impose limits to people's power, passion wants to make it limitless.

Views on history. Ćosić writes about the history of a specific period and simultaneously develops his views on the history of society and of man (Serbian in particular). In his writings he focuses on unique events that took place in the SFRY, Serbia and the world, on individuals and institutions continuously for around 60 years. His approach to the history of society and the times he lived in is a mix of several approaches. The 'top-down history' is combined with the 'bottom-up history' approach. He was part of the political and state authorities after World War II and during the disintegration of the SFRY in 1992/93, but he was also part of the opposition at times. He shines a light on political history from the point of view of its main players, but captures also the social and political daily life of Serbian society. His notes on the Serbian intelligentsia, intellectuals who engaged in politics in different ways should be added to his this. This aspect of his history could be called microhistory, by which we mean the history of small communities (the family, streets, villages...).

Ćosić devoted special attention to the history of the Serbian people. Serbian mentality is illuminated from several aspects with a focus on how people thought and behaved in politics during his lifetime. In the attempt to reveal different aspects of the Serbian mentality, he steps deep back in history, to the times of the Ottoman rule over the Serbian people.

There are no explicitly stated assumptions from his personal history. He is not a historian and, therefore, under no obligation to attempt to define history as a concept. As a matter of fact, what he tries to do

is to monitor (and participate in) the history of the Serbian and the Yugoslav society, as well as to uncover, for lack of a better word, the essence of historical developments. And to do this, there is no need for different approaches and combinations—this is where the “big mechanism of history” comes into play.

The demiurge of history. Questions about history have always been a challenge to the intellectual mind. Is there a deeper purpose to historical events to which individuals and social classes are subjected, or do they happen as a consequence of blind materialistic and spiritual ambitions of its players? Who are the people who create history? Is it the leaders from the top echelons of the state apparatus? Their ideas and will rule the masses. Key historical events are directly dependent on them.

Ćosić's starting point is that politics is the key mover in a society and that it, essentially, determines the life of its people and nation. In the structure of historical events, he differentiates between an idea and the political personality who implements the idea. In terms of importance, political power is above economic interests, above armed forces, above the individual.

During his infatuation with the communist hope of a society of justice and equality, he writes and speaks about history as being created by people, in particular by the young generation. In his speech at the Congress of Serbian Youth 1962, he expands his belief that man is the creator of history to include criticism of the revolutionaries who “had monopolized history”. The young generation, he claims, refuses to recognize this monopoly because they have an opportunity to “create history and achieve self-actualization, to contribute to the affirmation of man....to make a historical choice which has been forged by the revolution” (1962).

In socialist Yugoslavia, he takes an anthropological approach to history. “History is not fated, or at least not in all its outcomes. It is, after all, people who are the first creators of historical outcomes” (*Stvarno i moguće (Real and Possible)*, 1988:202). On a general level, people create history but with clearly assigned roles. The intelligentsia, as a social stratum, creates and disseminates ideas, and has the strongest influence on public opinion. Ideas have a great impact on social life and on the life of the state. Political organizations and politicians work to turn these ideas into practice.

Later, however, his views on historical developments become re-evaluated and changed. History is a force of time in which people and nations set their goals but fail to reach them. Disregarding people's wishes and intentions, history is a demiurge who rules as he pleases. And people fail to achieve their plans for several reasons, one in particular:

they are full of fear. "The history of mankind could most accurately be described as a history of fear" (1983).

History has the power to turn hard-won victories into long-lasting defeats. "The demiurge of history turns the hardest won victory into a longest lasting defeat" (1987). It has the power to toy with people who strive to create a new society. "A force to be reckoned with. History has viciously fooled the generation who positioned themselves eschatologically towards 'the happy future'" (1987).

To sum up, Ćosić's deliberations on history took a turn in the mid-1980s. From the stance that man himself creates history to the belief that history rules over mankind. From 1988 until the end of his life he views history as a mechanism which uses people. What is it that makes History so powerful?

There are four dimensions to the demiurge of history or its 'great mechanism': the general, the international, the Yugoslav-Serbian, and the personal dimension. They appear in Ćosić's non-literary texts in continuity from 1990 until 2010 and are not tied to any particular political events. It is fair to say that this was his philosophy of history. The world and the SFRY were fraught with major events, changes, wars and crises which eluded strictly rational interpretations.

The general dimension of history. In the general dimension, history is perceived as an irrational force which does what it wants, toys with people and nations, and directs events and outcomes. "Like an irrational force, it pushes nations into wars, destruction, self-destruction" (October 1993). It "mocks human reason" (28.06.1991), and overpowers political reason. "The dialectics of history is satanic!" (23.03.1999). When history is devoid of reason, it becomes "lunatic", a "fantastic story", "works insanelly", history is a "furnace which melts everything" (January 2004).

On this level, Ćosić applies a Hegelian interpretation of history. Historical movement is a necessity in which people are mere pawns in the achievement of its plan. Everything, writes Ćosić, happens in accordance with the laws of the "great mechanism of history and power" (May 2004). The great mechanism of history "catches people and nations who are slow to understand the in-depth pace of events in its cogs". This type of history and its mechanism are self-sufficient and do not care for anybody else's opinion (1993).

Ruined history. This notion is mentioned in *Bajka (The Fairy Tale)*, but Ćosić uses it in some public political statements as well. He uses it to mean the destruction of history, or a history which has derailed mankind. Ruined history can be interpreted in two ways. It is possibly a demiurge, a mechanism which controls people as a force from above. Elsewhere, he points to ideology and money as the basic factors

causing the derailment. History is, in this sense, a discontinuity with its Eschaton, and money a means to debase human beings into hedonism.

The international dimension of history. The face of history is not the same through different periods. In Budapest in 1956, history had the vivacious face of life, national and social urges, while in 1989 it had the face of everyday life. That is how Ćosić saw the disintegration of socialism in Eastern Europe. "History is something you watch and listen to. The world is watching the events in Rumania...I am appalled by the 'great mechanism of history' which grinds and destroys even the mightiest" (26.12.1989).

The syntagm 'the great mechanism of history' took on importance in Ćosić's non-literary deliberations on the historical development of society and man. It is history, not man, that moves in a new direction after 1989 and everything happens in accordance with the laws of 'the great mechanism' of history and of political power.

Both war and peace work in favor of history. What history builds, history destroys. "Until the ninth decade of the 20th century, the jobs for History were done by wars, while now the jobs are done by a peace which destroys the achievements of the two world wars and the October Revolution" (March 1992). One cannot learn how to do a job from history. "The changes in the world show that History is not the teacher of life.... No significant misfortunes have ever made people any wiser" (2007).

The Yugoslav and Serbian demiurge. History achieves its objectives by way of its 'great mechanism' regardless of the will of people around the world. That is what happened Yugoslavia as well. History simply followed its plan for the territory of the SFRY. "History is relentless in fulfilling its plan for the Yugoslav territory; it tears apart Tito's community of brotherhood among the people and nationalities" (December 1990). It "destroys the ideology of the country"; it laid the groundwork for the war between Serbs and Croats (23.09.1991).

And what about Serbia and Serbs? They were blackmailed by history in 1991. When the five-point red star was removed from the Belgrade city hall, Ćosić perceived it as History in action. Why? "Tens of thousands of young men and women died with the five-point star in their hearts. And now a new generation of young people have torn it down with vengeful glee" (February 1997).

The mentality and the poor culture of living in Serbia were caused by history. "Lazy, parasitic, confused, wretched country... Everything is dirty and ugly. The people have become evil and crude" (August 1997). Why? Because "Serbia has a hangover from History". Just like history mocks the world, so does it mock the Serbian people. And what does it do to Serbs? It lets other people decide who Serbs are supposed

to live with. "Should I have to live to see our national destiny be decided by Thaci, Rugova, Milo Đukanović" (Christmas 2001).

Obviously, they are not the ones who will determine the national destiny of Serbs, but somebody else will. Ćosić is ambiguous here. He claims that Serbs are caught in the cogs of the mechanism of history, but also that the main factor of Serbian development is violence (2004). In the book *Bosanski rat (The Bosnian War)* he claims that he and the people have been entangled in "the great mechanism of history", but that the mechanism is controlled by great powers. He was not referring to a metaphysical demiurge, but to concrete states with their military powers.

Personal relationship towards history. Ćosić as part of a group.

History has its general disposition, it rules over people, and Ćosić, too, is caught in its mechanism. With his literary sense he can understand the existence of man and nations and anticipate his own future. He, too, is in the hands of history. "History pulled me out of Titoism and the cold war and threw me into halftime" (27.03.1995).

Ćosić finds himself trapped by the mechanism of history in two ways. It toyed with him politically. "History played me for a fool" (October 1998). Later, after the October 5 democratic change in Serbia, he sees himself as somebody who has been tasked by history to be politically active. "I have once again been given a task by History: to act so that objectives of reason dominate the chaos which is supposed to turn into a people's democratic revolution" (11.10.2000). History keeps attacking "my life" causing me to feel "an urge to rebel against History" (2001). He concludes that "History will not let go of him" (February 2002) and that it causes him permanent troubles. In addition to the political tasks he feels History has assigned to him, he also sees its cogs in his novels. History is a novelist who is fantastic at plotting human destinies. "I was a mere recording clerk for the history of the Serbian people in the 20th century. A short memory quill" (September 1999).

Lastly, Ćosić is not a "lone straw tossing in the whirlwind". He belongs to a generation that wanted to devise society according to their own plan. And failed. While the smoke from the NATO bombs was rising over Serbia, he once again references the mechanism of history. "History has been cruel in its work, it has ravaged and staged our lives, it has ground us and changed us, but, hopefully, we too have managed to coerce it and change its direction" (22.06.1999). Since the 1990s, Serbia has been suffering the "Tantalian punishment". "For over a decade we have been living on death row in the labor camps of History. On the threshing floor of History. How can we step away from History? We will suffer poisoning from its poisonous dust. We will be exterminated by

its chaff” (December 1999). Ćosić’s and his generation were ground to death by the cogs of history. “History has simply devoured my generation!” (2000)

* * *

Is there a deeper purpose to historical events to which individuals, social classes and groups are subjected or are they simply a consequence of blind material and spiritual ambitions of its players? Is there a plan or is everything chaos? Are the changes that take place in society the product of reasonable intentions of individuals and groups? To what extent do instincts and mystical perceptions of the world affect the development of social history?

All these are questions about social and political history that have always presented a challenge to the intellectual mind. Society changes inevitably through history. There are always new developments in history. The changes in society are caused by ideas and actions of social groups and organizations which occupy the institutions of power and military force. Historical events are initiated by ideas, will, interests, material inequality, unpredictable acts (destiny). And such changes require one or several strong historical figures. There is a school of thought that believes that great individuals create and control the flow of history, while others believe that great individuals have no more significant impact than other personalities or masses of people. Only those who command power and force can create and change history. Theoreticians supporting the elite theory claim that every society contains an active minority which perceives life as a constant effort to achieve success and a majority which is passive and expects things to be done for them. The masses become important in major political events such as revolutions, rebellions, and street protests.

Ćosić views history as ignorance about individuals and events through time. The historical tapestry uses thin threads to connect participants from bygone events with contemporaries and their intentions. He does not have a consistent view of the possibility for true comprehension of historical events. His cognitive vacillation is reflected in the obvious difference between his texts that contain an emotional identification with the subject matter and others in which he merely deliberates on the character of a historical event. In the latter case he often probes the opinions and judgements of historical facts. His statement that “history is an unsurpassed playwright” is certainly a slightly skeptical viewpoint which centers around the unattainability of accurate and precise historical knowledge.

Dobrica Ćosić has a dual understanding of history: as a power beyond people's control, and as people being the creators of history. For some world events he uses the notion "the great mechanism of history". However, he fails to see not only the role of individuals, but also his own role. Was Đilas' rebellion caused by the great mechanism or by a concrete decision by a member of the authorities? What motivated Ćosić in 1968, and later, to stand up against the communist regime?

Commenting on the breakdown of the SSSR, he writes that history is a "madhouse". It is turning into a fantasy novel. So many wonders are happening that we cannot stop wondering (December 1991). And when October 5, 2000 happened, that is when he claims that "history is an unsurpassed playwright" (2000).

Ćosić is indirectly saying that man, despite all his knowledge, is not capable of comprehending the instigating forces of historical events. Social and political developments contain both visible and invisible sides. "The purpose of those great crucial events in history is becoming clear very slowly" (2006). The essential sides remain unclear for a long time. Objective knowledge about people and events in time gets compromised by strong irrational factors of the social and individual life. When he writes that "history is polluted by lies and forgetfulness" (March 1990), he does not have the great mechanism of history in mind, no "cogs", but concrete people failing to tell the truth.

History is a social and individual motion which unfolds in a cyclical manner combining progress and regress. Changes are sometimes planned, sometimes unexpected. They can be peaceful or bloody. All this seemed to confuse Dobrica Ćosić. Political behaviors, discrepancies between the ideal and the reality, differences between intentions, objectives and achievements, unexpected events and their outcomes contributed to his alternating views on history either as a "great mechanism" or as the product of conscious human actions.

If history is seen as "a great mechanism" then there is no room for free human action. Ćosić would never accept such a consequence of his position. Yet, it inevitably follows from hard determinism.

Anthropological thoughts (views on man). How does Ćosić understand the concept of man? Does he differentiate between the notions of human nature and personality? Is man predominantly evil or good? How do thoughts on man develop over time in his *A Personal History of an Age*?

Ćosić's views on man are derived from his life experience and from the books he read. When he writes down his thoughts on man, he references other thinkers. He uses Ancient Greek mythology for his understanding of man. Thus, man is both Prometheus and Sisyphus, a

rebel in vain. Secondly, man is simultaneously Zeus and Prometheus, the authorities and rebellion. The Greek poet Aeschylus belongs more to the modern times with his statement: "Honor, shame and fear keeps man within the boundaries of justice" (2001).

In his articles, notes and essays he expresses his beliefs about the evil in man in the form of claims without deeper analytical explanations. For example, "the entire past and present of the human race assure us that evil is inherent to human nature. And today human nature decides about the destiny of the world: that is how powerful man has become" (August 1983).

Ćosić's anthropological views are conveyed implicitly, incidentally, in his notes, not in his essays and articles, in which the dominant themes are society, politics and the state. He never developed systematic thoughts on man. In the early days of his writing career, he uses the thoughts of great thinkers. So, in 1964 he quotes Russell when referring to "intoxication with power" in the contemporary society where views on man range from total nihilism to disturbing divinization. If we follow his line of thoughts on society, man should be an individual with humanistic ideals, who is nationally confident and dignified, not a person whose values are dictated by the market and politics. The fair and free society that Ćosić advocates for requires a virtuous and humanistic person.

Anthropological optimism is typical of the communist period of Ćosić's politics. It was not possible to build "a happy future" for Yugoslavia and Serbia with the idea of man as full of vices and evil. In this period Ćosić writes about man as a being which, despite contradictions, has a passion for learning, who thinks and dreams about the future, and uses his powers to influence and guide the development of the society (1962). Man is seen in the spirit of the Enlightenment with its ideas on reason and freedom.

However, soon thereafter he deviates from this optimistic view on man. While still in communist ranks, he writes that man is an imperfect being (1964), that he is wider and deeper, too complex to be described merely as dominated by reason (1974).

Ćosić interprets the concept *destiny* in different ways; as marked by the human hunger for power, the tendency to rule over others. Power is a force due to which "human destiny will never change" (May 1973). Man's destiny is, in a way, imperfection, contradiction, the eternal fight between his inner good and evil. "If it is not true that man is also inherently good, then every evil he commits will be legitimized. Today we need to have faith in the power of good. Without this faith we can only become nihilists" (August 1983). However, this well-balanced claim is marred with the shadow of his typical skepticism. The same notes contain

also a dispute of the claim. "Achieving harmony between courage and kindness, knowledge and feelings, the power of intelligence and the power of the soul—is probably the biggest utopia of modern man" (August 1983).

Destiny can be characterized by good luck as well as by misfortune. Ćosić expresses this as tragedism. Back in 1968 he wrote: "Tragedism is the core of human destinies on this land". And thirty years later he sees the tragic in man's pain. "Man is his truest self in pain and suffering" (09.02.2004).

Destiny cannot be controlled. It is above any and all achievements of man. Twenty years later he writes that it is possible to achieve riches, power and glory through hard work and talent, but it is not possible to control destiny. "Any goal in life can be attained, but it is not possible to rule over one's life, destiny, time, which, following their own incomprehensive forces, destroy, humiliate, make pointless everything that man has created" (January 2005).

Ćosić slowly but decidedly begins leaning towards anthropological pessimism after 1980. What is *human nature* like? He accepts the traditional school of thought whereby it is considered unchangeable and evil. "Evil is at the very core of human nature" (1983). If evil is so strong in man, then there is no political order that can change his nature. The options at the disposal of a political order are to ban and control evil in institutions of freedom.

Does human nature change or is it a fixed structure? Bodily and physiologically it does not change, but Ćosić does not dispute the fact that human opinions and feelings do. These changes are also conditioned on changes in society. "I know very well that a person, his nature, his inner being is slow to change, imperceptibly so to his contemporaries. On the other hand, swift and obvious changes take place in the world, in civilization, culture, the economy, way of life and human behavior. People adapt to these changes resulting in changes to their needs, work, family and society" (12.09.2008). Despite subscribing to the school of thought that believed in the *a priori* evil in man, Ćosić realizes the important influence of man's social circumstances. People change because they are forced to by other people and by reality. This task is limited by human nature. "Serbian tragedy lies in the enforced changes to society, state, culture" (16.09.2008). The word 'enforcement' clearly points to role of external factors in the life of man and nation.

After 2000, his pessimistic views shift in the direction of emphasizing man's *instinctual structure*. Life and history are viewed as unpredictable entities in which man follows his instinctual needs. "The human animal accepts spiritual values with great difficulty: it instinctively chooses bodily pleasures. It is the anthropological matrix of the

European and Western man” (December 2000). Soon thereafter he expands on this claim to include thoughts on evil. “Instincts, as the core trait of man, make him commit evil things” (2002). Crime and lies, he writes at the time, are forces of human nature.

The instinctual structure is not the only basis of human behavior and it is not only a source of evil. Instincts are also the basis of cultural awareness. “Man has an urge for identity. An urge to know his roots, his true origin. They contain the energy for duration. And the right to differ and to dignity. If he does not have the need for his true origin and identity—then what is man?” (February 2005).

In his non-literary texts, man is perceived as destiny, as human nature, as an instinctual structure, as tragic. Yet, in his notes, man is not only the manifestation of evil, of instinctual structure and of tragic destiny. He observes the rational side to human nature as well. Man is seen as a being who *learns about* the world he lives in, most thoroughly through history. “Humans have a passion for knowledge”, wrote Ćosić in 1962. Can man know himself? Ćosić’s reply to the Antient Greek command ‘know thyself’ is that nobody has yet succeeded in this (2002). Man tends to overestimate himself. “He does not know what is in his soul and in his thoughts. He gets caught up in a mix of feelings, wishes and ideas...The brain has no limits, it is a jungle, an ocean floor” (March 2005). Towards the end of his life, he writes down an enigmatic thought: “Both man and nation first lose their mind, which is essential to the truth about oneself” (2009). Does this mean that delusions actually help in not collapsing?

Furthermore, man is seen as a being which *devises* his own life. He copes with life but does not progress. His consciousness is shaped more by the past than by the present. The past is beautiful. “Man does not realize how funny, ugly, uncertain, pointless his present is. That is revealed by sights and events from the past” (January 2003). The purpose of life includes a rational comprehension of the world which makes a man a man. The rational man possesses “controlled rationality” (February 2004). By this Ćosić means that there is a kind of struggle between the rational mind and feelings, which tend to dominate human nature. And rationality strives to take control over emotions. In his senior years he does not dispute the power of rationality, but writing from personal experience, he emphasizes the strength of emotions. “The thought is the beginning and the end of man: only emotions make a man whole. Sorrow means more to me than any of my thoughts. Sorrow—that is my whole being! No success with my novels, no fame, no money—will bring me peace of mind...Who can have any use of my pessimism” (20.09.2007). However, the purpose of life is a much more complex concept than just the mind-emotions relation. The purpose of life also

includes love, health, riches, knowledge—a whole set of values which guide a person's life in a certain direction.

What is the *Serbian man* like? Ćosić's depiction of the Serbian man contains several inconsistent subgroups. He writes about virtues and flaws in his *Personal History of an Age*. When he describes concrete Serbs, friends and politicians, when he writes about cooperation and conflicting arguments, he does not use strong language or criticize their character and behavior. He writes about himself as a Serb in two ways. His practical humanistic side, reflected in providing material aid to those in need and in his defense of politically persecuted people on the territory of SFRY, can serve as grounds to conclude that he did see the good sides of human nature as well. On the other hand, he often writes about himself in a pessimistic tone. To quote him—"my whole being is imbued with fear, doubt and trepidation" (01.01.2004). This perception of himself gets repeated several times in different notes. Simply put, the Serbian man is contradictory in his thoughts, feelings and behavior.

When writing about inter-Serbian relations, Ćosić differentiates between the good and the bad side of the Serbian political and moral man. But this approach to Serbian anthropology does not date back to 1945. Everything that happened between people in the socialist SFRY and the democratic Serbia has roots in the past. He does not contemplate that which characterizes the "Dinaric type" in which man's will takes precedence over responsibility. Nor does he rely on the ethno-psychological research by Jovan Cvijić, which establishes that the Dinaric man has a rich imagination and a quick tongue, a strong sense of justice, is prone to enthusiasm and quick to anger, heroic in character, nurtures the cult of heroic virtues and national pride (Avramović, 2015).

After 1990, a political trench is created between pro-Milošević and anti-Milošević supporters, just as previous generations had seen the same trench between supporters of the Obrenović family and the Karađorđević family, Yugoslavs and Serbs, the chetniks and the partisans, the communists and the anti-communists. One group speaks out against "the dictatorship of Milošević" and the alleged total media black-out and lack of freedom of speech. Others retort that such claims are pure propaganda and lies, that there had been freedom of political activity and information, that the state politics was in line with the fight of the Serbian people for state and national self-determination. Political animosities permeated other social relations in Serbia of that period as well.

Ćosić is an open anthropological pessimist. He believes that man is a contradictory being, intertwining good and evil, but with evil outweighing good. Tragedy is the essence of human destiny. Man is characterized by instinctual structure and a hunger for power, and social

order is not capable of changing instincts. The world changes, man does not. Man learns about nature but remains ignorant about himself. He is torn between personal and general interests. Man is more evil than good. He is greedy and selfish, gullible, headstrong, hypocritical. He has respect for profit and power. "The man and the beast in himself," which Machiavelli wrote about, is, in a way, contained in Ćosić's anthropology as well.

On the other hand, social life is capricious, conflicting and difficult to predict. With a nature more prone to evil than good and unpredictable social developments, the man of politics does not count on Christian ethics. Therefore, politics has to apply two methods: one is to win over public opinion through lies, cheating, hypocrisy, and shrewdness, while, at the same time, pretending to be full of virtues.

What the critical factor that affects the behavior, the value system, attitudes and beliefs of an individual is, makes for a question that cannot be answered with certainty. It is certain that culture equips an individual with language, faith, knowledge, customs, but it remains unclear to what extent and whether the individual is just a reflection of the current culture. Regarding the constant discussions about the relation between the rational and the irrational in man, there is one sentence by Aristotle that is worth thinking about: "It is difficult to listen to the voice of reason if one is too beautiful, too powerful or too rich."

His thoughts on man Ćosić does not link to concrete traits and capabilities. Nor does he link them with cultural and social tradition. His statements are universal, not analytical. The ME-attitude is presented as general. And man as a being who observes reality, thinks, feels and reasons. Man has the *possibility* to improve his existence or to give in to the force of his instincts and negative sides of human nature. Neither good, nor evil, are pre-determined, but they are a consequence of the comprehensive social conditions in which one grows up and lives.

Translated from Serbian by
Milana Todoroskov

SAŠA RADOJČIĆ

BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE: BOŽIDAR KNEŽEVIĆ AND HIS *THOUGHTS*

What secured Božidar Knežević, a Serbian philosopher from the end of the 19th century into the early years of the 20th century, a wider audience and a permanent place in the cultural memory of the nation, were not his extensive historiosophical studies, to which he dedicated most of his creative energy and ambition, but rather a later subsequent, from the standpoint of the author's intentions perhaps, even a subordinate book. Though he was indisputably a pioneer in the field of philosophy of history in our country, Knežević gained full recognition and reader response only with his *Misli* (Thoughts), which appeared in serial form in *The Serbian Literary Herald*, and later as a separate book (1902). It consists of textual fragments that border between philosophy and literature, whose genre or affiliation and predecessors are difficult to pinpoint. *Thoughts* cannot be compared to anything in earlier Serbian literature, and in the European context, these fragments are somewhat similar to the aphorisms of French moralists and Friedrich Nietzsche. According to the testimony of Knežević's daughter Milka,¹ the book was written at the incentive of philosopher Brana Petronijević, Knežević's fellow countryman (both are from Tamnava), to whom the latter once complained that his *Principles of History* was poorly received and read. "Petronijević replied that very few people in our country can understand these things, but to expand the circle of readers, he recommends that he take all his thoughts and observations from *Principles* and *Proportions* and publish them separately. This is how father's *Thoughts* came to be, which met with a wide response."²

¹ Milka Knežević, *Život mojih roditelja* (My Parents' Life) in: Božidar Knežević, *Beležnica* (The Notebook) (1986-1987), prepared by Aleksandra Vraneš, "Božidar Knežević" Public Library, Ub, 2002, pp. 77-94.

² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

According to this, *Thoughts* was written by extracting and reducing, probably also by additional formal editing of ideas from the author's already published philosophical works, as their so-to-speak distillate, the essence stripped of layers of more extensive argumentation and scientific apparatus. Regardless of whether it was as described in this testimony, or whether it was just another literary stylization of Knežević's complex life circumstances, *Thoughts* will remain his most important work. There was no time to write another, new work because at the beginning of 1905, at the age of 43, he died of pneumonia. In addition to *Thoughts* and the two-volume *Principles of History*, the works he published during his lifetime include several translations from the English language, a historical calendar for school use, and a Serbian-French dictionary.

The fact that Knežević achieved his greatest success with his least ambitious book is not the only oddity concerning the image we can acquire concerning this thinker, one of the few authentic speculative minds that our culture has produced—and it is not the only motif in his biography suitable for fictional processing and embellishment. That image, from a purely visual standpoint, is based on two or three short textual descriptions and one drawing. Božidar Knežević did not want to be photographed, so his *only* (or at least the only known) visual presentation was provided by Nikola Zega, a clerk from Čačak Grammar School, who found an opportune time to secretly draw Knežević's portrait. All of the subsequent portraits of Božidar Knežević are based on that hastily made sketch, and hence it can be said that we only know approximately what he looked like, which is almost incomprehensible for our era, overloaded with images.

Our knowledge about Knežević's life is just as unreliable. Biographical sketches about him are full of generalities, stereotypes, and unconfirmed or even incorrect claims—as recently shown by Boris Milosavljević in a well-substantiated text, correcting several erroneous data.³ We will arrive at a more or less reliable biography of Božidar Knežević only when we remove the veils of clichés and constructions that some interpreters had introduced and others uncritically adopted. This applies primarily to the story about Knežević's childhood and schooling, where we have stereotypes of an unjust stepfather and an orphan who supports himself by tutoring his schoolmates,⁴ but also to some very specific incorrect details—for example, that Knežević had so many difficulties with his superiors that he was even fired from his

³ Boris Milosavljević, "Božidar Knežević", in: Miloš Ković (prepared by), *Srbi 1903-1914: Istorija ideja*, CLIO, Belgrade, 2015, pp. 428-449.

⁴ For example, in the forward written by Ksenija Atanasijević in: Božidar Knežević, *Misli*, Srpska književna zadruga, Belgrade, 1931, p. VI.

job, or that, like Immanuel Kant, he never travelled (except, of course, moving for work). These false claims became so deep-rooted that it was even said on a television show that he had not travelled *even as far as Zemun*. And the actual truth? There was never a dismissal, and Knežević's estate contained notes from a trip to southeastern Serbia and the Kvarner Gulf (1897). Those notes were published in 2002. But even though his life story was not as gloomy as the attempts to weave a modern legend around Knežević's personality might suggest, it is nevertheless complex.

The stories that Božidar Knežević had a difficult childhood, that he was a neglected child and that he supported himself even during schooling, are not documented. The facts are that he lost his father at an early age, that his mother remarried, and that he grew up with his stepfather, but also that he was educated in the best (First Belgrade) gymnasium in Serbia at the time, which shows that his family cared about his education. It is also unlikely that he supported himself by tutoring the weaker students; at least not while studying at the Higher School. He enrolled in 1880, and after the first year of studies, he was accepted for a paying job as an intern, first at the State Printing Office, and soon after at the Ministry of Education.⁵ It is also a known fact that he often moved to the hinterlands switching gymnasiums (Užice, Niš, Čačak, Kragujevac, again Čačak, Šabac), but this happened more often at his request than at the behest of the school authorities. Even less reliable is the legend, which originates from Skerlić,⁶ that he learned foreign languages on his own; in fact, he studied German, French, and Latin at the Gymnasium and the Higher School, and only English on his own, by translating. Knežević was, by all accounts, a person about whom anecdotes were spun, one of those self-confident, lonely geniuses, who both despised their environment, made up of ordinary people, the masses, and yearned for it to recognize their greatness; a man of firm character and unwilling to conform to social conventions. After arriving in Užice at the end of 1884, he lived with a married woman (they did not marry until 1889) and had a child with her, which must have been scandalous for the citizens of Užice.

The days Knežević spends in the provincial towns are not unproductive. He reads a lot, translates (a translation of Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* appeared in four volumes between 1891–1893), and immerses himself in extensive historiosophical research (the first book of *Principles of History* entitled *Order in History*, was published in 1898, and the second, *Proportion in History*, in 1901). When he was

⁵ B. Milosavljević, "Božidar Knežević", p. 435.

⁶ Jovan Skerlić, *Istorija nove srpske književnosti*, Rad, Beograd, 1953, p. 419.

finally given a position at the King Aleksandar I (Obrenović) Gymnasium in Belgrade in 1902, Knežević was already well-known in the capital's cultural circles, partially for his *Principles of History*, but much more for his *Thoughts*, which was serialized in the *Serbian Literary Herald* in 1901 and accompanied by Skerlić's reviews. Almost overnight that work moved Božidar Knežević high up the ladder of Serbian literature and has kept him there until today.

Thoughts was published as a separate book in 1902.⁷ Its reception, and especially Skerlić's very positive review, reinforced the idea that Božidar Knežević was a creator who was neglected in the province for too long and unfairly and was not given the right opportunity to demonstrate and realize his outstanding skills. Skerlić repeated his views in a concise form less than three years later in an emotionally written obituary, adding a few more bitter notes to the evaluation of Knežević's overall activity in Serbian culture: "Knežević was a man who possessed considerable spiritual skills. He spent almost twenty years in the bleakness of the deprived hinterlands, fighting like the devil with debts, drafts, suspensions, injunctions, and lone sharks, unusually unadaptable to a life to which he remained a complete stranger, yet managed to work and create works of lasting value."⁸ Skerlić's overall opinion of *Thoughts* is important, and still acceptable today: "When *Thoughts* came out, the literary name of its writer was created. With this book, Knežević presented the best work of its kind in Serbian literature. In his *Thoughts*, one should not look for easily fabricated aphorisms, written according to a recipe or mold, witty paradoxes, skillfully arranged antitheses, and colorful definitions. Nor does it offer advice about practical moral philosophy, and a breviary for life, such as the old moralists gave. In addition to certain metaphysical speculations, in addition to traces of dry and abstract scientific terminology, he introduced a lot of his own, personal, autobiographical, almost lyrical. And the best and most powerful part of *Thoughts*, the thing that makes it so impressive, is its deeply intimate tone."⁹

Let us turn our attention to the questions that Skerlić hinted at, which touch on the most important things one could say about Knežević and his *Thoughts*: what specific type of work is *Thoughts*; what is the relationship between the *scientific* and the *personal*, the *abstract* and the *lyrical*; and can we conclude something based on this book about

⁷ The first edition of *Thoughts* (1902) was prepared by the author himself and it includes 491 fragments. The third edition (1925) includes 145 fragments from his manuscript legacy. In addition to the original 491, another 385 fragments from his legacy were published in the fourth edition (1931) (most of which overlap with the selection made in 1925).

⁸ Jovan Skerlić, *Boža Knežević, Sprski književni glasnik*, 14/5, 1905, p. 399.

⁹ *Ibid.*

the author's *metaphysical* views? The last question requires the most extensive answer, and that is why we will start with it.

If the book really originated or initially started, as a kind of distillate of the ideas extensively developed in the *Principles of History*, then it should be possible to reconstruct the basic structure of those ideas based on *Thoughts*. But, on the other hand, since it does not have the character of a complete text that would allow for a unique and consistent systematic exposition, since it is a variant of views in fragments, it is exposed to the risk of repetition and varying motifs, as well as the danger that views on certain subjects will differ in certain fragments, or even be irreconcilable. Thoughts given in fragments can endure the kind of inconsistency that makes systematic exposition fail. In *Thoughts* we will indeed find, in literary form, the core of Knežević's philosophy, but not his philosophy as a whole; we will find clearly illuminated details, but the whole will remain partly in the darkness. This in turn makes both the whole and the details more challenging and enigmatic.

In the most general sense, the philosophical position of Božidar Knežević is a form of evolutionism, a theoretical orientation, and a way of thinking widespread in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, except that his variant of evolutionism differs from the typical evolutionist theory, inspired and based on the measurable results of the empirical approach of natural science, because he deals primarily with the issues of human history and its development, trying to establish the general *principles of history* (as his two-volume¹⁰ historiosophical work is entitled). For Knežević, social history is an extension of biological development and is inherent exclusively in man.

Knežević presents a series of inspired, brilliantly written, unverifiable observations about human history, civilization, and morality. However, according to his primary system of thought, he was a metaphysician, not a positivist.¹¹ His trust in science is limited because although science arrives at the truth, it is not the highest form of activity of the human spirit, but "only one transitional phase in the history of the human mind, just as law and harmony are only one transitory phase in the process of the universe" (II, 47);¹² higher forms than

¹⁰ The first book of *The Principles*, under the title *Red u istoriji* (Order in History) was published in 1898, and the second, *Proportion in History* (*Proporcija u istoriji*) in 1901.

¹¹ Dragan M. Jeremić thinks differently. He states that Knežević's philosophy "represents the highest pinnacle of Serbian positivism", D. M. Jeremić, "Božidar Knežević", in: Božidar Knežević, *Čovek i istorija* (Man and History), Srpska književnost u 100 knjiga, knj. 42, Matica srpska and Srpska književna zadruga, Novi Sad / Belgrade, 1972, p. 38.

¹² The citations are marked according to the new edition of *Thoughts* in: Božidar Knežević, (prepared by S. Radojčić), Novi Sad: IC Matice srpske, 2018.

science are, in different ways, philosophy (I, 373) and religion (I, 232). Just as he ranks forms of spiritual activity, Knežević also ranks the truth, not considering it to be necessarily separate from fallacy: every fallacy is “just one phase of the truth; every fallacy is truth for its time and fallacy for other times; every truth is proportional to its place and its time, and it is only true if it is proportional to its place and its time” (I, 421); fallacy is understood as “truth of a lower order” (I, 487). This relativism in understanding the relationship between fallacy and truth is more consistent with the evolutionist postulate than a position that would strictly separate truth from fallacy and assert that absolute truth is possible. On the other hand, in *Thoughts* one can find fragments that seem to speak precisely in favor of this possibility: “Truth is only one, like the cosmos, and there can only be one truth, the highest, just as a circle has only one center” (I, 287). The idea of only one truth’s existence contradicts the idea of truth’s relativity. Such dilemmas are resolved in two ways—either by further analysis of the concept in question (the concept of truth) or by abandoning the requirement for strict consistency, which in this case is the better option. Contradictions and inconsistencies that we observe in *Thoughts* are most likely side effects of its text’s fragmentary and concise structure, and it is not necessary to remove them at all costs during interpretation. On the contrary, the inconsistency and discrepancy between individual fragments preserve the flavor of the living thought, which is always a kind of internal dialogue of different ideas and always transcends itself.

Although, in essence, Knežević follows in the footsteps of Spencer and Darwin, there are fragments in *Thoughts* that are close to different orientations in philosophy. In terms of style and, more importantly, the basis for their reasoning, Knežević’s cosmological fragments are more like the metaphorical way of speaking of the Greek Pre-Socratics than that of modern physics: “The universe is one big ball of the same yarn, which branches into more and more threads as it gets closer to the end. The closer it is to the beginning, the more it is one” (I, 3); or “Just as the number of times the earth circles the sun is set, so are set the number and measure of everything on and in it” (I, 306).

The following fragment is recognizably Kantian in tone: “True morality is only in the actions a person does independent of external nature, external influences and incentives, without fear of external averseness, punishment and misfortune, regardless of the benefit to them or their interests. Morality is freedom from all those external considerations and forces; morality is freedom from the must and can, morality is in the *should*” (I, 79). These words could be used to explain Kant’s categorical imperative! That the emphasis on the morally decisive, imperative *should* is not an idea restricted to *Thoughts*, is shown

by somewhat more widely developed examinations of the reasons why people are honest (I, 274). According to Knežević, the majority is comprised of those who *must* be, in fear of punishment from God or the laws of man. The second most numerous are those who are honest out of *self-interest*, expecting that right conduct will gain them honor or some other benefit. The least numerous are those who are truly moral: “everything they do or don’t do, they do and don’t do because they are convinced that this is what they *should* or *shouldn’t* do; they do good because they want to and don’t do evil because they don’t want to, even though they can, regardless of the external pressure that is driving them to do it.” This same idea is formulated in other places, for example: “A man with character is only he who does everything that must make him what and the way he is convinced that he should be, basing everything he does and how he does it on the *should* principle. Raising *must* to *should*, the character reconciles both—it *should be*; therefore it *must be*. All other moments and motives—fear, self-interest, vanity, hatred, love, anger, envy, pity, mercy, kindness, hunger, trouble, worry—are excluded by character, it has nothing to do with them. Therefore, true character is just as rare and momentary as everything else noble in man” (I, 480; see also II, 351 and II, 352). Therefore, the source of morality is autonomous, and moral requirements are rigorous.

Along with the already mentioned fragment about the relationship between truth and fallacy (I, 421), the following statement also resembles the (Hegelian) dialectic: “The final stage of development of particularity: is for it to disappear into something more general than itself” (I, 13).

The following sentences found in a fragment from the legacy are interesting concerning Knežević’s relatedness to the history of European thought: “The universe is one great thought written by a sublime mind. Just as a person writes a complete thought in his head word by word, so do certain moments in the creation of the universe represent certain words with which the thought of the universe is written. That thought is not yet complete,” (II, 11). It is a variant of the metaphor of the world as a book written by the finger of God, which, as far we know, was first recorded in the twelfth century by the scholastic theologian Hugh of St. Victor, and repeated by a whole series of thinkers and writers, from Allen of Lille and St. Bonaventure to Borges and Umberto Eco.

The similarity with Nietzsche, although apparent at first glance when it comes to the “lower” and “higher” man, is only external, and terminological. Knežević’s “higher” man does not aspire to *revalue all the values*, which are the basis of human coexistence; instead, he is a moral example according to which social values have yet to be established. While Nietzsche’s “Overman” embodies the affirmation of life and unfettered life forces, despite all rational limitations, Knežević’s

“higher” man uses reason to rise above life: “the highest form of the general process, thinking, can develop only at the expense of life. The more life and the more exuberant it is, the less thinking and consciousness” (I, 15). With Knežević, the concept of life is formed from a characteristic evolutionary and historical perspective; thus, he sees the progress of civilization as a growing rationalization of life potentials, as their sublimation, and only superficially and impermanently: “civilization is only the thin polish of a thin outer, cooled crust of the soul; beneath that polish, in the depths of every man’s soul, there is a seething liquid mass of animal desires and feelings, passions and affects, which at the slightest tremor break through that outer, polished crust, which happens in revolutions and wars and social upheavals” (I, 236; very similar, with the same metaphors: II, 148). The human community is constantly in danger of returning to the wild, animal state, in which only the “lower” man can live, while the nobler and “higher” man perishes.

Whether and to what extent Knežević’s position is in some aspects close to Protestantism¹³ is a matter of discussion. Based on his critical observations about cults and ceremonies, he did not request that they be rejected, because cults and ceremonies are needed by the unenlightened masses: “Ceremonies are diapers in which the childish greatness and childish sanctity of man are wrapped. Man’s mature greatness and his mature sanctity need a different garment,” (I, 277). Knežević is a theist who believes that Christianity is historically the best, but not the perfect expression of man’s religiousness. Hence, it is rash to tie it to any specific confessional framework.

There is something both original and naïve in Knežević’s understanding of religiousness. His statements about religion as the basic form of human spirituality, from which the derived forms of art, philosophy, and science arose and to which they will one day return, are intertwined with witty, but purely formal arguments from the repertoire of rational proofs of the existence of God that have been rejected long ago by European philosophy, for example: “Precisely because the world is a mechanism proves that there is some deep primordial spirit in the world that arranges and determines everything,” (II, 6); “There is only one God, everything else is, more or less, numerous. And since everything

¹³ Skerlić compares Knežević’s attitude towards religion to Protestantism (Jovan Skerlić, *Misli od Bože Kneževića*, *Srpski književni glasnik* 6/5, 1902, pp. 1016-1027). In the text, fragment I, 174 points to such a connection: “Honest work is also a prayer to God and a sufficient prayer at that. An increasingly mature mind throws out all empty words and ceremonies from religion and reduces all worship of God to honest work.” But the question remains: Does this consecration of work originate in Protestantism, the Enlightenment, or Knežević’s rigorous ethics?

else, of a kind, can vary in quantity, it doesn't have to be. Therefore, only God must be; everything else can both be and not be," (I, 229). In the first argument, the hidden subtext consists of Aristotle's *prime mover* and Leibniz's *divine clockmaker*, the only difference being that once they set the world in motion, they withdraw from it devoid of any further concern (because the world functions perfectly), while Knežević's *primordial spirit* remains in the world and constantly regulates it (because the mechanism of the world seems to be subject to breakdowns). The second argument is simply a mistake in logic because the assumption of the uniqueness of something does not imply the necessity of its existence.

Much more valuable than those "proofs" are Knežević's observations about God and religion, which he acquired by observing the human soul, observations most often formulated in gnomic language and with the use of stylistic devices that belong more to *belles lettres* than to the usual tools of philosophy. He considers the idea of God essential to man: "The more sublime the spirit, the more it needs God, a more and more sublime God, and more and more only one God," (I, 248)—the origin of that idea is not reason, but rather it originated "from the depths of the human soul," (I, 262). Therefore, the idea of God is not only essential but also very close to man. This is exactly why, for Knežević, religious rituals and ceremonies are less valuable than the immediate relationship that a person can establish with transcendence. "The best, deepest and most sincere way of believing in God is in silence," our thinker will say at one point (II, 29). Here, Knežević is nearing the viewpoint of so-called apophatic or negative theology and, no doubt, he will be speaking from this viewpoint when, in describing man's search for a name for the basic principle of the world, he says it would best to call that "primordial spirit—something that can never be expressed in human language—God," (II, 53). Only man can come to the idea of God, and that is why he is the only one who has religion, although animals also possess some form of faith (I, 359) because faith is the result of sensory experiences, inheritances of the soul.

Therefore, Knežević distinguishes between soul and spirit; animals also possess a soul, but only humans have the spirit and only some of them at that. The soul is natural, and the spirit a cultural (historical) category: "the soul is passed on from parent to child; the spirit is carried over and inherited only through history; the soul is the legacy of the entire human race and is inherited by the entire race, all people; the spirit and the mind are the legacy of only some glorious individuals," (I, 442). Those prominent individuals create history. In addition to emphasizing the importance of the individual or genius in forming world history, Knežević sometimes talks about humanity as the true actor

of that history. States, nations, and tribes are only seemingly the bearers of historical events, but in fact, it is *man* at different historical stages (I, 487). A history that can be covered by principles and laws, is “the life of mankind,” (II, 159).

In this way, Knežević shifts the focus of his considerations from the history of political events to the history of society, which was a very modern idea that had not met with an active response from Serbian historiography—which should not be surprising since this idea appeared too early, when historians still considered their task to be critical research of the material, and when establishing the facts was more important to them than delving into theories like Knežević’s, which adheres to the height of general principles. On the other hand, by not descending to the supposedly solid ground of data, it was easier for Knežević to combine into a whole the theory of “lower” and “higher” man and his moralistic views and ideas about humanity with the ideas of humanity as a historical subject and society as a stage. Thus, he sees the formation and progress of society as primarily moral problems, and “higher” people as agents of moral, and thus socially correct behavior (I, 402).

It is interesting that Knežević generally did not include his more direct political thoughts in the edition he prepared during his lifetime, and that his more concrete statements about the constitutional order and the government are found mostly in fragments within his legacy. He most likely wanted to avoid possible politically motivated discussions, which would distract the audience from more important topics. That is why the interestingly addressed issues regarding the false state of affairs in society (II, 233), the demand for aristocracy as a form of state organization (II, 207), as well as the problems of the ruler’s personal morality, were left for another time, which Knežević did not live to see (II, 260: “The more the crown shines, the greater the darkness around the people. For the people to be illuminated, it is enough for the crown to be unsoiled”).

One might be surprised that a reserved thinker, who is regarded as peculiar, should show such a lively interest in matters of society and morality. Nevertheless, Knežević approached these issues not only based on his contemplations but, above all, based on his experiences. Many of his fragments on moralistic themes emit a note of bitterness, mostly because they include something individual, something personal. It is difficult not to assume that, when he writes about the unfortunate fate of the “higher” man in the world as it is today, Knežević is not also thinking of his own fate. The fact that Knežević’s *Thoughts* draws the interest of the reader, both hundreds of years ago as well as today, lies precisely in the interweaving of personal experience with theoretical speculation. On a theoretical level, Knežević can be criticized for relying

on an unproved assumption concerning the necessary morality of the “higher” man, as well as for not talking about how that morality would be installed as a real social value and, in this sense, his ethics is utopian. He clearly shows us what *should* be, but not how it *can be* in a real, historically existing human society. But in the matter of introducing a personal note to theorizing, all remarks are superfluous, because then it is no longer a scientific or methodological issue, but a matter of an individual creative profile.

This points to one of the sources of the personal and lyrical in *Thoughts*. Another source is in their stylistic treatment. In many cases, Knežević’s fragments clearly belong to fine literature, rather than varieties of scientific or philosophical speech. Such, for example, are the statements: “The enormous book that time is writing is the biography of God” (I, 20), “Man is something that every so often even makes God happy, and frequently even makes the devil feel shame” (I, 164), “They say that everyone is a blacksmith of their own happiness. It’s just that fate gives some both a hammer and almost red-hot iron, while others have to forge it without any heat, and often with a bare fist” (I, 204), or “A cradle is the dawn of a grave night,” (II, 160). Such literary forms are very densely distributed throughout *Thoughts*, to such a degree that reviews stating that these fragments *also* fall under fine literature are not only undisputable but also impose the assessment that they *predominantly* belong to it.

It is true that among Knežević’s fragments there are many defining statements, but they are not definitions, but a kind of extended metaphor: “Duty is like wormwood, whose bitterness chases away the staleness of boredom, and soothes the bitterness of despair with its honey,” (I, 186), or “A dogma is an embalmed thought, dead but in one piece, alive but disabled, soulless but full of strength,” (II, 33). Knežević sometimes achieves excellent effects by playing with his pseudo-definitions—“height is distance” (I, 44), “distance is height” (I, 488). Statements of this type, which are essentially figurative, have the composition of apodictic judgments. This is a technique often used by poets as well, in texts that we unhesitatingly classify as lyric poetry. However, we should not go too far with this line of thinking, because it is quite certain that in *Thoughts* Knežević’s primary intention was not to achieve aesthetic effects, but rather to communicate his knowledge. But even then, he must have been aware of his use of figurative language.

This was a decision of profound significance for the fate of his work. Today, Knežević’s philosophy, both in *Principles of History* and in *Thoughts*, is at best a subject of historical interest, and despite its ground-breaking qualities, it will hardly serve as a starting point for some new philosophical reflections on the phenomenon of history or

its principles. The literary aspect of *Thoughts*, however, has not lost its value; on the contrary, Knežević's witty, well-formed fragments are still part of the Serbian literary canon today, and attract each new generation of readers. It is very like that each succeeding generation reads and sees something different in this work than the previous one; the value of *Thoughts* also lies in the fact that it provides a textual base for various reading experiences. Today, when we talk so much about non-linear writing and reading, about the experience of reading that freely dives into the text, the existence of pioneers such as Knežević's fragments, which must be read discontinuously and by forming countless associative connections within the text and outside it, reminds us that in our daring theoretical constructions we are not as innovative as we would like and that everything we want can be done much more naturally. For, Božidar Knežević's *Thoughts* is essentially exactly what its title suggests—the opinion of an individual with high speculative powers, free of the constraints of professional conventions and methodological obligations, only thoughts and their flow, unsystematic, unrestrained. Just think: nothing more and nothing less.

Translated from Serbian by
Persida Bošković

THE “INFINITE BLUE CIRCLE” LITERARY AWARD

NEBOJŠA LAZIĆ

DELUSION IN BERLIN: NECROPOLIS ABOVE METROPOLIS

Slobodan Vladušić's novel *Delusion* is his best prose achievement so far. Indeed, this opinion can also be found in the excerpts from the reviews by Dejan Stojiljković and Vladimir Kecmanović, printed on the cover of the book. Viewed chronologically, Vladušić moved in an upward poetic line from his first novel *Forward* (2009), through the novels *We, Deleted* (2013) and *The Grand Assault* (2018), to the last in the series, *Delusion*. This particular book can be read as any other novel, however, it is only the discovery of numerous intertextual relationships with various literary and artistic works, subtly inserted into the fabric of the text, that brings true reading pleasure. Therefore, it is desirable that the reader of this work knows the culture and literature of Germany from the beginning of the last century, but also the political and social conditions in the Weimar Republic and Berlin. This spiritual correlation certainly implies achievements such as the novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Alfred Döblin and the film *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang. On the other hand, Miloš Crnjanski's creativity is “mirrored” on the pages of the novel *Delusion*; his works *The Iris of Berlin* and *The Embassies*, above others, but his poetry, essays and all the texts in which he exalts or chastises the Germanic spirit of Germany and Austria as well. How much the author had in mind the oeuvre of Crnjanski, along with Andrić, the most significant Serbian writer, is also evidenced by the title. It is a reminiscence of the title of the first chapter of the *Second Book of Migrations*: “But all this is only a delusion in human eyes”.

The delusional state of consciousness of the main characters of the novel *Delusion*, Miloš Crnjanski and Milan Verulović, is manifested quite differently. Verulović, a veteran and war hero from Kajmakčalan who is mentally impaired, becomes addicted to opiates, alcohol and carnal lust in Berlin. Crnjanski stands opposite him, ascetically focused on seeing through the revisionist plans of Germany, its thirst for revenge for its defeat in the First World War. In the novel *Delusion*, Crnjanski is not so much a great Serbian writer as he is an obsessive searcher for a missing compatriot. That missing worker has his own name: Milutin Topalović. However, it is not too significant in the composition of the novel, because it only serves as a trigger (motive) for the search that revealed the threatening side not only of Berlin but also of the interwar Germany. Moving through Berlin, saturated with all the possible vices that humans as a species can indulge in, Crnjanski and Verulović uncover a well-kept secret hidden behind the decor of the decadent metropolis. That secret is eugenics, once a science, but in any case, a medical activity by means of which the weak and vulnerable parts of the population are removed and those with the best racial characteristics are kept. Although it originated in the Anglo-Saxon world, in Great Britain and the USA, eugenics was embraced by German Nazism and became the basis of its racial ideology.

Similarly, as Eco did in the novel *The Name of the Rose*, Vladušić also built his duo of the investigators according to the pattern of Arthur Conan Doyle and his literary heroes Holmes and Watson. This homage to the famous writer of the detective genre helped the author of the *Delusion*, to give his work a new quality, the mysticism of the search that keeps the reader in suspense until the final denouement. We think it is not an exaggeration to say that, according to the successful hybridization of genres, in this case through the symbiosis of high literature and the detective novel, Vladušić's novel can be compared to Borislav Pekić's *Rabies*.

Slobodan Vladušić's novel is bordered by a prologue and an epilogue, with the epilogue entitled *Epilogue* or *Contents*. Even Soviet semioticians, such as Boris Uspensky, pointed out that the beginning and the end of a literary text are particularly important segments in the composition of a literary work. Before the prologue, the reader comes across two appropriate epigraphs, one by Alfred Döblin and the other by Lev Shestov. The prologue itself is written in poetic language, some literary markers are indicated in it, the meaning and significance of which the reader will understand at the end of the novel. The epilogue is the author's most unusual intervention in constructing the composition of the *Delusion*, to some, it may even seem controversial. What is it about? The events in the novel are narrated in the first person by

Milan Verulović, through whose eyes, hearing and memory the reader follows the exciting plot and the unfolding of the adventure to which Crnjanski so passionately surrendered. After the “official” novel ends, the author does not put a final point to it, but leaves his heroes in Berlin in the twenties of the last century and writes about the time almost a century later. And it is not only this time leap that is unusual but also the fact that now the author is the “main hero” of this kind of appendix to the *Delusion*. In the theory of literature, this phenomenon is called, by analogy with the direct addressing of Greek tragedians to the audience, parabasis. This means that this kind of intervention in a literary work has been a legitimate literary procedure for centuries. It seems to us that this lengthy epilogue is a kind of elaboration of the dedication from the beginning of the novel. Namely, the novel *Delusion* is dedicated to Tanja Vladušić Rudić, the author’s wife, so the epilogue can be considered as a kind of an extended dedication.

Some of the feverishness of modern Berlin, the German machinism shown in Lang’s *Metropolis*, also vibrates in the rhythm of Slobodan Vladušić’s storytelling in the *Delusion*. And it’s not just an effective transition from one level of storytelling to another, usually, with a laconic sentence that floats between blocks of denser text, but the leitmotif of the tram, a technological marvel of that era, contributes to that rhythm as well. This hustle and bustle, whose tact is naturally dictated by Crnjanski, forces the slightly phlegmatic and disappointed Verulović who, together with the writer of the *Migrations*, jump off one tram and quickly run into another one. Berlin, a metropolis that is still cosmopolitan and pan-European, assumes a different vision viewed through the windows of those small trains that cruise through the German capital. Buildings, people, colours, the entire environment is dynamized, which, by visualizing it in the reader’s consciousness, further enhances the impression of the acceleration of the narrative.

Of course, the rise of the machines diminishes not only the physical but also the spiritual dimensions of a man; they are a measure of the alienation of one individual from the other, a man from a woman. That is why Verulović’s contacts with the girls and women in Berlin, regardless of the social class they come from, are superficial and reduced to monotonous copulations. One gets the impression that the literary characters in the novel *Delusion* wear masks instead of faces. And the mask, a theatrical prop, reveals Berlin, but also Germany and Europe, as a stage on which everyone, to the best of his ability, plays a given role. Milan Verulović does not have the ability to perceive the insight behind those appearances, but that’s why Crnjanski is a real master in recognizing what wants to be hidden.

The reality of the 20th century freed the authors of illusions about the prosperity and harmony which the 19th century promised. The discovery of the lies behind the proclaimed truths leads to a dystopian picture of the world, the only difference in engaged literature could be the degree of hopelessness offered by those works. When it comes to Slobodan Vladušić's novel *Delusion*, we are more inclined to look at it and place it closer to Camus's novel *The Plague* than to Pekić's *Rabies*, a kind of exegesis of Camus's thesis about the eternal and latent evil that constantly lurks. Of course, Vladušić's novel has its own voice, and that unique voice is based on national and world literature, but also on the author's experience of the modern and, by now, postmodern world and its conditions.

Translated from the Serbian by
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MLADEN ŠUKALO

WHO IS GWENDOCI?

(short note on the structure of
Slobodan Vladušić's novel *Delusion*)

At the end of the 80s of the last century, the French theoretician Gerard Genet, leaving behind, among other things, the narratological phase of research in literature, offering the public an unusual study on the “paratextual” aspects of books, giving it also an unusual title: *Thresholds* (*Seuils*, 1987). What are these “thresholds” in literature? Starting from Borges’s metaphorical name “entrance hall” for prefaces, Genet singles out among the “thresholds” (which is also a kind of metaphorical sign) everything that steps out of the text as a series of more or less long verbal statements, and then deals in turn with the aspects of the author’s name, titles and intertitles, prefaces, notes, epigraphs, dedications to various notes or “epitexts” including interviews, conversations, public debates, up to the analysis of correspondence or writers’ diaries.

On the margins of Genet’s ideas, a different approach to reflections about Slobodan Vladušić’s novel *Delusion* can be opened. Perhaps, in the aforementioned context, it would be more appropriate to talk about Vladušić’s “book” because the “Prologue” and “Epilogue or Contents” are separated from the “text of the novel”, by the nature of their message. Regardless of the series of other textual links between these three parts of the “book”, the title metaphor – *delusion*, and two names – Miloš Crnjanski and Gwendoci occupy a special place among them.

By the nature of naming, it is clear that the central place is occupied by the “text of the novel” whose exposition roughly follows the

form of a “detective novel”, that is, the search by Miloš Crnjanski and Miloš Verulović for Milutin Topalović, a missing Serb in Berlin in the late 20s of the last century. It is a fascinating image of this city on the eve of the Nazis coming to power, and it would be interesting, on an intertextual level, to consider it against Miloš Crnjanski’s travel book *Book about Germany*, but also Alfred Döblin’s novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, from which Vladušić draws the epigraph to his work. This would open up the issue of *genre slippages*, where through seemingly trivial patterns of the narrative procedure the widest reading audience is captured. The glamour of the life of the upper social strata alternates with the images of spaces where the poor live on the edge of misery, just as diverse ideological orientations intersect in different pub spaces. The entire investigation of the two Miloš ends up in the discovery of the “Confessions of a Beautiful Soul” hidden in the painting, the appendix of which is a list of 482 names by Maks de Grot...

From the previous indications, a kind of *tautological interpretation* or retelling the events in Slobodan Vladušić’s book *Delusion* would necessarily follow. However, the goal of this paper is of a completely different nature: in Genet’s terms, there is a need to establish a relationship between the “prologue”, the “text of the novel” and the “epilogue”. Here it is almost out of place to invoke Gerard Genet because among his “thresholds” he neither sees or explains the nature of the “prologue” or “epilogue” towards the “text”. His pretension is also not to delve into their theoretical aspects here, because the impetus for this narration is of a completely different nature.

Slobodan Vladušić plays with the meaning and function of both the “prologue” and the “epilogue” in his book *Delusion*.

“Prologue” indicates the double nature the author imposes on it. The first is of a poetic nature, where one tries to define the function of the “story” as the backbone of the narrative procedure, because it is, in itself, a kind of *delusion*. It is up to us to try to figure out whether this delusion belongs to the realm of storytelling or the realm of reading. At first glance, there is no such a hint, but then it seems that this delusion is hidden in the structural relation to the “text of the novel” or the “epilogue”. It could be said that it is annulled in those lines that summarize the narrative fabric that makes up the “text of the novel” by referring to the main characters. However, with the mentioned elements in the statement, the idea that the *name* is something that stands above everything is intertwined: “*Gwendoci*. Open that name. Open it. If you dare.” This quote from the “prologue” could act as toying with the reader’s position because Slobodan Vladušić is addressing him directly.

On the other hand, the “Epilogue or Contents” is even more enigmatic than the “Prologue” itself. In it, the reader is confronted with

the subjective, author's perspective of his own family and creative experience. In addition, the film director Fritz Lang is discussed in more detail, recorded both in the "Prologue" and in the "text of the novel". However, the central place is occupied by Miloš Crnjanski: "Then I remember, I don't even know why, a strange list that I came across in Crnjanski's legacy, which is kept in the National Library of Serbia. It was a list of names, Serbian, Czech, Slovak, Polish, Ukrainian, and some German, of which there are exactly 483. The names were written by Crnjanski, with a black ballpoint pen, on papers, which were now yellowed. Like the bones of a skeleton. From the date below the list of names, it can be seen that Crnjanski compiled it exactly one year before his death."

In fact, the mentioned list contains 482 names to which, separately, the name Gwendoci was added.

WHO IS GWENDOCI?

But, before embarking on a quest for the possible answer to this question, it is necessary to clarify other aspects involved in this story.

The content of the "Epilogue" does not meet the convention that we usually understand as an epilogue form of concluding the text. Rather, it could be accepted as a form of "prologue" in which motives for the creation of the "text of the novel" would be presented. Slobodan Vladušić does not say anywhere that the above list functions as a stimulus for writing the "Berlin secret of Miloš Crnjanski". It is not always necessary that the author has to say "it's this and that" because his task is to narrate. If one accepts this idea, then the "prologue" and the "text of the novel" together with the "epilogue" are parts of a unique entirety that in itself becomes fiction, because "stories do not differ from each other". Is the list of names fiction? Miloš Verulović tore up the letter-confession of Maks de Grot. Vladušić says that he copied the list of names from the legacy of Miloš Crnjanski and does not present it, unlike introducing the reader to the content of the destroyed letter. The doubling of fictitiousness is precisely facilitated by such actions, which is especially contributed to by the second part of the title "Epilogue or Contents". At first, one could expect a brief presentation of the elements of storytelling in the "text of the novel". Clarification of this way of naming could shed light on the structure of Slobodan Vladušić's book *Delusion*.

Finally, let's return to the title question: WHO IS GWENDOCI?

The appearance of a character named Gwendoci on the final pages of the "text of the novel" does not resolve his mentioning neither in the "prologue" nor in the "epilogue" at all: "His face is still as benevolent

as it is. At first, I think it is because he understands and sympathizes with me. However, then I realize as if in some epiphany, that none of my words reached his consciousness.”

Classic storytelling forms would require different ways of introducing characters to the scene. Even the genre typology of the “text of the novel” would require it. However, Gwendoci’s appearance on the shore of the lake and the meeting with Miloš Verulović seems to unite all three parts of the book – “prologue”, “text of the novel” and “epilogue”. He is a kind of delusion in the book because he is not the subject of the quest/investigation.

Translated from the Serbian by
Ljubica Jankov

GORAN RADONJIĆ

A NOVEL ABOUT BERLIN

At the beginning of Slobodan Vladušić's novel *Delusion*, in the *Prologue*, the reader is confronted with numerous secrets. The narrator, who has yet to be discovered, addresses someone: perhaps the reader himself, perhaps the hero who will soon take over the narration, and perhaps himself—and maybe, first of all, each of them, because the novel also has as its theme the doubling, parallels between characters, writing and reading. Themes of identity, freedom, travelling, and trauma are also introduced. Both important for the composition, and also significant on the symbolic level, the novel begins with motifs of sleep and awakening, while the epilogue begins with the opening of the eyes. At the very end there is a hug. The relationship between the voices addressing the reader is also important here.

The book starts from a state of mind that is said to have no words to describe it, in which consciousness awakens, where there are no dreams, no desires, no “coded memory”. There is only one name, which, like a coffin, carries words, places, book reports, as well as “everything that is close to you, but put together in a way that is unknown to you”. We can understand this as entering the unconscious, which, as Lacan says, is structured like a language. You need to reexamine those signs, and put them back together, build yourself up. On the second level, the author sends the hero, Miloš Verulović, to Berlin in 1928, to the embassy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, to his namesake, Crnjanski, who is his “friend from the past”. That syntagma, dear to Vladušić himself, who, among other things, varied it in the title of his biography of Crnjanski, also opens the third level, the level of writing and reading. A kind of hybridity of the novel is noticeable, a mixture of different types of writing.

The original title of Vladušić's novel was *Crnjanski, and the Other one*, that one, as well as the final title, refers to the classics of Serbian literature. The first version emphasizes that he is the central hero, given in a relationship with another character, so this relationship can be compared to Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson, regarding the investigation and the narration, or to the pair of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, as representatives of two opposite views of seeing the world. The second version of the title is a word that is associated with the *Second Book of Migrations* and puts in the foreground the character of the world, an attempt to understand it.

In the central part of the novel, Verulović narrates how he follows Crnjanski in search of one of their compatriots, believing that he has disappeared. The investigation takes us through the menagerie of Berlin, which with four and a half million inhabitants was the largest city in Europe at the time. This also makes *Delusion* a space novel and allows numerous topics to be introduced. Berlin is depicted as a place that personifies doubling: "nothing is what it seems to be, and everything is only what it seems to be," Vladušić's hero says. The interpretation is thematized. In that megalopolis labyrinth, money is the greatest value, and stories "turn, like the axles of a locomotive, but they don't get anywhere and they don't transform anything." Here people "live without a biography and die without a death certificate", they are in danger of being turned into raw materials, into pieces of coal. Crnjanski in that world, as the narrator says, looks like "a kind of unusual animal newly arrived in the Berlin zoo". The era of the Weimar Republic, carnivalesque, with cabarets, avant-garde rethinking in art, political turbulence, and industrial expansion, gives the motivation to introduce characters from different backgrounds and social groups, as well as to shed light on modern civilization from an unusual perspective.

Following the heroes from the café through the squares and streets of Berlin, the reader may wonder if there is any intrigue there at all, and why Verulović follows Crnjanski in search of a man who can even seem invisible. The crime itself is also problematized, i.e., its recognition: "In the future, the crimes themselves will be so hidden that it will be more difficult to discover them than their perpetrators," says Crnjanski. Related to this is the idea that stories differ in having the courage to listen to them to the end; or to be told, from the beginning. It is clear, then, the moralistic aspect of the text and the extent to which Vladušić's novel is based on the function of literature. As Borges notes, in our chaotic era, the detective story preserves the classical virtues and saves the order. Or at least the hope that order exists, we would add. Verulović is looking for the intrigue and the solution to the mystery, but he is also attracted by the fascination with the personality of Crnjanski (to whom

he does not relate without an ironic distance), as well as the need to find the Meaning. The atmosphere in the novel *Delusion* is almost the same as Crnjanski, the writer, describes in *The Book about Germany*: “Half of Germany is such that only novels could be written about it, and the other half is such that only a film can show it.” By that, I don’t just mean the “cinematic nature” of Vladušić’s novel. Vladušić’s depiction of Berlin can be understood in the cross-section of different literary and film genres and authors, to which the novel itself refers, explicitly or implicitly. It is the space from Döblin’s novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, as well as Fassbinder’s series of the same title. The modern reader will also remember the *Babylon Berlin* series, as well as Folker Kučer’s novel *One Unsolved Case*. It is the atmosphere of hard-boiled prose by Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler, as well as noir and neo-noir films. Fritz Lang is also present in many ways, as one of the protagonists in the novel, with his German films, as well as the American ones that he is yet to film. The motif of the hourglass puts the clock and the issue of time in the foreground, and there is a clear association with Danilo Kiš. An illustration from Kiš’s novel (which we can understand, for example, as a vase, an hourglass, a chalice, two figures or one that is reflected) will be directly quoted in one collage. Its origin, we know, is in Roland Laing’s book *The Divided Self*. Let’s add here Milorad Pavić and Paul Auster as well.

Numerous intertextual connections in the novel *Delusion*, characteristic of the art of our time (and not only of it), the reader can follow and see as the crucial, or they can be understood as subordinate to the plot. This can also be applied to Vladušić’s other books, first of all with the novel *Big Rush*, which is invoked by its motifs and characters, but also with the previous ones, *Forward* and *We, Deleted*. There is a clear association with the books *Crnjanski*, *Megalopolis* and *Literature and Comments*. It can be said that Vladušić confirms himself as a recognizable and important personality in our culture with his latest novel.

Slobodan Vladušić’s novel *Delusion* can be defined, among other things, as a historical novel in which the causes of well-known historical events are articulated. As is usually true for the historical novel, Vladušić’s text invites us to compare it with our time, from general ideas about a man and the structure of the world to motifs such as taking human organs. It is both a metaphysical detection and a novel about writing, about the search for a form. That’s why the metafictional aspect is emphasized in various ways, from the thematization of writing and reading, through the discussions about genres and artistic processes led by the characters, to intermediality, the functional use of Latin and Cyrillic or focusing on the graphic form of the text. The boundary between reality and fiction is also problematized. For Vladušić, it is

testamentary writing—another term important for Vladušić as the author. It is about the meaning of life and death (the motto, from Shestov, highlights death as a theme). The death of his father will have a crucial influence on Crnjanski (both the writer and the hero of the novel). In the epilogue, therefore, the theme that can be defined as *ars moriendi* will come to the fore. Therefore, writing is two-way: it is a replica addressed to many friends from the past, but also the opening of a new dialogue, with current and future friends. In order to understand the story, says Vladušić's hero, we need to be a part of it: "until you become its hero, you don't know anything about it." By becoming part of it, we also become participants in a special, friendly dialogue. And we do it with joy.

Translated from the Serbian by
Ljubica Jankov

JELENA MARIĆEVIĆ BALAC

THE FOURTH BOOK OF *MIGRATIONS*

Miloš Crnjanski published the novel *Migrations* in 1929, and the *Second Book of Migrations* in 1962. Slobodan Vladušić considers Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars* the *Third Book of Migrations*. In the essay "Pavić and the Good Homeland", moreover, he writes about the migration of the Khazars into dreams, which represent the homeland of Adam's body. Still, it should be borne in mind that for the Khazars, a *dream* is a "state of clear consciousness" and "the moment of the highest fulfilment of life". In this context, the Khazar dreams should be compared with the dream of Vuk Isaković and the Serbian people about Russia, the star and the possibility of a New Serbia in which they would preserve their identity.

The novel *Delusion* would therefore be the *Fourth Book of Migrations*. Writing a virtuoso monograph *About the Ending of the Novel. The Meaning of the Ending in Miloš Crnjanski's Novel The Second Book of Migrations*, Milo Lompar observes that migrations become the subject of "narrative reflection, not just storytelling" and in the apostrophizing "the second book" he sees a potential "biblical echo", while in the context of Crnjanski's reading of Rally, he interprets that his "second" is at the same time the "last" book of *Migrations*, because, as the writer says, "that's what our time used to be like, it's better that it stays that way." Pavić's time, obviously, gave its response to the epoch, because the Serbs were dissolved and disappeared within the country in which they lived. The era of the 21st century and the disappearance of the SFRY and FR Yugoslavia from the world map also led to the creation of the *Fourth Book of Migrations*, which, to put it bluntly, ironically thematizes the incessant and intensified migration of the Serbian people to Germany and the almost maniacal learning of the German language, for the sake of an alleged better life.

In order for the novel *Delusion* to really function as the *Fourth Book of Migrations*, the writer establishes an intense dialogue with both Crnjanski and Pavić, but discreetly and effectively. Miloš Crnjanski is one of the key characters of the novel, and the novel is set in 1928 when *Migrations* was published in sequels in the Serbian Literary Gazette (Srpski književni glasnik). The novel *Delusion* is printed in Latin, but fragments from *Migrations* are given in Cyrillic script, as well as parts of Dučić's poem "Sunset", "Come on, Jana, kolo to dance" and the poem "Know Yourself" by Jovan Hristić. These functionalized quotes simultaneously reveal the symbolic significance of the Kajmakčalan battle both for the Serbian people and Miloš Crnjanski, but they also reveal autopoetic links with the novels *Forward*, *We*, *Deleted* and *Grand Assault*. Dučić's verses and the song "Come on, Jana" were recited and echoed on Kajmakčalan before the assault of Duke Vuk's volunteers and represent a kind of bequest and vow.

The *Second Book of Migrations* is most strongly present through the title *Delusion*, because the countries to which the Serbs moved were the opposite of what they expected, therefore, a huge disappointment, a hallucination, a mirage, an apparition and a fairy tale. It is the point of origin of all migrations today. The answer offered by the novel to this question is unspoken but present by Šantić's "Stay Here" and fight for yourself and your people here! Instead of German, learn Serbian, and then "Learn the Poem" (Miodrag Pavlović): "Defend yourself! Learn the Poem! (...) and stand still when the question is heard / who among you will close the door (...) in the midst of this war that erases memory / learn the poem, it is the salvation!" That is why the "Epilogue or Contents" at the end of Vladušić's novel should perhaps be understood as a dialogue with Pavić's "Final Note on the Use of this Dictionary", which underlines the strength and saving power of books and literature, love, family values and intellectual honesty.

Slobodan Vladušić, in addition to the aforementioned relationships, interweaves the novel with numerous explicit and implicit allusions to the creativity and work of Miloš Crnjanski. "We took our blood from one place to another (...) It is our terrible pride which" from the "Hymn" found its creepy stronghold in the novel *Delusion*, through the trade in blood and organs, among others, and the Serbs who did hard physical work in Germany. The fate of those people is condensed into the character of Milutin Topalović, who disappeared, but who is persistently searched for by Miloš Crnjanski and Miloš Verulović, like Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson. They are looking for him simply because he is a Serb. Each Serb is important! Crnjanski says in the novel that he "believes that this man is no longer among the living." His voice is hoarse as if he has known Topalović for decades. And he

has never even seen him. In the poem “Serbia”, Crnjanski writes “I will die for Serbia, and we haven’t even met”. Vladušić reckons with that, when in the tenth chapter he states the sentence: “Can one die for Kindom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes?”, but in this way it is suggested that Milutin Topalović is a synecdoche for *Serbia*. Is it then possible to give up the search for Topalović and his salvation? Therefore, this search is not a bizarre act, but a heroic one. Kajmakčalan calls the bet and “raises”. Hence, the search for Topalović is equivalent to the breakthrough of the Thessaloniki Front in the *Grand Assault*.

Crnjanski and Verulović “dug to the bottom”, as stated on the back cover of the novel. From chapter to chapter, as going through the circles of Dante’s Hell or Berlin’s Babylon, they went to its very bottom, where the traitors should be found. They encounter traitors to humanity in the broadest sense, to various forms of the decimation of the population on the planet, from the Institute of Birth Control, to various diseases, epidemics and wars. The horizons of biopolitics are, therefore, one of the key themes of the novel. Speaking in the poetic language of Paul Celan, they experienced the “black milk” of Berlin, listening to his “Death Fugue”.

I do not mention this metaphor accidentally because the motif of breasts is one of the most present in the novel and is contrasted with the Mother of God the Milkmaid from the travelogue *Love in Tuscany*. Women’s breasts in Germany are a reflection of sexuality and the spirit of fertility, so they do not have the aura of the artistic, vital and sacred, as with Crnjanski. Opposite the German sausages, the mass slaughter of cattle and the stench of the Berlin air, which is like the gale in the *Damned Yard*, stands an interesting Italian meal by Maks de Grote, which consists of spaghetti, tomato sauce, olive oil, onions, parsley and basil. Perhaps this meal is a silent suggestion that we should see the outlines of humanity in it.

Vladušić is very powerful in details and there is no mere arbitrariness with him in this respect. Small packets of sugar that were used to pay the prostitutes in *Stark’s Nest* are semanticized in many ways, not only through the ironic sentence that the Prussians put sugar in every meal. On the one hand, a dialogue is opened with the story “Holy Vojvodina” and Pantelija Popić, where the distribution of sugar reflects his relationship with his wife and lover who has become his wife in the meantime. On the other hand, we are dealing with the current German series *Berlin, Babylon*, in which this method of payment is directly explained.

A more careful reader will certainly notice Kiš’s motif of the walnut shell, which opens up the question of the cenotaph in the novel, but also the seemingly enigmatic lilac juice or mulberry flowers. In

the *Second Book of Migrations*, lilacs were one of the features of Vienna, and mulberry trees were part of the homestead of bedcover maker Grozdin. The serving of lilac juice in the Serbian embassy in Berlin points to the connection between Berlin and Vienna, i.e., Germany and Austria, but both floral motifs are a feature of Serbian denationalization. This is impressively conveyed to us by the disappearance of the Pirot carpets from the Serbian embassy, as something characteristic and recognizable for the Serbs.

In order for the Serbs not to disappear like the Khazars, one should, of course, keep the Pirot carpets, “know thyself” and keep their wits, i.e., the brain, because this organ, unlike the others, cannot be replaced. The brain of the Serbs is Serbian literature, and if we lose that, if we give up on Milutin Topalović, then we will be eaten by dogs and cats in the landfills of Germany, without a grave or a marker. Serbian literature is therefore a vow to our survival, our “state of clear consciousness”, “the greatness of the country in the depths of time” and a star in the “endless blue circle”. This novel is also its defense since, by its discrediting, discrimination and neglect, we are disappearing as a people.

Translated from the Serbian by
Ljubica Jankov

“THE DRAGON” AWARD OF THE MATICA SRPSKA

JOVAN DELIĆ

THE POEM AS A MEANS OF BROADENING AND DEEPENING HORIZONS AND SPIRIT

In an effort to be, as much as possible, in the service of poetry and of the award-winning poet, of the Matica srpska and the Zmaj Award, we have given up on delivering a solemn speech praising the laurate and opted, instead, to delve into the intricacies of a few poems selected for tonight's program, and thus demonstrate, most obviously, why Miroslav Aleksić is this year's laureate. In the book of selected and new poems *Travarev naslednik (The Herbalist's Heir)*, which just appeared in the "Višnjić Prize" edition, there are at least fifty, if not more, similar, and even better poems, and there is not a single bad one.

The poet Miroslav Aleksić surprises us every time with something ordinary, concrete, already seen, experienced and confirmed, only to turn it inside out, transforming it into something unusual, wondrous and subject to multiple interpretations, turning his description, his seeming verism, into magic and giving it an otherworldly, metaphysical dimension. His poems often have a lyrical topic, an anecdote told in a conversational rhythm, in free verse, but then they suddenly sway, change and show their depth.

Thus, the poem "U Savini" ("In Savina Monastery") describes a group of friends, boisterous beyond the limits of decency, inebriated with grape brandy, in the churchyard between two churches of Our Lady. Stevan Raičković recites his magical and favorite sonnet "Niti" ("Threads"), while Darinka Jevrić, Blagoje Baković and Miroslav Aleksić listen to him, enveloped by the smell of chlorophyll, iodine, salt, lighted

candles and grape brandy. With the sonnet “Niti” Raičković connects “the unborn with the dead” and this intertextual play by Aleksić turns the monk Josif Tropović—Njegoš’s teacher at the Savina Monastery who has been dead for over two centuries—into a listener. He now “lies at the monastery cemetery / from the high Heavens dead drunk”. This way the unborn and the living are literally connected with the dead by way of Raičković’s sonnet, the abbot’s grape brandy and heavenly intoxication.

Enthralled by the epiphanic lyrical moment, the lyrical subject raises and lifts the cross onto himself, looking out at the sea, where “through the dark, / mighty green” he sees “a white sail out on the sea”. The adjective *mighty* (*jedro* in Serbian, TN) and the noun *sail* (*jedro* in Serbian, TN) are same-sounding indicating ambivalence: it is not clear whether it is “just a ship” or “maybe the sweet soul / of the lost man from Boka”. And the lonely sail can, through intertextual play, allusion, invoke yet another great dead poet—Mikhail Yurevich Lermontov:

Белеет парус одинокий...
A silver sail, the ocean loner...

How the living and the dead become connected through threads that break! Especially as we are interpreting these lines tonight, and Raičković’s and Jevrić’s threads are already broken.

Aleksić finishes with irony to link the poem to the churchyard and the two churches: it is time for evening service and the poor, good abbot would be more than happy to see the boisterous company of poets depart.

This is typical Aleksić: a few anecdotes, and some irony, and description, and a concrete place, and concrete people, and culture, and verses, and intertextual play which links this world with the world of the dead, and a poetic revival of Josif Tropović, Njegoš, Lermontov and the soul of the wondering man from Boka—he opens up the splendor of that which has been seen, experienced, reminded of, awakened and invoked. Between this world and the next, a white sail floats. What looks like verism and narration becomes transformed through images, reflection, sudden twists and knowledge of history and tradition into a cerebral poem.

The title of the poem “Tamni lazur veka” (“The Dark Lazurite of the Century”) suggests an unusual, metaphorical and metaphysical image of the century, but the poet surprises us yet again. The poem is built on the principle of description and advanced comparison. The first fourteen lines rhapsodize about the beauty of a mountain, which

the poetic subject is moving away from, with numerous heart-warming, concrete images and details. The next five lines paint a transformed picture of the mountain at dusk, a transformation from a riches of detail into a “two-dimensional grey massif”:

When at dusk you look back
You see a two-dimensional grey massif,
Which somewhere near its summit in the clouds
Turns into the color of the sky.

It is the five mentioned lines that prepare for the point of the poem and herald the comparison—a picture full of diverse moments which becomes covered, levelled and flattened by the “dark lazurite of the century”:

So, too, does the diversity of moments,
Which you, passionately and irreversibly,
Lived for years,
Become covered by the humus of rotten time
And levelled by the dark lazurite of the century.

That which in the beginning, like a mountain, seemed like an exciting and endless splendor and diversity—a thriving life—turns into a source of melancholy under the cover of “the humus of rotten time” and “the dark lazurite of the century”.

Dazzled by the charms, brightness and magnificence of Lisbon, which is eroticized by the blending colors, the green of the Tagus River and the blue of the Atlantic, the poet delivers his main point of this ostensible travel poem, “Lisbon”, with the soothing power of magical light, making it otherworldly and healing:

If somebody were to take
A sliver of that glow
No bigger than a candle flame,
And bring it in the palm of his hand
Into the autumnal dispensary,
He would heal the light inside.

We will also mention two poems which, seemingly cold and emotionally restrained, talk about the loss of former comrades and friends with whom we used to share this world. In the poem “Preferans” the lyrical subject deals cards to non-existing players at a non-existent table. The game turns into absurdity because the two players no longer

exist, nor does the table, nor the game itself. All the games are played. The only thing that remains is absurdity, or the appearance of absurdity, and the terrible magnitude of the loss; what remains is a void, a human and cosmic hole:

In spring they crack,
The ice dams,
From the sun blindfolds fall off,
Winter anxieties collide
Like, in a whiskey glass,
Round ice cubes do.
I get up and turn on the record player
Which is not there
I play an Ella Fitzgerald record,
I sit down at a table that is not there
And I deal the cards for Preferans
For myself and those who are not there.
Three times ten
And two in the talon
Like countless times
In that old time
Which is not there.

The poem “Portreti” (“Portraits”) has reached perfection of simplicity. The purpose to our life and the meaning to the world are given by the beings with whom we have filled our allotted time on earth, i.e., by those privileged moments we have lived life to the fullest with them. Their portraits would appear if we could connect these moments and these beings “like stars in the constellations”. But such connections are only possible in a poem, in the form of longing and nostalgia for loved ones and for understanding the “meaning of the world beyond solitude”:

If the moments
That we truly lived,
In days and years
That escape us now
Into eternity,
If we could connect these moments
In our minds
With imaginary lines,
Like stars in the constellations
In the sky of a cloudless summer night,
Portraits would emerge

Of those we chose
To jointly understand,
The meaning of the world,
Beyond solitude.
Simple, deep, experienced, painful.

It has already been said that Miroslav Aleksić is a poet of culture; that the readers of his books are like in a fine library with a selection of distinguished authors and works: from *Gilgamesh*, *the Bible*, Homer, Lao Tzu, to his favorite Germans Hölderlin, Rilke and Kafka, from *Don Quixote* to Jovan Hristić, Borislav Radović and Ivan B. Lalić, to Aleksić's friends and contemporaries. There is good reason why Aleksić's kinship with Jovan Hristić and Borislav Radović has oftentimes been pointed to, but there is also clear closeness with the less often mentioned Ivan B. Lalić. In the poem "Uspomena" ("A Memory") the poet promises that, if he ever goes to Constantinople, he will draw the face of the poet who reintroduced the Byzantine into modern Serbian poetry onto a stone wall and who, with his *Četiri kanona* (*Four Canons*), single-handedly revived and modernized the canon in modern Serbian lyricism, and, with him, also the poet, composer, icon painter and icon lover John of Damascus before the Three-handed Mother of God. He will draw him as he speaks his verses, enraptured by wine and engulfed in clouds of smoke, and by quoting two lines by Lalić, Aleksić punctuates "Uspomena":

At last only the city remains
At the mouth of the sea, fenced in by the red eyes of fire.

Constantinople—once surrounded by fires and armies of the Crusaders, then the Turks, a city that has suffered and been victimized, history's martyr, an insufficient warning to our contemporaries to avoid repeating the crimes of the Crusaders—is the capital of the poetry of Ivan V. Lalić. Aleksić too wrote a poem "Opsada Carigrada" ("The Siege of Constantinople").

Aleksić is a poet of culture also when he writes about the poet without a grave, Vezilić, whose "earthly ashes" rest "in an unmarked grave", "under the hexameters of grass / somewhere between the Academy / the Temple of St. Nicholas", as he watches Vezilić play "find your own grave" with the graveless brothers Trlajić and Koder "in the garden of Elysium". While this game goes on in the afterlife, "the one who has yet / to become a Serbian poet"—presumably Aleksić himself—"can see Cyrillic letters / fall from the sky like shooting stars". He sings praises of Vezilić, and the poets without graves, and the future

poet who watches and catches the shooting stars in the form of Cyrillic letters of his mother tongue; and these letters—through the miracle of tradition—shine a warm light upon his own soul.

For Aleksić, for his poetic process, and even as a confirmation of him as a poet of culture, representative is the poem “Skaska o galebu” (“The Fantastic Tale of the Seagull”). There is nothing fairytale-like in it; it is more of a parody. A deeply melancholic, realistic depiction of “pedestrian seagulls / pecking in the field” somewhere by the highway in the agricultural district of Čenej. It was developed as a parody of epic images: the seagulls in question do not glisten in the sky above water, they do not resemble the Novi Sad bridge with spread wings over the Danube, nor do they swoop down, flash like, on the fish in the deep waters, but, instead, like the poorest winged wretches they trudge through the muddy field, “with wings glued up to their ears, / legs muddy up to their knees, / heavy hearts up to the skies, / grey eyes, listless and sluggish, unable to say anything, / to testify in any sense / about their famous chivalrous nature”; they are the complete opposite of all albatrosses, all flying creatures, even of the Pastor’s dusty duck, the final humiliation and the metaphor of sorrow. This veristic image is deepened by a literary subtext—with pigeons, swans, cranes, ravens, albatrosses, eagles, falcons, doves, and more recently, sparrows—but their sorrow, the sorrow of the seagull whose eyes the poet first looked deeply in, is further deepened by a literary allusion to “Konstantin’s seagull in Chekhov’s play”: still, this Pannonian seagull looked more miserable “because he was alive”.

A short poem about lead, hunting and the catch, with prominent sound repetition,¹⁴ can be interpreted as a parable about a wish that is as heavy as lead, and disillusioned dreams about a plentiful catch; the fisherman finds himself empty-handed after fishing, without a net and without fish, without the hunt and the catch. Brilliant in style, with two excellent similes, concise, the poem is reminiscent of other works in verse and prose about failed wishes and empty-handed hunters, such as the poem “Ribarčetov san” (“The Little Fisherman’s Dream”) by Branko Radičević and Hemingway’s famous *The Old Man and the Sea*, evoking similar sound repetition like in the wondrous line by Nastasi-jević “they hunt, yet are hunted”:

The net cuts the sea with its emptiness
As man is cut by the edges of life.
After all, what remains are only
Palms with glistening salt

¹⁴ In Serbian, the words which produce the repetitive sound are olovo (lead), lov (hunt) and ulov (catch). TN

And the hard rock in the distance, gilded with
Algae and fog of amalgam.
And you without lead and catch.

Culture sings also in the title and the title poem of the award-winning collection of poems *Kafkino matursko odelo* (*Kafka's Graduation Suit*). Reminiscences of Kafka are constant in Aleksić's poetry, sometimes in the title ("Milena Jesenska će dobiti pismo" "Milena Jesenska will Receive a Letter"), even in a title which suggests to the reader praise of the rural world ("Između dva sela" "Between Two Villages"). The uninformed know little of how much Kafka appreciated both the peasant and his grazing cow to whose mouth the grass raises itself; he perceived the peasant as the last of the nobility. Some of these affectionate sentiments are present in the poetry of Miroslav Aleksić as well, but there is even more of Kafka's feelings of constraint, threat, anxiety, alienation, and even betrayal by those closest to him, like in the title poem. Before becoming seen as mature and an adult, during a fitting for a new suit, the subject realizes that he is "exposed from the inside / displayed, a wooden doll", without the power to stand up in his own right, let alone to defend elementary dignity and freedom. The tailor is the one who determines the measurements and destiny; with his hooklike index finger he lifts the young man's head from his chest—the last line of defense—ominously rattling the scissors, while "the cloth remains silent" and "the felt is thick / to the point of suffocation". All this takes place with the mother's treacherous approval by nodding her head, leaving the young man with no support or ally, a wooden doll behind a meaningless screen.

However, no one has ever been so alone and forsaken as Christ "on that night" between Thursday and Friday. His apostles were nowhere to be found: the false one betrayed and denounced him, while the others fell asleep when he called on them to pray for him, and then ran off every which way. God was left alone and abandoned before the crucifixion. The poem "Gestsimanski vrt" ("The Garden of Gethsemane") was written with a voice of the collective lyrical subject—the voice of the apostles—because they know and feel best what they failed to do for God and man; they are the best witnesses to how weak even the strongest people are in the hour and day of judgement, and how unreliable even those of deepest faith can be; thus, this excellent poem contains a deep and universal anthropological discovery. The apostles' failure marked the whole history of Christ:

And we did not make,
Between Thursday and Friday

Even the smallest of gaps,
Like the one between door and threshold,
Enough for a letter to slip through,
Where from room to room
A thin line of light passes.

That is why the black night between Thursday and Friday lasts forever:

That night is still dark.
And a thorn grows quietly within it.

This thorn buds and grows for all future crowns of thorns and for man's walk through history. On this walk, Aleksić's people have suffered tragic historical experience, which the poet has translated into poetry, sometimes in a quite unexpected way like in the very successful poem "Strelčev strah od penala" ("The Shooter's Fear of Penalties") dedicated to Peter Handke, which deals with the massacre of the farmers in Staro Gracko, or the poem "Prebilovci" about the suffering of the people from this village in Herzegovina. His historically themed poems are devoid of shallow, naïve involvement; as a rule, they are woven into cultural heritage, activating thus an archetype like in the poem "Kidisanje na Boga" ("Lunging at God"), which centers around the image of a man breaking off the cross from the Church of St. Elijah in the city of Podujevo, attacking thereby the remains of God in himself. We will present the five final lines of this poem, which is pure as crystal, without a hint of hatred; they contain a twist in meaning. The one who broke the cross now "floats over the abyss", revealing thereby the real truth—that the cross has, in fact, broken him:

The cross keeps him from falling.
It has lifted him and he floats over the abyss.
The man has finally broken the cross,
And holds in his hands the arms of the cross and the body of the cross,
But sees not that he has been crucified.

We, however, find the most wonderful poem of Aleksić, and our favourite, to be "Šišarka" ("The Pine Cone"), which can be interpreted as a metaphor of his poetry and poetics. This poem is the quintessence of Aleksić's implicit poetics.

A pine cone in a pine forest may seem like banal waste, dead and insignificant, but Aleksić, manages to turn something seemingly small and insignificant into a poetic and divine miracle. That is why he begins

the poem by praising the almighty time, which he is fascinated by in general: time “eats stars and planets”, / hills, stones and distant views”—yet this cosmic principle of transience and destruction “cannot but stop / and bow down every spring / to this, the precise, unadorned and resplendent”—pine cone. The highest power of cosmic proportion bows down every spring to this little conifer “waste”—the embodiment of precision, simplicity and splendor. Isn’t that Aleksić’s poetic ideal: “simplicity” as precision, unadornment and splendor? This oxymoronically precise, unadorned splendor is at the very heart of Aleksić’s poetics, embodied in a small pine cone, a miracle before which the cosmic principle of time bows down. Everything in the pine cone is precisely organized and arranged to perfection, composed to perfection:

In each seed – a drawer,
In each drawer – a message,
The message says:
Fall to the ground and wait for the rains...

This perfection of layout and composition is a poetic principle. It includes vitality and giving life, which is what Aleksić’s poetry celebrates despite being aware of the absurdity and man’s vulnerability and lack of freedom. There is also a lesson on patience here: “wait for the rains”; wait for the hour of explosion, for the decree of the pine cone as a symbol of the whole potential pine forest.

What follows is a whole poetic pine cone erotology; an explosion of love. The pine cone is a clip, a “*Kalashnikov* loaded with love bullets”. Aleksić’s erotology is divine, with a little bit of Ancient Greek, and a little bit of Christianity. His pine cone eros is a “fireworks of ideas, a dictionary of needles, / resin and tree rings”. It is a unification of erotology, botany and poetry, i.e., the world of ideas. He uses metaphors which simultaneously reference Laza Kostić and folk poetry. The pine cone is a “book of dreams where the singer reads: / *Grow, grow, my green pine tree...*”

It is only natural that Aleksić—following the first erotic, and erotological, i.e., the poetic trance—called on Dionysus, the god of ecstasy and creative passion and his Ancient Greece:

Every Greek, in the time of drunken paganism,
Knew why Dionysus
Had a handle on his staff in the shape of a pine cone.

This is, of course, something that Aleksić too knows very well, since he is, in terms of education, a bit of an Old Greek and a New Greek,

and thus an admirer of both Dionysus and Cavafy. If the entire potential pine forest is packed and perfectly arranged in a pine cone, and this pine forest will explode in passion in contact with water, i.e., rain, then there is no more natural symbol for the handle of Dionysus' staff than a pine cone, which is warmed by the hand of this god of ecstasy and drunken revelry.

The pine cone on Dionysus' staff serves as a basis to achieve contrast with us "advocates of temperance". And here Aleksić follows in the footsteps of Ivo Andrić. Not many people know that Ivo Andrić ironized the accountant or book-keeping, i.e., calculating, approach to life. Those who calculate much tend to overcalculate or miscalculate quite often. Using the contrast with Dionysus as a starting point, Aleksić, once again, employs knowledge, science, culture. Even science—and anatomy, no less—sings in this poem of his, creating a wonderful twist with a poetic imagery. The pine cone moves to the human head, into the brain. Anatomy in this poem creates a miracle by undoing human sobriety:

And we, advocates of temperance,
Who stopped and kept calculating,
Cannot see the skies from our nose
And we don't know that in our brain,
Right between the eyes,
In the cerebrospinal fluid softer
Than placenta
Floats a small gland,
In the shape of a pine cone
The receiver and transmitter
Of our love messages
Which, unbeknown to us, in our dreams,
We exchange with the Universe.

The poem begins with the Universe and ends with the Universe. The shape of the pine cone has moved into the human brain and through it we can, irrationally, communicate with the Universe.

It is amazing what Aleksić has applied in this wonderful poem: mythology, knowledge, botany, erotology, anatomy, poetics. And all in praise of the pine cone: the one in the pine forest, the one on Dionysus' staff and the one in the human brain. All intricately linked by some hand, or some idea, which a calculating person can never figure out. Three powerful twists in one poem belong to poetic riches and make for a small miracle which grows to cosmic proportions.

A poet does not know, even when he is highly educated—as Miroslav Aleksić most certainly is—what he has written, until he hears it recited by a decrepit interpreter. The old Socratic paradox is true of educated poets as well. And of decrepit interpreters of poetry, still capable of feeling the cosmic explosion of a pine cone in the forest, on the staff of Dionysus and in the human brain.

The day before yesterday was Saint Trifun Day; vineyards were pruned and Dionysus rejoices. Yesterday we celebrated Sretenje, Serbia's Statehood Day. Today, it is already spring. The only thing that remains for us to do is to wish Miroslav Aleksić that Time bows before his, “precise, unadorned and resplendent” pine cone, and then that we get to read new poems worthy of Zmaj and the Matica srpska from the book of dreams.

(Speech delivered at the award ceremony for the Zmaj Dragon Award at the Ceremonial session of Matica Srpska on the 16th of February 2022)

Translated from Serbian by
Milana Todoreskov

MIROSLAV ALEKSIĆ

THE AESTHETIC AND THE ETHICAL FACE OF A POEM

Joining the ranks of winners of the Zmaj Award means more, at least to this poet, than just receiving a literary award, regardless of how prestigious. The ceremonial act of receiving this literary recognition is an initiation into a special national literary corpus to which one has longed to be part of, or, more accurately, dreamed of belonging to while writing one's poems. I hope that those who claim that poetry awards are not important will forgive me for my personal and "ceremonious" tone. The sheer names of previous winners should suffice to make any Serbian language poet proud to have earned and accepted the Zmaj Award.

But, let us get back to Zmaj right away. Even during his lifetime, he was more than just an ordinary poet. Together with Njegoš and Radičević, he was one of the poets who fastest and deepest became rooted in the Serbian people and his poetry rapidly became part of the national poetic body or tapestry. It was recited by children and adults alike, sung by tamburitza players, known by heart even by a giant such as Tesla, who perceived Zmaj as the pinnacle of the Serbian spirit and the most sublime expression of the Serbian being. The only other thing he valued as much as the *gusle* fiddle and the particular poetry that is sung with *gusle*.

As I was reading these days in the newspapers about the new winner of the Zmaj Award, one interesting thing came to mind. Namely, the poet that stands before you was mentioned in a newspaper 57 years ago; in the Novi Sad daily paper *Dnevnik*, dated April 23, 1965, an article with a picture of a boy was published, entitled *The Child Prodigy from Vrbas*. The article read: "Miroslav Aleksić, the son of Milosava and Milivoj Aleksić from Vrbas, has just turned four and knows the names

of almost all European and Asian heads of state, foreign and domestic pop singers and the songs they usually sing by heart. Little Miroslav gave us a detailed account of ‘how Lee Oswald killed the former president of the USA’; he knew everything there is to know about the achievements of the astronauts, not to mention that he can read the poems of Uncle Jova Zmaj fluently. We thought that he might have learned the poems by heart, but Miroslav took the newspapers we handed him and – read as fluently as he had read the poems.” (end of quote)

I realized, as I delved into my own past for this occasion, that this newspaper article was indeed very indicative of the poet standing before you. As you know, in Goethe’s Bildungsroman “Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship”, the boy gets a puppet theatre as a birthday present, together with scenography, puppets and props. Everything small, but almost real. This toy would likely come to play the most important role in his development and in the shaping of his spirit. The same role to me was played by a comprehensive collection of poetry by Zmaj and an anthology of epic folk poems. Leaving the anthology aside for the moment, in this early childhood before school, I had the most intense experience reading the poem *Tri hajduka* (*The Three Guerilla Fighters*) by Zmaj. Every time I re-read it, which was often, I would feel the same rage rise in me because of the pasha’s brutality and the final lines “and the skeletons—they laughed “God forgive!” always felt cathartic. When I would go down to the old cellar in our old colonial house in Stari Vrbas, the darkness would make me shudder and feel afraid. But I kept convincing myself that even if I come across the skeletons of three Serbian guerilla fighters from the time of the Ottoman Empire, nothing bad would happen to me because they were, after all, my ancestors.

At the traditional fairs of that time, I would stand tiptoe near the horses adorned with colorful stripes, looking for Zmaj’s gipsy. Even though I knew well how fast horses could move, I still believed, deep down, in the gipsy’s most wonderful lies in the world.

After reading *Svetle grobove* (*Bright Graves*), I began seeing the land, the plough fields, the meadows, and even my own backyard with new eyes. I could sense Zmaj’s great, bright underworld. I was born 56 years after his death and it is only now that I have become aware that this was, in fact, not so long ago. And that—to paraphrase Jan Kott—Zmaj is, in fact, our contemporary. If, by some miracle, he could be here with us tonight, he would be happy that Vojvodina is in Serbia. He would be proud of the Matica srpska as it is now, with its exemplary Library, reputable Gallery and Publishing Center, which, with its largest edition, is a leader among Serbian publishers.

However, he would also stand witness to the fact that Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a century and a half after the Herzegovina

uprisings, still bleed for their rights, that his beloved Montenegro—a country he, as well as his blood brother Laza Kostić, loved to visit and which used to be ruled by a strong Serbian ruler, his friend and poet Prince Nikola Petrović—had renegaded into an anti-Serbian entity and that ‘the Serb Marseillaise’ “Onamo, ’namo!” in Kosovo and Metohija had been silenced.

Zmaj was a poet with a great national task. I don’t know whether anybody has ever made an attempt to count the number of times he mentioned the words: a Serb, a Serbian woman, a Serbian child, Serbia, or just the adjective, but I believe the number would be well over several hundred. It sets a unique example when a poet singing of love, of a woman, emphasizes that she is Serbian, or when he writes about his deceased children says that they asked him to dedicate himself to other Serbian children. It is true that Zmaj’s time was the time of romanticism, of strong national movements and wars for the liberation of peoples, but he was anything but a rigid nationalist. This is confirmed by the recognition he received from Hungarian poets in Budapest who organized a ceremony to mark forty years of his literary work. Zmaj’s persistence and power in raising the national spirit was on a par only with that of his friend Svetozar Miletić. And about Miletić he rhapsodized: “Raise the children from their cradles, Let them remember his face.” Zmaj was, eventually, crushed by the deaths of his wife and children, none of whom outlived him, just as Miletić was crushed by the moldy dungeons of the mighty Austro-Hungarian Empire *where the wretched suffocate*.

Zmaj socialized with many great men of the time, from Miletić, Branko, Đorđe Popović Daničar, Đura Daničić, to Laza Kostić, who was his blood brother, and Đura Jakšić with whom he stayed friends from the days of schooling in Vienna until Đura’s death in Belgrade in 1878; by then Đura had become impoverished and sick and Zmaj took care of him and treated him to the end. He dedicated the poem *Svetli grobovi* (*Bright Graves*) to Đura.

The son of the senator and mayor of Novi Sad, Pavle Gavanski, and Marija Gavanski, who was from one of the wealthiest family of landowners in Sentomaš, today’s Srbobran, Zmaj helped the poor by treating them for free. He was born two hundred meters from here, at the corner of Ćurčijska Street (today’s Pašićeva Street) and Zlatne grede Street, where one wing of the Platoneum, the palace of bishop Platon Atanacković, was later built. The Matica srpska relocated to the palace from Budapest in 1864. This important year to our culture, 1864, is the year of Vuk’s death, and the year Zmaj’s collection of poems “Đulići” (“Little Roses”) was published in Novi Sad. With the relocated Matica srpska, the already open Serbian National Theatre and the Serbian

Reading Room of Novi Sad, it is only natural that Novi Sad became the Serbian Athens. And from this Serbian Athens of ours, today's European Capital of Culture emerged.

And, in conclusion, I would like to say a few words about the awarded book from my perspective. I have been asked lately by friends from the Capital of Culture about the title *Kafkino maturalo odelo*, why such a title and what it is supposed to mean. The book begins with the title poem which is supposed to indicate to the reader what the idea and broader meaning of the whole collection are. The time when it was written was in essence Kafkian; the pandemic created the frame. The radical international encroachment into the space of human liberties is the key issue of this major global event. The world functions between nature as the source and corrective of the human community, on the one hand, and an international society which is being created before our eyes, on the other. New, imposed social constructs stand in opposition to the divine and the human nature. Ultimately, human freedom is at stake in everything. And power, violence and various forms of media manipulation are means of depriving people of their freedom. The role of today's poet, just like Zmaj's role was in his time, is to love Man and respect freedom by creating poems. The aesthetic and the ethical face of poetry are one and the same beautiful face.

And, lastly:

Many thanks to the Jury for recognizing quality that deserves to be awarded! Thank you to the Matica srpska, which has been a guardian and defender of literary, aesthetic, scientific and moral values of this nation for two centuries. Thank you to all my friends who share the joy of this special event tonight. And thank you to my Magdalena, Mina and Marko for their invaluable love and support.

(Speech delivered at the award ceremony for the Zmaj Dragon Award at the Ceremonial session of the Matica srpska on the 16th of February 2022)

Translated from Serbian by
Milana Todoroskov

JOVAN SKERLIĆ FROM A WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW

Klara Skerlić. *My Liwe with Jovan Skerlić*, translated from French by Živomir Mladenović, Akademska knjiga, Novi Sad 2021.

The mere fact that the memoir of Klara Skerlić, the wife of Jovan Skerlić, has finally become available to the Serbian readership, both to experts and the wider public interested in the cultural history of Serbs, is an unequivocal testimony to the editorial endeavor of Slavica Garonja Radovanac. Written eighty years ago (in the period from 1938 to 1939), the memoir sheds light “from a woman’s point of view” on the remarkable figure of Jovan Skerlić, complementing the memoir of Skerlić’s sister, Jelena Skerlić *Život među ljudima* (*Life Among People*), which was edited by Professor Zorica Hadžić, PhD, in 2014, and also published by Akademska knjiga from Novi Sad. These two views of Skerlić, we believe, will encourage comparative readings and fruitful conversations in the future, confirming thereby the importance of the authors’ effort and the dedicated archival work invested in them. Commenting on the portrait of a brother and that of a husband, Slavica Garonja Radovanac points out:

Their memories, therefore, certainly represent a more intimate, private and ‘oblique’ female view of the great literary historian, who, to them, was a brother and a husband above all, and certainly different from the commonly perceived figure of Skerlić in public discourse and our history of literature.

In addition, both memoirs provide a valuable insight into the cultural and public life of Serbia by two educated and sensitive women, which, albeit still somewhat ‘oblique’ due to the specific position of the authors as women, is no less worthy of attention.

The memoir was translated with utmost care by Živomir Mladenović, whose interest in the subject actually encouraged Klara Skerlić to write down, by hand, her memories and reminiscences of her husband, in French, twenty-five years after his death. Since it was a request by Klara Skerlić not to allow publishing of the memoir at the time of writing, the book only saw the light of day now thanks to Živomir Mladenović’s daughter, Dr. Jelena Raković, and

the efforts of the editor (with her extensive and valuable experience in working with manuscripts that have enriched Serbian literature with several important folklore collection which previously existed only as manuscripts).

The significance of this manuscript is manifold. From the point of view of the history of literature, the memoir completes the knowledge about Jovan Skerlić as an extremely important literary historian, critic and socio-political activist, in particular during his last days. (Slavica Garonja Radovanac rightly highlights these pages of the memoir as Klara Skerlić's greatest contribution). From the point of view of imagology, the memoir opens up a very provocative and ambivalent view generated by the dual position of *not belonging*—the author is a foreigner who repeatedly emphasizes *the otherness* of her cultural identity—but, at the same time, *belonging*—as the wife, she is in a position to see the private face of Jovan Skerlić, in addition to his public persona. This ambivalent relationship, or, in the very least, her strong self-control which consciously suspends any hint of the personal and private, is evident in the specific way she addresses him. To Klara Skerlić, her husband consistently remains “Skerlić” (Jelena Ćorović addresses her brother in the same way—Skerlić or he—but with much more warmth when providing the final portrait of him), and one of the basic traits of his portrait in her memoir is his *Eastern* hot temper, strength and sensuality. With its specific “intimate” insight into family life, habits, relationships, and even conflicts, the memoir contributes to the history of private life among Serbs before the beginning of the First World War. Klara's striking outline of her father-in-law's portrait includes not only his impressive physical appearance—beauty and almost gigantic stature—and his pride in his ancestor, a Serbian guerrilla fighter during the Ottoman Empire, Jefta Skerla, and his colorful spend-thrifty ways which soon led to the ruin of the family fortune, which was acquired by his prematurely deceased wife through hard work and trade skills, but also the information that Milutin was used to eating from a shared bowl and that he perceived his daughter-in-law's insistence not to do so as “the whining of a foreign woman”. These testimonies can, therefore, be considered from the perspective of imagology as well: to Klara Skerlić, her husband's family, and to a certain extent he himself—remain *the others*, just like they see her as a *foreigner*. A hint of misunderstanding, even a certain level of intolerance, overshadows the author's relationship with her sisters-in-law, Skerlić's sisters. Among her reminiscences, there are frequent mentions of the relationship between *the West* and *the East*, i.e. the mixture of Western and Eastern traits in the idealized character of her husband.

The memoir of Klara Skerlić makes, also, a considerable contribution to gender studies. Slavica Garonja Radovanac rightly points out:

A look at Jovan Skerlić from a ‘woman's point of view’, exactly one hundred and more years after his death, completes and provides the necessary

dimension of his personality—giving, thereby, Serbian culture this missing dimension so necessary for the complete understanding of a great human secret and destiny. But, it is only our time that is ready to listen to women's "voices from the shadows", voices that have been long-neglected in memoirs.

It remains, of course, to be investigated in detail to what extent this "female voice" is true to itself, and to what extent it remains in the function of an ideologized self-promotion and narrative about a well-educated, sensitive and intelligent *Western woman* and her relationship with a man who, despite his supreme intelligence and high education, basically remains a kind of *Eastern* despot—strong, sensual, belligerent.

The gender role of the author, as dictated by her time and as a basis for self-reflection and self-presentation, had a significant impact on her testimony about the man she had lived with, both on what she chose to emphasize in her narration and on what she kept to herself in order not to damage the idealized portrait of her famous husband and of herself, first as a young girl and then as a woman. She consciously shapes the image of a beautiful, but overly modest girl,¹⁵ diligent, selfless, thrifty (in contrast to the sisters-in-law who "did no work", she advocates for the "Western lifestyle" in which everyone has to contribute by working), and, above all, well-educated, introvert, prone to philosophical reflection, who with contempt denounces jealousy and stalking her husband, even if this would guarantee his fidelity. This painful issue—the author's extramarital affairs and her social isolation stemming from her position as a foreigner in a not fully accepting environment, as well as being married to a man who divides women into "those one can marry, and—the others" (his word for "the others" is too drastic for me to repeat here)—protrudes through hints and meek attempts at justifications and concealed accusations.

Klara Skerlić's book, *Moj život sa Jovanom Skerlićem*, is a valuable source of information and analytically provocative reading material. A valuable supplement to the memoir is the introduction by the editor Slavica Garonja Radovanac "A Foreword to Klara Skerlić's Memoir", which provides important information about the origin of the memoir and the history of the manuscript. It also gives a glimpse into the complementarity of the testimonies of Jelena Skerlić Ćorović and Klara Skerlić. The editor thus shows how his sister often remains silent on topics his wife talks about (for example about the doomed love and tragic destiny of Jovanka Skerlić) and vice versa. She also rightly points to the gender aspect of the memoir and to the paradoxical destiny of the wife of one of the leading advocates of gender equality. "Jednakost

¹⁵ As a contrast to the self-destructive passions of her sister-in-law, Jovanka, she repeatedly highlights her modest behaviour in her brother's house: "Personally, I could not understand this patience (of Skerlić towards his sister) in the slightest, because me and my sisters, when we were sometimes invited to spend 2-3 weeks in our brother's house, were expected to exhibit a humble and submissive demeanor, with the threat of being shown the door if behaving otherwise."

za ženskinje” (“Equality for Women”), if judging by the memoir, did not apply to his own wife, who spent most of her marital life in house isolation, confirming thereby her own assessment whereby Skerlić “treated women more with justice than with respect”, allowing himself to make crude jokes about women despite “being a feminist and champion of rights for both sexes.”

An important addition to the monograph is the illustrative material, among other things, the “original facsimiles: Klara Skerlić’s correspondence, her letter, and the first pages of the memoir (which) are being published for the first time”, as well as detailed comments by the editor. In view of its literary-historical and cultural importance, Klara Skerlić’s memoir, together with the Introduction and the supplemental documents, represent a valuable contribution to the literary and cultural history of Serbia.

Ljiljana PEŠIKAN-LJUŠTANOVIĆ

Translated from Serbian by
Milana Todoseskov

PEKIĆ AS SPIRITUS MOVENS, MEASURE AND SIGNPOST

Srdan Cvetković, *Borislav Pekić: the Life of a Rebel*, Catena mundi, Belgrade 2020

Contemplating the meaning of the concept of ketman model, Borislav Pekić in the first part of *The Years that the Locusts Have Devoured* records how Dušica Milanović, during an interview for the magazine *Književnost* in 1985, gave him one of the most beautiful compliments, saying that in his works he has overcome all types of ketman model. In the spirit of the need for balanced, multi-perspective reflections, the writer wondering over praise and reflection whether he is still, sometimes, a ketman or if he really is not writes down: “Only my unworn life can answer that question.” Cvetković follows precisely the trace of achieved authenticity and consistency, which were completed at the same time as the writer’s fulfilled worldly life, in the biography dedicated to Pekić, trying to derive a consistent thread of the duration of the “eternal young man and rebel”, the thread that, from the aspect of Pekić’s political and ethical beliefs, points to necessary resistance to ideological rigidities, to the belief “that freedom and honesty are the ideals worth living for.”

The first chapter “The Love between Lovćen and the Banat Plain” tells about Pekić’s origins and childhood, about his mother Ljubica Petrović, originally from Bavanište near Pančevo, and his Montenegrin father Vojislav Pekić, the head of the department of Zetska Banovina expelled by the Italian

fascists and forced to move with his family to Banat. Cvetković describes in detail and vividly the events of the writer's early years, which despite the war, according to Pekić's confession, were spent happily apostrophizing on several occasions the link between life and literature. Often changing his place of residence due to his father's civil service "Pekić acquired rich social experience, without which there is almost no great writer", while in the shooting of German families by the liberators in Bavanište, and in the later systematic terror, Cvetković recognizes the generators for the writer's "rebellious attitudes and freedom fighter against all totalitarianism." In Pekić's early years, the author also notes the presence of characteristics that become key features of the writer's character: "the inherited strict moral code of a mountaineer, personal courage and love for freedom, uncompromising resistance to all violence", as well as the ironic acerbity of intelligence refined by a tolerant, conciliatory nature.

In the chapter "Colporteur of *Democracy*", Pekić's secondary school years were highlighted, after the family moved to Belgrade, by involvement in public and secret anti-communist actions of the democratic opposition, centred around Milan Grol and the Democratic Party, and then in a series of illegal youth opposition groups. Their mostly propaganda activity faced a fierce reaction from the members of the Union of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (SKOJ) people "who publicly set fire to the only opposition newspaper, *Democracy*, and beat up the colporteurs." Striving to provide a comprehensive overview of the historical/political circumstances of the time, the author testifies to the content of the newspaper *Democracy*, i.e., the attitude of the regime towards it, the atmosphere before the 1945 elections and the fact that the communist government established a dictatorship even before the elections, and that civil society was politically and systematically destroyed by economic measures.

About the repression and persecution of dissidents even after the election and the mass action to clean the Third Boys' Grammar School of "reactionary elements" among the students is evidenced by the chapter "Gauntlet in the Third Boys' Grammar School". It not only tells about the torture and beating the students, among whom was a famous writer, about the parents' protest and Pekić's feeling of shame and remorse (because his friends and teachers, taken aback and scared, "did not oppose the terror of the young people of SKOJ more decisively"), but also highlights the writer's even more persistent involvement in "reactionary" activities—in July 1946, with friends in Bavanište, Pekić formed an illegal democratic group that pasted leaflets on houses and gates, and all the slogans were designed and written by Pekić himself in red pen and ink.

Different types of resistance to the new worldview are thematized in the chapter "Written Off", in which Cvetković in subscription to the opposition press, boycotting the press on Tuesdays when *Borba* was published, celebrating

the patron saint, Christmas, Easter and attending religious classes, in addressing someone as “sir” instead of “comrade”, avoiding to join work brigades, listening to records from the American Reading Room, going to screenings of American films, learning English as opposed to forced Russian, and especially in fashion recognizes the forms of cultural resistance and rebellion against the communist single-mindedness. Trying to provide a broader historical picture on this occasion as well, Cvetković lists opposition groups of youth in various cities, whose work slowly ceased to exist after mass arrests in the early fifties, and other opposition leaders, “companions of the revolution”, i.e., former allies in the elections and many unfit priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church who were targeted by the regime.

The chapter “Process to The Social Democratic Youth of Yugoslavia (Union of Democratic Youth) (SDOJ) 1948-1949” testifies to Pekić as the mastermind of the SDOJ, constituted with the aim of forming an alternative to the United Union of Anti-Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia under the communist control. The arrests of the members of this illegal youth opposition political organization with the explanation that they organized an association in the country with a “fascist goal” aiming to overthrow the existing order by violent means, the description of the trial process and the verdict impregnated by the prosecutor’s imagination and altered (enlarged) by the Supreme Court are the main thematic points of the chapter.

The chapter “In Prison” is dedicated to the picture of prison life, which, after Pekić’s transfer from the Belgrade remand prison to Sremska Mitrovica and KPD Niš, lasted for more than five years until 1953, when the writer was pardoned. The biographer’s attention is directed towards illustrating the conditions of Pekić’s prison existence and their impact on the writer’s psychological and health condition, the experience of time as the greatest prison enemy, the social typology, structure and hierarchy in the prison, emphasizing that Pekić, despite his illness, did not write pleas for pardon: “it was against his principles, which he believed to be politically necessary, and above all honourable. He considered it unworthy to beg for mercy from those he accused of brutality.”

“Studies—the search for the golden fleece” is a chapter in which the author apostrophizes Pekić’s mood after being released from prison, his studies in experimental psychology and his “extravagant study group” (Pekić was in class with S. Selenić, V. Dimitrijević, D. Makavejev, V. Jerotić), the writer’s encyclopedic knowledge and marriage to Ljiljana Glišić, the daughter of the technical director of *Vreme* and the occupation *Novo vreme* Dušan Glišić, who was shot without trial in 1944.

The chapter “Pilgrimage of Borislav Pekić” is dedicated to Pekić’s literary activity, writing method, and editorial work in *Književne novine*, but also to his tireless political activity and support of student demonstrations in 1968, even though he ideologically disagreed with its goals, while in the textual entity

“Letters from Abroad” under the eyepiece of the biographer is put Pekić’s leaving for London motivated, as the writer comments, by the need to confirm inner artistic freedom and ensure more time for work. This chapter activates thoughts about history as an inspiration for Pekić, his understanding of democracy and the writer’s communist positioning during the 1970s on the side of the Serbian right, although he prefers to call his status solitary.

While the chapter “On top of Ararat” lists Pekić’s literary achievements, work for radio, television, theatre, editorial activity and the position of the part-time commentator of the Serbo-Croatian section of the BBC, the chapter “Life after Death” points to Pekić’s living presence manifested in the form of posthumous recognitions, exhibitions and printed editions about his character and work, the whole “Restoration of the Democratic Party in 1990” refers to the renewal of the work of the Democratic Party, of which Pekić was one of the founders and vice president, to its programmatic postulates, as well as to the writer’s participation in the demonstrations in Belgrade in 1991. Cvetković shrewdly observes not only that these were “the last anti-communist demonstrations in which Pekić participated”, but that the Terazije, where the writer as a boy spread the forbidden *Democracy*, and towards the end of his life fought for democracy with the students in the same place, symbolically bounded his political duration.

Written with the author’s distinct loyalty to Pekić’s personality and inspiration for the values that the writer’s work inherits, this biographical creation is able to show imperfections such as quote repetitiveness and the absence of quote functionality (on two occasions citing Pekić’s substantial description of the first meeting with the interrogator from *The Years the Locusts Have Devoured* i.e., quoting Pekić’s description of the cell from the aforementioned work without prior contextualization of the quote), a sporadic lack of pedantry in quoting references, as well as the absence of directing to published primary sources. The quote that illustrates Pekić’s demeanour during his testimony in the First Municipal Court in 1968 in the case of the accused Miodrag Bulatović is cited as unpublished documentary material, although Pekić testifies in detail about that event in the second volume of *The Years the Locusts Have Devoured* (chapter “Twenty years after or another picture from an uncivil pantry”). The interpretation of Pekić’s attitude towards the student protests in 1968 involves citing the episode about the reasons for the writer’s non-wearing the emblem of the Red University “Karl Marx”, an episode which is equally unjustifiably placed in unpublished documentary material since it was published in *There Where the Vines Weep*, as part of an essayed diary entry “Seven Days that Shook Belgrade.” Such sporadic slip-pages compared to scientific meticulousness and precision, however, do not blur the multiple significance of Cvetković’s endeavour: it is reflected not only in the consistently realized intention to outline Pekić’s appearance against the background of historical and political circumstances, but also in the fact

that this biography, published in the year of the commemoration the ninetieth anniversary of the writer's birth, figures as a pioneering, and therefore particularly relevant step from the point of view of integral, biographical views on the life of one of the most significant creators of the Serbian literature of the 20th century.

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FACING DEFEAT

Saša Radojčić, *This Must Also Be Me*, (Arhipelag), 2020

The most common thing that is said about Saša Radojčić is that he represents the poetics of small things. However, in that poetics, in Serbian literature, there are two lines. The first one is Ristović's and the second one is Hristić's. The first one is writing about small things and the second one talks about writing about small things, while actually remaining essentially philosophical. Radojčić undoubtedly belongs to this second line. In his poetry, there are few images or descriptions of everyday events, things and people that one encounters in life, and much more meditation on how one should write about it or how much these things mean in life. The poem "Memories" from the latest collection, *This Must Also Be Me*, is a good example of Radojčić's procedure. The poem tells about how he once travelled by train with several other young poets and critics, they discussed some metaphors, and then "the old man" came in and started telling his life story. However, Radojčić is not interested in the story itself, so he presents it like this: "And that son of his/ and that infuriated daughter-in-law / what they make of themselves/ that he in his age/ goes to cool them down." This avoidance of narrative is similar to the application of the dramatic procedure of scenes within a scene, when the play seen by the characters on the stage (as in *Hamlet*) is presented with a lesser degree of imitation in order to make the play seen by the audience seems more convincing. Radojčić ends the story about the old man with a spicy detail—he offered them sugar from a filthy bag so that they remember him fondly. The last stanza is actually the most important thing in the poem: "Thirty years have passed/ and I still remember that delight/ and I completely forgot/ what the disputed metaphors were." So this is a poem about how small events and encounters are far more important moments than deep philosophical discussions.

However, the poem is not organized to be one of those events, but rather to be a reflection on the significance of those events.

The “Reminiscences” cycle, to which this poem belongs, deals entirely with the problem of memory and what remains and what is lost. The opening poem “Congregational poem” talks about two aspects of the author’s personality—the one that asks “believing it knows all the answers” and the one that answers “thinking it understands all the questions”. The internal dialogue set up in this way confronts the main theme of the book—old age. The old age that Radojčić analyzes is primarily the loss of intellectual powers. The poem “A-lethea” describes the agony of the struggle between mature intellect and oblivion. Starting with the clear statement that he is forgetful in the verses: “I meet so many people/ I forget their faces/ names, words/ I get to know them/ each time anew/ each time from the beginning” Radojčić reaches a sensitive place when this infirmity affects an essential part of his life—writing poetry: “Sometimes I come up with a verse/ and turn it over for a long time/ turn it round in myself/ try it out/ mostly/ and forget it.” It is oblivion that takes everything from him, the past and everything that was part of that past. The end of the poem is more than typical for Radojčić—instead of lamenting about forgetfulness, he draws a philosophical problem from such a situation: “If I am my memory/ what poets represent/ what then is my forgetfulness/ and who represents it”. As in the poem “Memories”, everything that is spoken about in the poem is in the service of conveying some cognition. So here, oblivion serves as an object through which cognition is analysed. However, this does not mean that these poems are not deeply personal and that in them one does not feel the spasm and struggle with life’s adversities they speak about, but the philosophical distance makes them calm and almost serene. The poem “Just like from that Poem” is even about an idyllic atmosphere—sitting in the shade of a tree and reading a book. It gives a picture of the passing time and the change of the reader, even the change of poems that describe the given situation, but all the way to the end it remains harmonious, peaceful and idyllic.

The poem “Just in Case” is somewhat more tense, which talks about waking up at night and checking bodily functions being aware that they will fail one day. However, as the lyrical subject himself checks these functions, tests himself to see if he is alive, the conclusion that “only once/ he will fail the exam” is paradoxical. Actually, here we are also talking about the contemplative side of the personality who, speaking of oblivion and how thinking has become more difficult with it actually thinks. Here, too, this abstract particle of personality can witness its own death, precisely because it is aware that this death will come, so its absurd checking that death did not occur during the night is actually a part of that thinking personality that looks at the man to whom it belongs, and even at the greater part of his intellect, from the side, as if it were not involved in it. Radojčić is becoming part of collective knowledge

and opinion here, so everything he thinks is what others would think, so his thought is not subject to death or oblivion at all, but only him as an individual. The reader from the poem “Just like from that Poem” is replaceable by another one because they have the same thinking mechanism, and the poem is also replaceable because poetry, as an abstract thing, exists both in one poem and in the other, and not only that but there is also historical continuity of poetry, which actually just grows out of the other, as the trees in that poem slightly grow between the change of one reader with another.

The cycle of poems “This City” is somewhat different from the rest of the book, since it does not deal with personal topic, but with the city itself, the illusion that one has about the city, the “distorted image of the city”, the “civic myth” and the fact that the city should be cleansed with a “destroying flood”. In the final part, the lyrical subject describes the experience of the same city when, returning from the trip, he sees “scattered points of light/star clusters”. He ends the poem with the verses: “I wish/ to grab it with my hand/ and steal the glow/ to close the borders of the night/ and save that moment/ so that I don’t set foot on it.” The condemnation of the city from the previous parts seems to have softened or gained a contrast in the idyllic image of the city seen from a distance at night when it resembles a cluster of stars, but Radojčić does not confuse this idyllic image with the city itself. Abstraction, the expectation of some kind of heavenly abode that is created when looking at the glittering city, is not for a moment attributed to the city itself, it is part of the lyrical subject’s expectations, but he is not deceived by that image (“so that I don’t set foot on it”). To some extent, a parallel could be made here with Plato’s myth about the cave, where the one, who has realized what the world really is, observing the illusion, does not think that this illusion is reality, even if it was tempting as in Radojčić’s poem.

The latest cycle, transparently called “Dedications” naturally refers to the dedications to friends, some of which are still alive and some of which are dead. This already connects it with the first cycle. There are also some losses here. However, the poems in this cycle are the most diverse and the least connected as a whole. There is, for example, the poem “Manifest” dedicated to Nenad Jovanović and in memory of Voja Despotov, in which a bold fantasy is developed about printing poems on cans where “they would be consumed”. On the other hand, there is the “Poem that has been Repeated” dedicated to the memory of Simon Simonović, which talks about various possibilities of reincarnation. However, the best poem in this series, as well as in the entire book, is “The Expert in Dialectics”, which is dedicated to his father for his seventy-fifth birthday. Regarding his poem “Life of Wine”, Borislav Radović claimed that the poem about his father (the real one) is one of the most important that a poet has written. That could be said for this poem by Radojčić, which actually contains all the key elements of his poetics so that it alone in an anthology can give a very clear insight into this poet. The poem

is narrative, almost a story: “My father in his youth/ Used to write stories/ Raw and powerful/ He despised writers/ With a certain name/ Their lies/ Embellishment of reality”. When the poet turned fifty, his father gave him his stories to read: “What would I say/ to that young writer/ of wild talent/ If I were his father/ And he were my son.” Then, to his father’s question what his poems are like, he answers: “I said they were good/ Really good// I couldn’t say/ You’re great, lad/ Keep it up/ Because it might happen/ No, none of that.” This is about a promising non-existent writer. As a young man, he wrote good stories, but we know that nothing developed from that, hence any judgment that treats him as a talented writer is absurd since we know that he will not become a writer. Or he will! Again we meet with that grain of thought that Radojčić’s world observes from aside. Just as it is impossible for a man himself to check whether he has died, or as any reader can read any poem under a tree, things remain the same, because we are all part of a collective mind, so from that collective mind, it is quite possible to imagine what did not happen, more precisely to see the father as a writer, in this case, to see him as a young man who will become a writer. That’s why Radojčić says: “I have reason to believe/ I was not in the world in vain/ My son, my father/ Has his own truth/ He knows how to tell it”. That truth and that “skill” as the potential to write them is enough to establish a certain relationship between me as a writer and my father as a writer: “They are good/ I repeated/ Instead of that/ Waiting for my father to leave/ To stay alone with myself/ Expert in dialectics/ I have become what/ He despised/ A writer with a certain name/ Who embellishes reality/ And lies.” An effective ending to the book (let’s ignore the short epilogue), especially when you consider that the whole book is actually a book about one’s own defeat, age, poetry, actually being defeated by what we have become. That defeat is actually the defeat of every writer who has lost that original innocence of writing when one still writes only for himself and does not think about publication or who will read it. However, the poem should not be seen as pessimistic. And here we are talking about cognition, and therefore a victory. It just seems that in this poem the conclusion of that cognition is introduced most elegantly and the least obtrusively, leaving us with a difficult image of a man facing a bad opinion of himself. Actually, as I said at the beginning, it is a description of dealing with old age, which Radojčić is only intellectually interested in. Also, in the defeat itself, one can feel Radojčić’s calm, stoic acceptance, rather with a touch of sadness than with a taste of tragedy.

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Translated from the Serbian by
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SMALL HISTORIES OF GREAT TRAGEDIES OF THE EPOCH

Igor Marojević: *Remains of the World*, Dereta, Belgrade 2020

Even if he had not recently won the “Meša Selimović” award, Igor Marojević’s novel *Remains of the World* would be a work that deserves the attention of a wide range of readers. The important theme and the way in which it is literary interpreted are a good example of how great historical stories can be told in a way that is appropriate for our time.

But let’s start from the beginning. After the dominance of postmodernism in Serbian literature during the last two decades of the 20th century, in the first two decades of the 21st century, new realism became the dominant way of writing, but mostly with avoidance of the ideological engagement, which was a reaction to the decades of ideological dictate from the socialist period. The content is primarily focused on the demythologizing of everyday life and simulacrum that pervade 21st century societies. Igor Marojević’s prose is paradigmatic in this sense. Both in his novels and collections of stories, he treated three geographic areas thematically in a neorealistic manner: Belgrade, Boka Kotorska and Spain. Although he primarily dealt with everyday life in the era of sanctions and the NATO bombing of Serbia and Montenegro and later, parts of our recent history were rising up in his prose. This became visible and especially structurally important in his novel *Heat* (2004), in which he postulated a modern literary image of the past. In that novel, he tells about Montenegro in the years immediately after the First World War (the Christmas Uprising of 1919 and its reflections), which is an epoch that did not have many artistic interpretations until then. In everything he had written until then, Marojević tried to stay away from any daily political engagements, so he made a certain exception in this novel. However, by the way in which this work was written (multiple time planes in the narration, condensed language, etc.) it was obviously addressed to a highly sophisticated reader, so it was not possible to derive connotations of its meaning without a more serious aesthetic analysis. (One of the important heroes of the *Heat* is Toman Kažić, while one of the important heroes of *The Rest of the World* is Mojaš Kažić, and both of them—not by chance, making a symbolic bow—the author puts in the same birthplace Brezovik next to Nikšić. Then, in the novel *Slice* (2007), he places the whole love triangle story in Zemun during the Second World War. Afterwards, in the novel *Mother’s Hand* (2011), he tells about almost the same historical epoch, but now through the prism of the fate of the German population in Yugoslavia after the Second World War (1944-48).

Hence, it is no surprise that Marojević came to the topic of the Spanish Civil War, the Jasenovac camp, the Walled Bridge, Bleiburg and, in the background, the NATO bombing of Serbia and Montenegro in 1999. In the *Remains*

of the World, the central thematic and structural position has the narration of the Ustasha camp in Jasenovac, and regardless of the fact that Marojević, a storyteller with a primarily urban sensibility, gave the most traumatic point in the Serbian history of the 20th century special artistic credibility because his writing was not primarily driven by non-literary motives, but above all by the desire to tell a convincing story about some of the most tragic events in the century behind us.

As in the majority of Igor Marojević's other prose works, the main narrator in the novel, Martin Inić, is an outsider, and his position affects the tone of the narration as a whole, because the author does not want to capture the epoch/event as a whole, but its fragment, part of the event which is available to the individual, the so-called *little man*. Hence, we can say that this novel consists of small histories of the great tragedies of the epoch.

The novel has a ring-like structure. It begins at the time of the NATO bombing of Serbia and Montenegro, in the spring of 1999 when the main character meets the psychotherapist Boško Čipelja, to whom he goes for several sessions. It will turn out that as much as the sessions help Inić, they also benefit Čipelja, and thus the two create a relationship of specific friendship and mutual advantage. Boško's father is Spanish, and his mother is of Montenegrin-Croatian origin, so that makes his existential perspective twofold. Together, the two of them visit Boško's patient in Srebrenica (a Bosniak, Vahid) and so we get the first confession in the novel—seeing the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A conflict that, together with the war in Kosovo and Metohija, will close 20th century war in Europe. The perspective of personal and family suffering related to Srebrenica will be the first ring of storytelling about the bestiality of the century behind us. Without ideologising and relativizing, Vahid talks about the hard-to-speak depth of pain due to a lost child.

Taking us out of this ring of the story, the heroes go to Montenegro, first to Brezovik near Nikšić (where Inić's father is from), and then to Bar, where Boško's and Martin's mother lived at the time. Nada, Boško's mother, first begins to talk about the Spanish Civil War, in which she participated as an advanced Yugoslav youth. Thus, during her stay in Madrid, she met Lucas Čipeljo, the future father of Boško (or, in Spanish, Bosque). Then, for the first time in his life, he will become acquainted with the violence of the civil war. The rampage of Franco's Moroccan legionnaires ("if I hadn't met the Ustasha, I would have thought that the Moroccan legionaries were the most bloodthirsty army...") will leave a particularly painful impression on her, to whom part of the promised war booty was the rape of imprisoned women. (Historical sources say that General Hans von Funk, one of several high-ranking German officers present in Franco's troops, said after one of their massacres that he was a battle-hardened soldier who had fought in France during the First World War, but that he had never seen such brutality and ferocity as the one which the African Expeditionary Force carried out during its operations. That is why he

advised Berlin not to send German regular troops to Spain since the German soldiers would become demoralized by such a rampage.) That kind of special wartime humiliation and torture of the woman will also be mentioned in Vahid's report on Srebrenica, as well as in the confessions of female camp inmates from Jasenovac, but also in the memory of the partisan terror on Kočevski Rog at the very end of the Second World War.

Nada's personal experience with the Francoists, but also with the Soviet instructors ("with great difficulty I defended myself from the lustful Russian, damn him!") and the different structures of the republican soldiers, give an extremely interesting picture of the complexity of the Spanish Civil War, in which none of the warring parties was spared critical review. For example, like the never-solved enigma of the murder of the popular anarchist Bonaventura Durruti in besieged Madrid in November 1936, for which the Francoists are accused by inertia, but in fact, he could easily have been a victim of Soviet officers. And while for the decades we had a black-and-white historical picture of this conflict that brought the world into the Second World War and which Yugoslav historians described exclusively from their ideological-pragmatic (communist) perspective, now we get a dispersed narrative picture of the conflict in which, as in every war, civil especially, there were really no innocents.

When Nada returns to Yugoslavia, her fellow communists will suspect her and her future husband Lucas and blame them for returning from Spain alive, because, in their opinion, only the dead can be heroes of the revolution (or in Nada's words: "... I managed to miss an unrepeatable opportunity in my life to be built into the myth of the communist idea and the party..."). However, the world will reach unprecedented dark depths not long after, when the Second World War began. Nada's father, Dr. Draško Marković, originally from Montenegro, started his medical career in Zagreb after the First World War, where he soon married a girl from an old and respectable city family ("her Magdićs have been in Zagreb since the fourteenth century"). Given that he is a successful and respected dermatovenerologist, even the Ustasha will not touch him for some time after taking power (although they know about his nationality and his daughter's ideological affiliation), because he successfully treats many of them from venereal diseases: "Not only that Draško was neither stigmatized nor relocated, but he was also rewarded: he was included as a part-time associate of the Medical Commission for the Ustasha military hospital for the treatment of endemic syphilis among the Bosnian Ustasha". However, when his daughter Nada rejects the courtship of the high Ustasha officer Ante Moškov ("who was the most ordinary syphilitic, promiscuous Ustasha!"), soon, as a form of his revenge, both the doctor and his daughter will find themselves in the Jasenovac camp.

And so we come to the central ring of the novel, to the heart of darkness, the darkest point in the history of the Balkans, the true pandemonium—the Ustasha camp in Jasenovac. Despite the obvious enormous scale of the crimes

that took place there, this camp was very little mentioned in Serbian and other South Slavic literature after the Second World War. Whether due to internal barriers or the difficulty of finding an adequate artistically valid expression, the topic was on the margins for decades. Our writers such as Đorđe Lebović (directly), Aleksandar Tišma and Danilo Kiš (indirectly), with some of their works, joined the circle of authors consisting of Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, Imre Kertész or Boris Pahor, i.e. the so-called *camp literature* and the attempt to tackle the subject of the Holocaust. However, the topic of death camps in the Balkans will remain almost untouched until the 90s of the last century, when David Albahari in the novels *Bait* and *Getz and Mayer* thematized the Ustasha terror, the Staro Sajmište camp and the slaughterhouse in Jajinci. This sequence is followed by the central ring of the story of the novel *the Remains of the World*.

In addition to being undoubtedly the main character of the novel, Nada, at the moment of the beginning of a new, modern war (for which she says it seems to her like lemonade in comparison to her war: “The war is... when in two or three days the Spanish-Moroccan military mob killed almost a quarter of the population of a former left-wing town in Extremadura...”) presents to the listeners her confession about her stay in Jasenovac, which is a measure of horror and a picture of hell on earth, at the same time with that she also gives a picture of wartime Zagreb and a gallery of figures of Ustasha leaders who were in some way connected with the camp. Colonel Ante Moškov is the first of them, a well-chosen and described character of a man who was born in Špiljari near Kotor, the fiancé of the daughter of chief Ante Pavelić, Višnja. (Towards the end of her life, Višnja—she died in 2015—tells the journalist of the Spanish newspaper *El País Semanal*, Pablo de Luján: “Jasenovac is a complete exaggeration. It was a labour camp where there was poverty, but they had doctors, their leaders, everything they wanted. It wasn’t Auschwitz, you understand? Everyone was alive and well there.” It was posted on 4 March, 2020.) Vain and promiscuous, a bon vivant used to taking whatever he wants, Nada’s rejection of his advances takes as a reason for revenge and for which he sends her to Jasenovac camp. (The heroine of David Grossman’s novel *Life Plays with Me*, the old woman Vera, says: “The war in the Balkans has a different logic. The war in the Balkans is primarily punishment. Here we punish.”) Nada’s husband, Lukas Čipelj, tracks down Moškov to avenge his wife, and so in May, 1945 he reaches the Walled Bridge where he took offence on the captured Ustasha, considering that Moškov has successfully escaped. In the camp itself, Nada survives hunger, disease, dirt, constant rape and hard physical labour. There, she attracts the attention of Vilim Petrač (a fictional character), an unsuccessful writer whose expressionist works were not understood by anyone and who “for writing degenerated poetry was sent to Jasenovac as a punishment” where he had to show his true affiliation with the Ustasha idea with a knife. His actions and thinking, keeping aestheticized diary entries, can be seen as a grotesque manifesto of Ustasha expressionism

in which killing and slaughter are parts of an artistic-scientific experiment in which, of course, the victims are not important at all. In front of the reader, a complete darkening of the mind emerges, because this is the only way Jasenovac could have happened. And any attempt of making sense, such as the explanation that mass daily killings were carried out because there was not enough room for so many prisoners in the camp, can be nothing but blasphemy. Another historical figure will be found in the character gallery—Franciscan Miroslav Filipović-Majstorović. He is a combination of a religious fanatic with the extremist political ideology of the Ustasha, who will be expelled from the Church in 1942 by the decision of the Vatican. But that didn't prevent him from, in the so-called "public performances", killing camp prisoners in a kind of mystical quasi-rituals. One of the surviving camp prisoners, Egon Berger, describes Majstorović dressed in an elegant suit, with make-up and powder, and a green hunting hat on his head while watching his victims with delight. He is the embodiment of vicious psychopathology for which slaughtering people was a form of self-realization.

In Vilim Petrač's notebooks (which he hides from his Ustasha comrades, but gives to Nada for safekeeping, whom he abuses, rapes and guards at the same time), we will see such a macabrely grotesque gallery ("Grotesque is the only pill with which it is possible to drink a glass of blood" says Vajo from Srebrenica) of pathologically distorted minds who ruled the Ustasha death camp. The narrator carefully individualized each of them: Petrač, Luburić, Moškov, Majstorović, indirectly Pavelić and Budak as "writers" in whom one can see the operetta banality of primitive evil that wanted to present itself as a lofty mission, despite the material facts that proved the opposite. So Nada notices a detail that says more than the essay: "...their unbuttoned fake uniforms, cheap copies of SS uniforms made of the worst black cloth, on which any change is easily visible, such as blood, applied crumb of mud or flour, or a strand of hair of raped women...". Instead of an overly aestheticized expression, Marojević provides a cold description of the daily sufferings of Jasenovac camp prisoners (both men and women), an almost documentary narration about hunger, disease, and systematic rape ("And then I remembered everyone who had me there... Six... Maybe seven of them ... I was inconsolable... Sometimes I still am... I'm always inconsolable... Forever," Nada will say), violence, death and brutal, sadistic murders through which he reveals the dark entity of the world, that is, another world—the world of pure evil. The world whose contours were hinted at the beginning of the 20th century by Franz Kafka and George Orwell.

Nada's confession, which covers Spain, Jasenovac and Walled Bridge, underline, like few literary works in Serbian literature, the figure of women as the greatest victims of the 20th century—because from Franco's Moroccan legionnaires to the Ustashes, but also to the partisans, all of them rape and

kill women without much hesitation, although as a rule, it is about beings who are unable to resist or threaten the villains in any way. And all of that, allegedly, in the name of great ideas and totalitarian ideologies. Having all this in mind, Igor Marojević was guided by the fact that the so-called *camp literature* is not only a form of testimony but it is also paying tribute to the victims. Because, we will remember the words of Imra Kertesz (who as a boy went through the Auschwitz and Buchenwald camps) that Spielberg's film "Schindler's List" is a forgery because the story of the Holocaust is not a story of survival, but a story of extinction, given that the number of surviving Jews is minor in relation to the number of the killed ones. That it is a story about authentic evil. I believe that this is exactly why Marojević did not stray too far from the facts in his novel because the number of survivors of Jasenovac camp prisoners is minor compared to the number of those who were killed. The writer did not deal with the ideologies that led to this in an essayistic manner, but rather let the fate of his heroines and heroes bear witness to them. That is why he personalized the criminals, not depersonalizing them through collective qualifications, but concretizing them considering it the best way of showing the banality of evil. This is how Nada, describing Vilim Petrač, says: "... he, as an outsider from Podrut near Novi Marof, who was constantly rejected by her as a born Purger, until I was in a position to reject him... (...) began to complain that he was completely misunderstood, both as a writer, and as a butcher." In this kind of anti-ideology that reveals the root of evil, the author was consistent this time as well, as in his earlier books, and that is why he created a work that is not a literary statement "for" or "against", but a work of art that, on a very scrupulous aesthetic and ethical way interprets the most traumatic point of recent Serbian history, does not play on the "card" of non-literary elements and therefore leaves no room for loadings that would relativize the memory of victims and criminals. He is already mercilessly confronting us with the evil that has been raging unrestrained for years. And with that act, Marojević transcends every literary fashion and self-serving game and enters the circle of the authors whose works try to figure out the most difficult open issues of the century behind us, but also of the one in which we live.

Mladen VESKOVIĆ

Translated from the Serbian by
Ljubica Jankov

AN OUTLINE OF A PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY

Đorđe Despić, *Autohipnoza (Self-Hypnosis)*, Public library “Stefan Prvovenčani”, Kraljevo, 2021

While writing about Đorđe Despić's previous, his first, collection of poems, *Pesme i drugi ožiljci (Poems and Other Scars)* (2018), which won the prestigious award of the “Miloš Crnjanski” Foundation, we pointed out that his poetics is characterized by a telepathic-like link between body and language, sleep and language, perception and meditation. A word can be a trigger for physical pain and trauma, but it can also be their product, that crystal of sense along life's journey through suffering and (self-inflicted) injury. Especially important is the constant vibration of the wire connecting sleep and waking, and their inverse meanings which always meet in the other, because of the lyrical subject's or the hero's immersion into a fluffy, soft bed of dreams, from which, like from a children's castle made of a non-material substance, words erupt and acquire their own intuitive order, their intertwined place in the verses.

Here, again, to this collection of Despić's poems, it is sleep, as an area of the archetypal unconscious, subjective and collective, that is very important, because it is with a Jungian approach that he is trying to reconstruct and feel the refined Sumatran connections and harmonization lying beneath the visible, practical and pragmatic functions in which man has to be involved, and in which he is today fully immersed through networks. Hence, also time is perceived differently; diachrony becomes a psychologically challenging synchrony of sequences, sequences which are announced to the hero just before awakening, creating hypnagogic images. We will get back to this concept a bit later, because it can be linked to the title of the collection. Hypnosis is a procedure used in so-called hypnotherapy, i.e. hypnotic suggestion, whereby the subject is brought into a state similar to trance, which at the same time provides a sharper perception and focus on details that he pulls from the unconscious area, usually with the help of a therapist. Let us not forget that Sigmund Freud was the first to introduce this method in the process of treating his patients with the aim to unlock their suppressed feelings, and one of the first patients was Lou Salomé. The therapist uses repetitive speech and evokes certain mental images in the patient, thereby awakening and formalizing his repressed memory.

For Đorđe Despić, the process of writing poetry, from a symbolic point of view, overlaps with this procedure on several planes. Let us just recall the poem “Krik” (“The Scream”) from the first collection, which testifies to the very psychotherapeutic effects in two, or the poem “Kao” (“Like”) in which the desire to rid oneself of negative feelings, fear and anxiety is projected onto the desire for resonance in the world, for human communication: “my identity

is a continuous / Munch's scream / a voice of flames in the bloody night / the scream of a sting / lost somewhere deep / inside of me" ("The Scream"). That is why the provocatively chosen title "Self-hypnosis" is a technique in which the lyrical hero brings himself into the described state, fully aware that the revival of memories from childhood and his loved ones (father, mother, Nana) will bring renewed pain, but that healing takes place at the level of rationalized text of the dream or the body of the poem. It is, indeed, a Disian dream of the poet himself: to save from oblivion a poem he hears in his sleep, in trance, just before waking up, and give it the outlines of his personal mythology in a simple, intimate, gentle, refined, yet detailed and precise way. When we say personal mythology, we mean that the intertextual dimension in this collection is more discreetly present than in the previous, which can be a virtue, not a flaw. Then again, even when there are allusions to certain intertexts, the author tries to subordinate and reshape them to fit his own voice, poetic flow and motif-thematic orientation. In this context, let us get back to the term *hypnagogic images* by Ira Progoff, the founder of holistic psychoanalysis, who influenced Salvador Dali. These are images in movement, in a wake state, just like with our poet, when one is looking for that essential image. "If we were able to stop just one single image", wrote Dali, "we would discover the essence of beings". The Intensive Journal Method for dreams linked to the body and language seems to be the dominant poetic trajectory that intersects in three cycles entitled "Autohipnoza" ("Self-hypnosis"), "Ispod stih" ("Below the Verse") and "Video si" ("You Saw") in this collection, which is characterized by the author's outstanding sense of description, detail, trifle, gesture.

The majority of poems in this collection are of a descriptive and narrative type, with a special approach to this type of poems typical of the author, in particular when it comes to the really long poems (the first cycle, the poem "Udica" ("The Hook" and, for example, the last one, "Ti čekaš svoj red" ("You're waiting for your turn")). Perhaps the most suggestive cycle of the entire collection, the introductory cycle entitled "Autohipnoza", seems to begin with the invisible presence and voice of some therapist or shaman, witch doctor, whose role is to bring to light the repressed memory of parting with his father (the poem "Kad kažem sad" ("When I Say Now") is dedicated to his father) and force the lyrical subject to relive it all in the present: "I will take you now / to your history / to your source / of pain and fear / from whose depths / you fail to emerge / and your air is perilously running out". Written in out-of-breath, clipped, short, cinematic style, this long poem refers to a twelve-year-old boy's / son's parting with his father. He leaves his hometown and goes to another town, and the time of memory is measured by the moment of parting, which seems to be engraved in the eternal "Now": "when I say "Now" / you will return to the time / of parting". After each introduction of a new motif (the son's confusion and sadness, the father's anxiety, the smell

of linden, the crumbled chalk that he carries with him like a small heart), the Eliotian adverb *now* appears almost ritually, like the sound of a gong or a clap of hands suggesting that the lyrical hero is delving even deeper into the details of his memory. Towards the end, the poem intensifies, reaching higher and higher, and it is not clear which voice guides the lyrical subject to his heart, to the abyss of pain which is common to both father and son. Also effective is the technique of self-dialoguing or conversing with the imaginary self (actually, the inverse self), which deprives the poet of the possibility of slipping into sentimentality and preserves the appearance of a poetic story. This relationship between the experiencing Self and the writing Self can also be seen in the parabolic story about a former boy ("Mladunče u ulici Alberta Tome" ("The Cub in Alberta Tome Street")), while the beauty of evocative description is on full display in the poem dedicated to his mother, "Jedna neusnimljena fotografija" ("A Photo Not Taken"), as well as in one of, perhaps, the best poems of the entire collection, "Pesmi, tkanju" (*Nani*) ("To the Poem, to Weaving") (*To Nana*).

In connection with this poem, it should be said that Đorđe Despić belongs to that small group of Serbian poets who have continued the poetically important tradition of using lyrical associations and symbolic properties of family figures typical of Serbian male and female poets (Zmaj, Đura Jakšić, Rastko Petrović, Momčilo Nastasijević, Radmila Lazić, Živorad Nedeljković, Milunka Mitrović, Ana Ristović, the author of this paper and others), and in doing so he has left a distinctive and recognizable personal poetic emblem. Especially since other meanings are woven around those figures, like in the poem "Pesmi, tkanju" where his Nana's weaving is connected to the boy's longing for love and security, but also to the secrets of weaving as a craft, regardless of whether it is done by Penelope, Arachne or Jefimija, in other words, to that which is of the utmost importance to the lyrical hero himself. However, what captivates in this poem, in addition to its unadulterated tenderness, is the composition of the text in which motifs are expertly juxtaposed, building, thus, a complex metaphorical network: from the famous melody "Svilen konac" ("Silky Thread") and the virtuoso violin performance by V. Pavlović Carevac, which Nana loved to listen to, to the weavers of the Pirot kilims, with their dominant red thread used against curses, for children's peace and happiness and for the weaving, the link to the memories of the subject himself, who uses words to create a complex linguistic pattern, just like his Nana: "and you weave / line by line / your poetic patterns / against curses".

The middle cycle, "Ispod stiha" thematizes another of Despić's favorite and important poetic preoccupations, namely (auto)poetic issues closely related to the "hypnotherapy" symbolism of the previous cycle. Here, the author turns more to the world of everyday experience, chronical trifles and their transfer to the allegorical level. In the first, striking poem of this cycle, "Udica", memory and nostalgia are linked to a frozen lake under whose ice covers dark

treacherous waters—a mirror of the subconscious—while the writing process is likened to fishing, i.e., to the hook, which reveals and writes previously obscure verses. The poem “Opiljak” (“The Chipping”) is also a true example of summoning hypnagogic imagery that stem, equally, from the collective and from the individual unconscious: “it is unclear why and from where / an image emerges, reminding of / some vanished fragment / from a dream / or a long-suppressed / love trauma”. Thus, the poems convey a hidden touch behind the visible, material substance, an almost humorous planting of a walnut in a pot by a crow, the connection and disruption of the subject of reading and writing, and even the subject as the imaginary topic of somebody else’s poetry, wavering and mystical (“Tihi preobražaji”) (“Quiet Transformations”).

The title of the final cycle, “Video sam”, already refers to the visual aspect, a view, observation; not the usual, superficial visual, but one with symbolic depth instead. Although it may seem, at first glance, that simple, repetitive, everyday scenes are the topic, the subject gets surprised by some odd traits. The cycle opens with a poem of characteristic title, “Red Right Hand”, which immediately brings into our receptive horizon Nick Cave’s song of the same name. It is worthwhile remembering that this phrase was first used by John Milton in his poem *Paradise Lost*, where the red right hand actually signifies the fist of God aimed at the fallen and the sinners. In the context of vague associations, which this motif evokes in our author’s poem, the red right hand is a kind of synecdoche for human existence, just like in Cave’s song, and the moment when he hears the sound of the song from the mobile phone, the subject realizes that somebody is calling him. One more vague, mystical ending which discreetly foreshadows the next poem, “Preosetljivost, iznenada” (“Too Sensitive, Suddenly”) and its symbolic and allegorical reference to the nymph Melissa, who, in mythology, is linked to bees and honey as a source of sweetness, and to the beauty of poetry (Lalić’s collection *Melissa*). In “Ljubavna priča” (“Love Story”), Despić becomes more explicit with the motif of the dead sweetheart, the drowned Ophelia (Rimbaud, George Heym, Ivan B. Lalić), only to have the lyrical subject wonder in “Mala čuda” (“Small Miracles”) about the sense of accidents, coincidences, agreements, comprehended through epiphany, regardless of time and space: “you still cannot discern / whether these small discoveries / these strange coincidences / are unimportant and small analogies / that you occasionally recognize”. Or is it about the truth, the enigmatic truth which always eludes the subject, no matter how authentic that flash of evidence might seem. The construction of parables or allegories with ethical or eschatological signs (“Drob” (“The Gut”), “Ti čekaš svoj red” (“You Await Your Turn”)) are texts which set Đorđe Despić apart as a poet of occasional fantastic observations, and that makes for a convincing link with the last cycle of his previous collection.

Although it sometimes seems that these poems are repetitive and use different techniques, this is actually the result of the hypnagogic process of

repetition and evoking certain, specific mental and symbolic images and matrices. Each of these poems are read slowly; they have to “dissolve in the reader’s mind” in a manner that falls somewhere between the new techniques applied by Vojislav Karanović and Nikola Vujčić, and sometimes even Slobodan Zubanović, if we were to outline the context of recognizing this type of poetics. But the depth of the emotional power that these poems easily evoke and envelop us, like in a dream, sets this new book by Despić apart from last year’s poetry production.

Bojana STOJANOVIĆ PANTOVIĆ

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the writer and his work – a discussion on the cultural identity of Serbian literature, 2003]; *Država i obrazovanje – kritička evaluacija koncepcija obrazovanja u Srbiji* [The state and education – a critical evaluation of the conception of education in Serbia, 2003]; *Obrana Crnjanskog* [Defense of Crnjanski 2004]; *Aporije obrazovanja za demokratiju* [The aporias of education for democracy, 2006]; *Kultura* [Culture, 2006]; *Srbi u getu demokratije* [Serbs in the ghetto of democracy, 2007]; *Sociologija i književnost – ogledi o sociologiji kulture i književnosti* [Sociology and literature – essays on the sociology of culture and literature, 2008]; *Rodomrsci – o jednom delu srpskih političara i intelektualaca od 1990. do 2009* [Patriothaiters – about a section of Serbian politicians and intellectuals from 1990 to 2009, 2009]; *Politička misao Miloša Crnjanskog* [Political thought of Miloš Crnjanski, 2010]; *Sociološka osmatračnica kulture i obrazovanja* [Sociological observatory of culture and education, 2011]; *Demokratija i bombardovanje – kakva je budućnost demokratije?* [Democracy and bombing – what is the future of democracy?, 2012]; *Obrazovanje u tokovima društva znanja* [Education in the currents of the knowledge society, 2013]; *Rodoljupci i rodomrsci – savremeni srpski patriotizam i nacionalno dezintegrativna misao i praksa* [Patriotlovers and patriothaiters – contemporary Serbian patriotism and nationally disintegrative thought and practice, 2013]; *Obrazovanje između dnevne i naučne brige* [Education between daily and scientific concern, 2014]; *Ogledi iz srpske kulture i književnosti* [Essays from Serbian culture and literature, 2015]; *Književnici i politika u srpskoj kulturi (1804–2014)* [Writers and politics in Serbian culture (1804–2014), 2016]; *Društveno angažovan u Srbiji* [Socially engaged in Serbia, 2016]; *Književna raskršća – identitet, Andrić, Crnjanski* [Literary crossroads – identity, Andrić, Crnjanski, 2016]; *Sociološko čitanje književnosti* [Sociological reading of literature, 2017]; *Srbi i antipatriotizam* [Serbs and anti-patriotism, 2020]; *Slučaj jednog instituta* [The case of one institute, 2020]; *Naša nekadašnja kriza* [Our former crisis, 2020]; *Uzburkanost društva i kulture* [Turmoil of society and culture, 2021]; *Dobrica Ćosić i politika* [Dobrica Ćosić and politics, 2021]. He lives and works in Belgrade.

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old measurement, 2006, 2011]; *Aša – pod životom* [*Asha – under life*, 2007]; *Ćorava strana* [*Blind side*, 2007]; *Kolubarska trilogija* [*Kolubara trilogy*, 2008]; *Gospođa Olga – duše i priključenija* [*Mrs. Olga – soulful and connected*, 2010]; *Priče* [*Stories*, 2010]; *O svemu će pričati Gavriilo* [*Gavriilo will talk about everything*, 2011]; *Putnikova ciglana – zaludno pletivo* [*The traveler's brickyard – a futile knitting*, 2015]; *Plava kapija – Kronika Kronike* [*Blue Gate – Chronicle of Chronicles*, 2017]; *Stojna vetrenjača – četiri kanata* [*Standing windmill – four katanas*, 2020]. In 2013, his collected works in 13 books were published.

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¹ *Zmaj Despot Vuk* (Vuk the Dragon-Despot) is one of the habitual forms of reference to the historic and literary figure of Vuk Grgurević Branković (c. 1440–1485), titular Despot of Serbia who fought for Hungary against the Ottomans and became famed for his valour and heroism. Another of his names found in folk tradition is *Zmaj Ognjeni Vuk* (Vuk the Fiery Dragon). – *Translator's note*.

o usmenoj poeziji [*Stanaja Set the Village to Fire: Essays on Oral Poetry*, 2007]; *Kad je bila kneževa večera? – usmena književnost i tradicionalna kultura u srpskoj drami 20. veka* [*When Did the Prince's Supper Take Place? Oral Literature and Traditional Culture in the Serbian 20th-Century Drama*, 2009]; *Usmeno u pisanom* [*The Oral within the Written*, 2009]; *Gospođi Alisinoj desnoj nozi – ogledi o književnosti za decu* [*To Mrs. Right Leg of Alice: Essays on Children's Literature*, 2012]; *Bez očiju kano i s očima – narodne pesme slepih žena* [*Unsighted Just Like the Sighted Ones: Folk Poems by Blind Women*, by a group of authors, 2014]; *Zatočnik pete sile – fantastična proza Zorana Živkovića* [*The Herald of the Fifth Power: The Fantastic Fiction of Zoran Živković*, 2016]; *Glavit junak i ostala gospoda – analiza narodnih pesama* [*The Main Character and Other Noblemen*, by a group of authors, 2017]; *Pišem ti priču – refleksi usmene književnosti i tradicionalne kulture u pisanoj književnosti i savremenoj kulturi Srba* [*I'm writing you a story – reflections of oral literature and traditional culture in written literature and contemporary culture of the Serbs*, 2020]; *Iza Alisinog ogledala – tipološki ogledi o fantastičnom romanu za decu* [*Behind Alice's Looking Glass – Typological Essays on a Fantasy Novel for Children*, 2021]. Ljiljana Pešikan Ljuštanović has edited a number of books.

SAŠA RADOJČIĆ (b. Sombor, Vojvodina, Serbia, 1963) writes poetry, literary reviews, studies, essays; translates from German. Books of verse: *Uzalud snovi* [*Vain Dreams*, 1985]; *Kamerna muzika* [*Chamber Music*, 1991]; *Amerika i druge pesme* [*America and Other Poems*, 1994]; *Elegije, nokturna, etide* [*Elegies, Nocturnes, Etudes*, 2001]; *Četiri godišnja doba* [*Four Seasons*, 2004]; *Panonske etide: izabrane i nove pesme* [*Pannonian Etudes: Selected and New Poems*, 2012]; *Cyber zen*, 2013; *Duge i kratke pesme* [*Long and Short Poems*, 2015]; *Slike i rečenice* [*Pictures and sentences*], 2017; *To mora da sam takođe ja* [*It must be me too*, 2020]; *Za vatru nadležna je duša: izabrane pesme* [*The soul is responsible for the fire: selected poems*, 2022]; *The Novel: [Dečak sa Fanara The boy from Fanar*, 2022]. Books of criticism, essays and studies: *Providni andjeli* [*Transparent Angels*, 2003]; *Poezija, vreme buduće* [*Poetry, Future Tense*, 2003]; *Ništa i prah – antropološki pesimizam Sterijinog Davorja* [*Nil and Ashes: The Anthropological Pessimism of Sterija's "Davorje"*, 2006]; *Stapanje horizonata – pesništvo i interpretacija pesništva u filozofskoj hermeneutici* [*Merging of Horizons: Poetry and Interpretation of Poetry in the Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 2010]; *Razumevanje i zbivanje – osnovni činioci hermeneutičkog iskustva* [*Understanding and Action – the Basic Factors of a Hermeneutic Experience*, 2011]; *Uvod u filozofiju umetnosti* [*An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*, 2014]; *Reč posle* [*The Afterword*, 2015]; *Jedna pesma – hermeneutički izgređi* [*A Poem: Hermeneutical Excesses*, 2016]; *Slike i rečenice* [*Images and Sentences*, 2017]; *Za svetlom iz očeve kolibe – kritičarski pojmovnik* [*After the light from the father's hut – critic's glossary*,

2018; *Ogledalo na pijaci Bajloni – ogledi o srpskom neoverizmu* [*The mirror at the Bajloni market – essays on Serbian neo-overism*, 2019]; *Umetnost i stvarnost* [*Art and reality*, 2021].

GORAN RADONJIĆ (b. Podgorica, Montenegro, 1971). He defended his doctoral dissertation “Models of Narrative in the Serbian and American Novels of the 1960s and 1970s” at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade. He spent one year (2003/2004) in training in the USA, at the University of Tennessee, as a scholarship holder of the Junior Faculty Development Programme. He works as an assistant professor at the Faculty of Philology in Nikšić. He deals with the theory of literature, narratology, twentieth-century literature and film. Published books: *Vijenac pripovjedaka – granični žanr u srpskoj književnosti pedesetih do sedamdesetih godina XX vijeka* [*Wreath of Stories – Border Genre in Serbian Literature of the 1950s and 1970s*, 2003]; *Fikcija, metafikcija, nefikcija: Modeli pripovijedanja u srpskom i američkom romanu šezdesetih i sedamdesetih godina XX vijeka* [*Fiction, Metafiction, Non-Fiction: Models of Storytelling in Serbian and American Novel of the 1960s and 1970s*, 2016].

BORISAV STANKOVIĆ (Vranje, 1876 — Beograd, 1927). He was a Serbian storyteller, novelist, and dramatist. His work is mostly classified as realism, but it has features that lean towards naturalism. Recent criticism classifies him as one of the founders of modern Serbian literature. His novels and short stories depict the life of people from the south of Serbia. Book of short stories: *Iz starog jevanđelja* [*From the old gospel*, 1899]; *Božji ljudi* [*God's people*, 1902]; *Stari dani* [*The old days*, 1902]; *Pokojnikova žena* [*Deceased's wife*, 1907]; *Naš Božić* [*Our Christmas*, 1912]; *Uvela ruža* [*Withered rose* 1912]; *Vrela krv* [*Hot blood*, 1917]; *Njegova Belk* [*His Belka*, 1921]; *Tetka Zlata* [*Aunt Zlata*, 1922]; *Moji znanci* [*My acquaintances*, 1928]; *Pod okupacijom* [*Under occupation*, 1928]; *Nastup* [*Performance*, 1930]; Book of dramas: *Koštana: komad iz vranjanskog života u četiri čina s pevanjem* [*Koštana: a piece from Vranje life in four acts with singing*, 1902]; Book of Novels: *Nečista krv* [*Impure blood*, 1910]; *Gazda Mladen*; *Pevci* [*Boss Mladen*; *Singers*, 1928]. Selections from his literary works have been printed several times.

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of the 1990's, 1998]; *Srpski ekspresionizam* [Serbian Expressionism, 1999]; *Kritička pisma* [Letters of Criticism, 2002]; *Morfologija ekspresionističke proze* [The Morphology of Expressionist Fiction, 2003]; *Raskršća metafore* [The Junctures of the Metaphor, 2004]; *Pobuna protiv središta – novi prilozi o modernoj srpskoj književnosti* [Revolt against the Centre: New Contributions about Modern Serbian Literature, 2006]; *Oštar ugao* [Acute Angle, 2008]; *Rasponi modernizma – uporedna čitanja srpske književnosti* [The Spans of Modernism: Comparative Readings of the Serbian Literature, 2011]; *Pregledni rečnik komparatističke terminologije u književnosti i kulturi* [An Easy-to-Survey Glossary of the Comparativist Terminology in Literature and Culture, co-authored and edited by M. Radović and V. Gvozden, 2011]; *Pesma u prozi ili prozaida* [The Prose Poem, or the Prosaid, 2012]; *Čist oblik ekstaze: studije i eseji o srpskom pesništvu* [A Pure Form of Ecstasy: Studies and Essays on Serbian Poetry, 2019]. Anthologies: *Srpske prozaide – antologija pesama u prozi* [Serbian Prosoids: An Anthology of Prose Poems, 2001]; *Nebolomstvo – panorama srpskog pesništva kraja XX veka* [Breaking through the Sky: A Panoramic View of the Serbian Poetry at the End of the 20th Century, 2006]. Verse and lyrical prose: *Beskrajna* [The Infinite, 2005]; *Zaručnici vatre* [Betrothed to Fire, 2008]; *Isijavanje* [Emanation, 2009]; *Lekcije o smrti* [Lessons on Death, 2013]; *U obruču Ziggurat* [Encircled, 2017]; *Povreda beline* [Injury to Whiteness, 2021], *Niz kičmu godina: izabrane i nove pesme* [Down the spine of the years: selected and new poems, 2022]. B. Stojanović Pantović has edited a number of books by Serbian writers.

MLADEN ŠUKALO (b.Banja Luka, BiH, 1952). A literary theorist, a professor at the Faculty of Philology in Banja Luka. He writes prose, studies, literary criticism and essays and translates from French. Published books: *Narodno pozorište Bosanske Krajine 1930–1980* (koautori P. Lazarević, J. Lešić) [National Theatre of the Bosnian Krajina 1930–1980 (co-authors P. Lazarević, J. Lešić), 1980]; *Okviri i ogledala* [Frames and Mirrors, 1990]; *Ljubičasti oreol Danila Kiša* [Purple Halo of Danilo Kiš, 1999]; *Odmrzavanje jezika – poetika stranosti u djelu Miodraga Bulatovića* [Unfreezing the Language – The Poetics of Strangeness in the Work of Miodrag Bulatović, 2002]; *Pukotina stvarnog – odmrzavanje jezika, nulto*, [The Crack of the Real – Unfreezing the Language, Zero, 2003]; *Đavolji dukat – o Ivi Andriću* [Devil's Ducat – about Ivo Andrić, 2006]; *Oblici i iskazi, ogledi* [Forms and Statements, Essays, 2007]; *Portreti – iz srpske književnosti u BiH* [Portraits – from Serbian literature in BiH, 2015]; *Krhotine i druge priče* [Debris and Other Stories, 2016]; *Kulturni identitet Kočićevih junaka* [Cultural Identity of Kočić's Heroes, 2018]; *Velike iluzije (igrivost, teatralnost, stranost)* [Great Illusions (Playfulness, Theatricality, Strangeness), 2020]; *Kritički otkloni* [Critical deflections, 2020]; *Obrazovni paradoksi: fragmenti, aforizmi, citati, sholije* [Educational paradoxes: fragments, aphorisms, quotations, scholia, 2021].

MLADEN VESKOVIĆ (b. Zemun, 1971). He writes literary criticism and essays. Published books: *Razmeštanje figura* [*Placing the Figures*, 2003]; *Mesto vredno priče. Razmeštanje figura II* [*A place worth talking about. Arrangement of Figures II*, 2008]; *Širina izmaštanog sveta – studije o srpskoj književnosti* [*The width of the imagined world – studies on Serbian literature*, 2013]; *Srpski pisci prošlog i sadašnjeg vremena* [*Serbian writers of the past and present*, 2019]. Edited several books and anthologies.

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LITERARY LINKS OF MATICA SRPSKA

For the publisher
 Dragan Stanić,
 President of the Matica srpska

Department of Literature and Language of the Matica srpska

Associate of the department
Milena Kulić

Language editors
Zoran Paunović
Randall A. Major

Technical editor
Vukica Tucakov

Cover design
Atila Kapitanji

Computer layout
Vladimir Vatić, GRAFIT, Petrovaradin

Printed by
SAJNOS, Novi Sad

Circulation
300 copies

CIP – Каталогizacija u publikaciji
Библиотека Матице српске, Нови Сад
82

LITERARY links of Matica srpska / editor-in-chief Ivan
Negrišorac. – 2017, 1- . – Novi Sad : Matica srpska, 2017- .
– 24 cm

Godišnje.

ISSN 2619-9971

COBISS.SR-ID 322395911