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STEVAN SREMAC

KIR GERAS

Chapter One

Describes the arrival of Kir Geras in Serbia, as well as the first years of his innocent and carefree youth.

Old Ćir Đeras—or Geras, as he used to sign himself—who in his old age walked bent over, with his arms hanging loosely or thrown behind his back, holding a small prayer rope with five or six beads; who would go along muttering something to himself, always looking at the ground, forever seeming as though he had lost something and was now searching for it—had once been much younger. He had been—and who would say so, and who would believe it today!—he had once even been a child! And so, following the old Latin saying *sed ab initio est oriendum*, we too shall begin from the beginning. That is to say, we will start with that innocent early period when he was still small—as one might say, "no bigger than a fist"—before he had tasted, let alone drunk, the bitterness from the cup that time pours and life serves to every creature; we will begin with that time when he knew nothing of savings banks and stock exchanges, bonds and promissory notes, guarantees, due dates, or court executors...

It was a long time ago, during the early days of our statehood, when this old, hunched-over Kir Geras came to Serbia. Or rather, he didn't come; he was brought to Serbia. Or to be even more precise: he wasn't exactly brought, but rather, so to speak, he was "smuggled" into Serbia. And it happened in the fourth decade of the last century, just after the *ćumruk* and quarantine had been established in Aleksinac.

And precisely during those days, one day when the officials of that office—the quarantine overseer, the appraiser, and the customs officer—were relaxing with rakia under the awning erected for the

ceremonial opening and blessing of the new quarantine and *ćumruk*, and nibbling on fresh green cucumbers, around that time—judging by the rakia, towards evening—a long caravan arrived from Turkey, from the direction of Niš. They crossed the border, taking small steps, both the men and their small horses and donkeys. It was a caravan made up of ponies, donkeys, and many Cincars, both big and small, surrounding them. The younger ones led the small horses and donkeys, while each animal carried an older Cincar seated on a small wooden saddle, rocking back and forth with his legs and his long neck.

When they crossed the border and reached the Katun guard post on Serbian soil, the older men then dismounted from their horses and donkeys. At that moment, the little bell from the village church tower began to ring. The travellers started at those sounds—so dear and sacred to them. And all of them, both older and younger, those seated in the pack baskets and those on the ground, took off their fezzes, lifted their eyes to the sky, made the sign of the cross devoutly, and gave thanks to God that they had arrived alive and well and had stepped onto Christian soil, where a Christian reigns and renders judgment. For a moment longer, they listened, content and blissful, to the sound of the distant bell. Then they all again, with their hands tucked beneath their belts, bowed meekly and submissively before the Serbian authorities, who were drinking rakia and snacking on salted green cucumbers.

When the authorities asked them who they were and where they came from, they replied that they were Greeks, Christians from Turkey. "We's Greeks, Christians from the Turk's land!" said one, and another added: "Christian we is, from Epirus country, from Gotista village, up Metsovo way—all us here's Metsovo folk..."

And there was really no need to ask them because, the moment you laid eyes on them, you could tell instantly who they were and where they came from. They were all either Cincars or Greeks; I say Cincars or Greeks because, neither then nor later, in the entire *čaršija*, could anyone ever be certain whether a single one of them was truly Greek or Cincar. As is well-known to learned readers—especially those familiar with *The History of the World*—in the famous Library of Alexandria, among many other books and primers, there was also a Cincar primer. It was kept there until that historic fire. When the flames engulfed the library, all the nations rushed to save their literary treasures. That was when the Cincars also ran to seize their primer—and, in the chaos, began passing it from one to another, just as in our saying: "The priest to the sexton, the sexton to the deacon, the deacon to the dog." That's exactly what happened here: one Cincar to another, until the very last Cincar shoved the primer at a dog. The dog clamped it in his jaws and bolted off, never to be seen again by any living soul, anywhere, ever!...

From that time on—so say the Greeks—the familiar canine custom of sniffing each other as a greeting was born: they claim it's because they are looking for that lost Cincar primer... That's how the Cincar primer and the Cincar alphabet were lost and misplaced. Since then, out of pure shame—because they are the only people to have lost both their primer and their alphabet—the Cincars have never dared call themselves by their true name. Instead, they all pretend to be Greeks. At least, that's what the Greeks say, and everyone knows the Greeks never lie.

So, these fellows now also declared they were Greeks. They were all migrant workers; some were old, some young, and there were also children among them. All wore long cloth coats, red fezzes on their heads, and pointed *jemenije*, rawhide sandals with big woollen tassels dancing at the toes; the men had thick, heavily waxed moustaches and bushy eyebrows, a humble bearing, and a quick, goat-like gait.

The authorities inspected their travel papers; the quarantine overseer examined them to evaluate their health and found everyone to be healthy; and the appraiser confirmed that they had not brought anything in, noting that on that occasion, twenty-seven "males, of various ages" had crossed.

It has long been said that a Serb is a good servant but a poor master. This proved to be a sacred and undeniable truth on this very occasion at the Katun quarantine post. Had there been Germans instead of these Serbs, the first "officials" of the young Principality of Serbia, they would never have examined the baskets, permits, and bags so carelessly. A German would have searched every pannier, every sack, even every pocket, very thoroughly; he would have poked his nose everywhere, and the list of travellers would, of course, have been more accurate and complete. Instead of twenty-seven, twenty-eight persons would have been recorded. Because if they had only looked a little more carefully while casually inspecting the rugs, blankets, pack-saddles, and baskets, they would have found, hidden in one of those baskets, a tiny, very tiny Cincar boy in a miniature coat and tiny sandals hardly bigger than a piglet's hoof, wearing a little fez decorated with silver coins and tassels, with goose feathers stuck behind each ear (to ward off the evil eye), so that he looked exactly like a *soluf*. And they would have entered that twenty-eighth traveller who crossed the border: the seven-year-old Gerasim Paschalia Metsovali from the village of Gotista in Epirus, who is the hero of our little story.

But as it was, the authorities, being careless, never noticed him, and he, for his part, never saw the authorities either, because just at the moment they were passing the frontier post, sleep had overtaken him and he had dozed off right on the border line itself.

*

Thus, our hero entered Serbia unnoticed and unregistered, not appearing on the list of incoming travellers nor in the customs ledger of imported goods; neither as a person, nor as an object, nor even as a sample without commercial value.

Along the way, the travellers gradually parted ways, staying in villages along the main road; only five of them continued to Belgrade.

As soon as they reached Belgrade and sold their horses and donkeys to the carters, they immediately dispersed in different directions. One opened a liqueur shop called "At Karaiskakis's," displaying a picture of the same hero; another opened, in Zerek, something like a sweet shop called "Nectar and Ambrosia," where he made and sold *sudžuks*, roosters, and whistles made of sugar, which, as instruments, surpassed all other known instruments in affordability, clarity of tone, and nourishing qualities—because it was the only musical instrument you could eat, thereby both celebrating and nourishing its artist, sweetening his bitter artistic life and tough calling. A third opened an *aščinica*, a cookshop near the Lyceum, where crowds of young Serbs—eager for knowledge and learning—would stop by. A fourth opened a vegetable stall in the central bazaar, and within a single year, that stall grew into a proper shop all the way out by "The Three Keys." It was with this last one that little Geras stayed.

And so, already in his seventh year, Geras took part in and assisted his fellow countryman, Kir Naun, using his limited strength. He was gradually introduced to the trade because it's well known that gradual learning is the best way to gain real knowledge of commerce. His very first task in the trade was simply to observe the customers. All day long, he had to stand by the door or at the counter, watching and learning how Kir Naun offered and tempted customers, measured goods, and, more than anything, ensured that none of the customers, whether inside or outside the shop, slipped anything into their bags. And he did this skillfully for a child his age. He would play around, seemingly like any other child, but those small, quick Cincar eyes of his flickered and darted like oil on water—nothing could escape his sight!... And how he watched! Not only could no one steal anything from the shop, but two or three times he himself snatched from the bag of some bewildered, scatterbrained peasant woman a thing she had already bought and paid for, and skillfully returned it to the shelf—so deftly that even Kir Naun didn't notice... And if by chance someone did manage to lift something cleverly, he didn't enjoy the thought of having obtained the goods cheaply for long, because little Geras would quickly spot it and immediately, in his thin Cincar voice, report it to Kir Naun in their

language. Kir Naun would add this to the tally he kept with chalk on the counter:

We have, my friend: salt five oka and half, and two *šamija kalemćarke*, and *ćitke—smijl-ćitke*, very nice for daughter-in-law, and half oka cott'n, and one fresh-new *opanci*—and one beltses...

"What belts, for God's sake, man!" the peasant shouts. "You no can do *zulum* on me, this isn't Turkey no more!" ...

"Them there... in bag..." Kir Naun says calmly, points down at the bag with the chalk, and adds four *grošes* (groschen).

"Eh, for God's sake, what belts? ..." the peasant asks, completely stunned.

"In bag... from these beltses..." Kir Naun points at the belts hanging in the shop.

"Here!" little Geras jumps and pulls them out quickly. "Here, you won't find in any other *dućan*, only in our shop we have such belts, first class!"

The peasant tries to remember when and how he put them in his bag, but for the life of him, he can't recall, so he crosses himself with his left hand in astonishment.

"Hehe, can happen, can happen, Master Ranisav," Kir Naun tries to calm him, chalking the four *grošes* down again just to be safe. "Can happen, man forgets. You have some trouble home, somebody sick maybe, *e de*, then man no know what he does..."

"Upon my soul, how'd you guess!" he exclaims. "I must've put 'em in myself; me-me... Who else but me..."

"Now I tell you story, what happen to me, listen good!... You listen and you no believe, but I swear by my little Geras here—may he live hundred years—exactly so it was! Came once Master Pavle from Rušanj, good man, *sefte* customer when I open this *bakalska* shop, everything brand-new... He wants salt. "How much?" "Ten oka!" Good, I serve. I put salt on *kantar*—ten oka exact... "Too little!" say Master Pavle. "What too little? Ten oka I give you! Want I write eleven?" (We were jokin', y'know.) "No," he says, "too little salt, too many oka!" "That much," I say. "No, not that much," he say, "not ten, I know ten oka, there isn't even seven here!" "Can't be short, you're hurtin' my honour!" I say. *Kantar* always right, Archangel Michael hisself could weigh souls on 'em, exact to the grain!" ... "Let it go, Master Naun!" he tell me. And what happen! I have big worry that day. I weigh salt but think on my troubles, press little bit with elbow... and *kantar* shows ten oka! When I lift elbow, eight oka and half, one oka and half missing! Can you believe? Same with you today, Master Ranisav... Hehe! Man forgets, my friend. Not just one worry in this world, is there?..."

And so, thanks to little Geras, Kir Naun managed to cover the entire bill—even the thing the peasant had absent-mindedly slipped into his own bag...

Thus, little Geras slowly began working and gradually became familiar with the trade. One morning, little Geras appeared—to the surprise and admiration of the whole neighbourhood—as a proper, fully-fledged *bakalin*, dressed appropriately with an apron made from a flour sack (with the sack's number and the proud name of *pan* Všetečka, owner of the steam mill, still perfectly visible). The apron was tied a bit higher than usual—that is, right under his chin. So little Geras looked like a genuine *bakalin*—in miniature, of course—what the Germans would call a Taschenausgabe—pocket edition. Strangely enough, the moment he put on the apron, as if he suddenly felt the weight of his new role, tiny worry lines appeared between his eyebrows. Now he truly resembled a genuine Cincar grocer. The only thing still missing was a string of prayer beads, without which a Cincar cannot even be imagined. Soon enough, he got a set and enjoyed secretly counting them—of course, only when alone in the shop; but that pleasure was short-lived. When Kir Naun once saw him walking thoughtfully in front of the shop, as if the entire main bazaar owed him money, counting his beads—and when he noticed that Geras's beads were even longer than his own—Kir Naun suddenly snapped. He marched over, tilted his head to one side—precisely the way every angry Cincar does—seized Geras by the ear and hissed:

"Your father, he go Holy Land?" ...

"Nope!" Geras squeaked, staring in bewilderment as he tried to wriggle his ear free.

"Aaa... so... you... you not *'adžija*?..."

Geras grew quiet; he already understood what was ahead.

"Inside the shop, quick-quick, go grind salt now, you *gumari*!" roared Kir Naun, delivering a burning slap across the boy's cheek, and confiscated the prayer beads on the spot...

Chapter Two

In this chapter, the reader will see how Geras—through hard labour and suffering, saving and pain—fought his way through this world and finally reached "selamet"; or, to put it more simply, how Geras became Kir Geras, and what he was like once he arrived there—that is, what he was like as a young merchant standing behind the counter. There are also a few dark little hints that Geras still had some poetic moments during that "kalfa" life.

We will skip the bleakest part of every *bakalin's* life—the apprentice years—and even the *kalfa* years, which in other trades are at least sprinkled with flowers and sweet memories. But for a grocer's *kalfa*, they are just as dark, if not darker and more tormenting, than the apprentice period itself. That time is full of all kinds of trouble and hard work; words are too weak to describe it all. It is filled with demanding and unpleasant tasks and experiences: waking before dawn, going hungry, freezing in winter, sweating in summer, teeth chattering, sweat pouring down, hunger and thirst; filled with suspicion and scolding, slaps and beatings, blisters on the hands and bruises on the back. We shall skip all that, or rather, pass over it quickly, and for one reason only: to spare the tender feelings of sensitive readers and delicate lady readers, so we do not make them shed rivers of those so-called "tears of pity" at the description of all Geras's sufferings.

Therefore, we shall keep it brief and mention only this: after seven years of apprenticeship, Geras finally became a *kalfa*. The fact that he was an apprentice for exactly seven years—no more, no less—had its own reason, which even Geras himself did not understand for a long time. But after the master's explanation, he calmed down, accepted his fate, and realized it had to be that way. Whenever he grumbled and complained about serving so long as an apprentice, Master Naun would soothe him and assure him that it was necessary for many reasons—reasons too lengthy and unnecessary to list fully—yet he mentioned a few. These included: because a week has seven days; because there are seven Christian sacraments; because there are seven wonders of the world; and because, finally, there are seven sages of Greece. So, Kir Naun said, Geras—as a Christian and a Hellene—must serve exactly seven years (not a day less, nor a day more)! And that, he would tell him, is already a blessing, because when he, the master, was an apprentice in Moscopole, he served ten whole years, not just seven, because—as it was explained then—the Ten Commandments of God are older than anything in the world!... But now, Kir Naun added, these are different times; the world has grown corrupt and fallen away from God, and for that reason, Geras only serves seven years—the remaining three, the master said, have been taken away by the devil and the *kakademon*!

*

And so, Geras became a *kalfa*, and he looked just like every other grocer's *kalfa*. Dear readers, you can picture him in a heartbeat. Take that same little Geras, the tiny apprentice who used to hide in the hamper,

now hold him up to a magnifying glass—and there you have *kalfa* Geras! He still wore the short Cincar jacket, and over it the thick apron made from some old sack. On his head was a fez smaller than his skull, and on his feet, clogs bigger than his feet—and those feet, after seven straight years standing behind the counter, had become flat and wide as a duck's. When he stepped on someone's toes with them, the poor victim would hop on one leg and howl like a dog that just got its tail caught in the door!... The only difference was that underneath the jacket, instead of the old baggy *tozluci*, he now wore proper trousers—and no wonder, because (as science itself has proven) Belgrade stands at the very gates of Western civilization and Europe...

As a *kalfa*, he knew nothing of joys or pleasures—not like the tailor's lads or, even more, the barber's boys, for whom every day was different, and Saturday and Sunday evenings were filled with the sweetest memories. For Geras, there was no world beyond the shop and the counter. From sunrise until nightfall, he was there: serving customers, grinding salt, pounding pepper wrapped up like a mummy, rolling little paper cones for spices, or doing whatever was needed so he wouldn't stand idle—because every single day, Kir Naun drilled into his head the same wisdom: "Idleness is the mother of all vices in this world." On Sundays and holidays, he did housework in the morning—helping the Mistress Patruna, Kir Naun's second wife, in the kitchen—and in the afternoon, he sat in front of the courtyard gate or the shop door, quietly humming (or actually chanting) from the *Katavasia* (of course in Greek), or secretly reading *Greek Mythology*, or openly reading *The Lives of the Saints*, which he borrowed for his "spiritual edification" from his *daskal*, Kir Hariton, who was a teacher at the Greek Sunday school; Geras had gone to him as an apprentice and was allowed to study only on Sundays, because on weekdays, Kir Hariton was just an ordinary *jorgandžija* (duvet maker) and *drndar*.

Geras spent fourteen long, relentless years as a *kalfa*—and he might have remained another fourteen if not for something that sped up the process. He received his guild letter, his *esnafsko pismo*, sooner than he ever dared to hope...

*

One Sunday, old Kir Naun was pacing the courtyard, lost in thought in the manner every Greek and Cincar is obliged to adopt: his hands clasped behind his back and his short prayer beads slipping unconsciously and mechanically through his fingers, when a voice and a song tore him from his thoughts:

Without you, my darling, my dearest,
I cannot live; I cannot live –
I must die!

As if struck by a bolt from the blue, Kir Naun suddenly stopped. He wavered and almost fell, but caught himself on his heels. The tassel of his fez shot forward; he raised his eyebrows, widened his eyes, and stared in complete surprise when he heard that Serbian song. He paused and listened for the next lines:

For you are like fragrant flowers,
And I, I pluck you, I pluck you —
Joyfully.

"Fluh-ers!" the old man muttered. "What fluh-ers! Who picks fluh-ers?... *Whose* fluh-ers is she smelling? *Who is fluh-er*?!?" He stomped around the yard like a little bantam cock on a dung heap, kicking at the dirt every few steps. "Fluh-ers!" he repeated, started pacing again, then suddenly stopped dead, turned toward the voice, thumped his chest with both fists and roared: "*Fluh-ers*? ... *Well, I'm the fluh-er*!..." After more wandering and head-shaking, he finally halted, sighed mournfully and cried: "*Dulusos*, poor wretch that I am!" and waved his hand in despair as he listened to the singing of young Aglaïca, his third wife, even younger than the two previous ones now resting in peace.

It scandalized him to his core! Aglaïca? Aglaïca, who only two years ago had come from Šatište and still could barely stammer a word of Serbian—and now she was singing? And what songs—shameful Serbian love songs! Old Kir Naun shook his head more forcefully, clicked the beads faster, marched around the courtyard, muttering, circling the kitchen, but never going inside. When her singing began to drag on, he came up to her and remarked that she would do well to stop, telling her that it was a sin, right there during the Lord's service, instead of praying to God (or, if she simply had to sing, at least to chant some Akathist in Greek)—and here she was singing songs like these! After that, he again paced up and down, whispering from time to time: "Doulos, Kir Naum! Doulos!" He walked and pondered, when once more singing was heard from the room:

For you, my love, I shall die,
Ah, into the dark grave, into the dark grave –
I shall lie!

"Huuu!" Kir Naun let out a howl, snatched off his fez to cool his head, which was steaming like a boiled beetroot. He glanced up at the sky to thank God the song was over, when a new one started in a different tune:

I think of you when dawn is breaking,
I think of you when the day is done...

"Hehe! 'Thing of you!' Thing!... And I, what do I thing of—of you, my girl, and for that word alone!... You've poured Tartarus into my heart. Clytemnestra accursed...!"

And from within it, there came:

And until the grave, I shall think of you.

There, Kir Naun! To your health and the pita you eat!" he sighed bitterly upon hearing that. Then he began smacking his forehead even harder: "Ah, you *kondrokefalos*! Fool!"

At the word pita, he suddenly recalled the "Cincar pita" and "pasha qofte"—and only now did it hit him that lately his little Aglaïca had begun making such dishes even on weekdays, dishes he had never requested and didn't particularly care for! ... Old Kir Naun stopped abruptly. Mouth agape, he looked around cautiously, nervously, like a cat about to swipe something off the kitchen table.

"Hmmm!" he said, shaking his head thoughtfully. "Aha! You little minx, you devil!... You damn Erostratus! You want burn my temple of Artemis!... I'll throw this fire out from my house!"

And one day, not long after this, the neighbours saw Greek merchants gathering at Kir Naun's house. They arrived one by one, each lost in thought. With prayer beads in their hands, murmuring and counting something to themselves, they entered Kir Naun's house, one after another. They assembled like a sort of Court of Good Men. Open ledgers lay before them... They fussed and studied things for some time, and eventually it all ended with Kir Naun and all of them embracing Geras; each one giving him a gentle pat on the shoulder and back. It was then, for the first time among them, that he was called Kir Geras—as the author will now always and consistently refer to him.

*

And so Kir Geras became his own master.

He opened a shop in Zerek. It was hard to say what kind of trade it really was, since the shop sold a bit of everything. At first glance, it

seemed like a grocery and haberdashery combined; look a bit closer, and based on certain goods, you'd think it was a greengrocery and a confectionery; and since the elderly women bought their medicines there only, it appeared to be a chemist's shop or a pharmacy; yet with all those pack-saddles, trestles, and saws often displayed outside, and with all the drunken Banat sawyers inside, Kir Geras's establishment looked most of all like a liquor shop.

And precisely for that reason, business went well for him: his shop was always full; one customer out, another straight in. And he knew how to draw them in, especially the womenfolk: sometimes a little gift, but far more often, every single time, a sweet word. Let a comely girl or a young widow only step inside, and he would sigh and murmur, as if to himself: "Hehe! Hard-hard the house without a *fustan*!" And if she were married, he would sigh again and say something else, but again something pleasant and flattering to the customer: "I take rifle, become klepht!" And when she asked him where he meant to go, he would answer, "To forest!" And when she asked why on earth he needed to do all that, he told her he would do it for her husband's sake—for he hated the man, hated him like a sworn enemy, and why exactly he was his enemy, that, he said, he would not tell even to the black earth. Yet another woman, he greeted differently and told her something else again, but still, something sweet, "I become monk, build monastery!" Yet all these pretty words never stopped him from short-weighing every single customer, even the prettiest. And still the women, married ladies and servant girls alike, swarmed to Kir Geras's shop like flies to sugar.

And so, whether there was anything to buy or not, Kir Geras's shop was always full; even fuller before noon, but busiest of all toward evening, before supper, when the Bosnian labourers and the Banat sawyers trudged home from work.

Then the front of Kir Geras's shop was buried under pack-saddles, saws, and log-rollers. Inside, the sawyers sat with their wives: the men drinking rakia, the women sipping liqueurs, talking, complaining, reminiscing about what they once were and what they are now! If Kir Geras had truly been as interested as he pretended while listening so intently, he would have heard some astonishing life stories from his everyday customers, for among them there were all sorts! There were once-wealthy masters, assessors, and bailiffs who used to ride in four-horse carriages, buying, selling (and sometimes stealing) horses; there were men who had lived contented and happy lives without the slightest cloud over their marriage—until one night the wife (some Sosa, Sara, or Rakilja) ran away with a garrison trumpeter, vanishing to who knows where. There were those who, in a fit of merriment, cut a friend with a razor, then served many years in prison; and when they returned,

their property was nearly all gone, and no word of the wife! And what could a man do then but tie his rags together and set off for Srem—first to drive carts, then to guard vineyards; and when left with only three florins to his name, he bought a saw and a file and crossed into Servia... And now he sighs for his old black stallions and for the wanderings of his youth with Pijad, long vanished, who knows where. Yet still, sitting here with a glass of rakia, he comforts himself like a true philosopher, saying, "God forbid anything worse! As for this—well, this can be rattled through till the first death comes!"

Chapter Three

This chapter is merely a continuation of the previous one. It clearly demonstrates the type of man Kir Geras was—as a Hellene, as a worshipper, and householder.

Such things Kir Geras heard every single day; each day brought something new, even stranger, and he listened to it all, though he remembered none of it, as he watched more closely to fill their empty glasses and monitor how much each had drunk rather than to remember their tales. Yet even so, it benefited him: the days passed pleasantly and lightly. Therefore, he grew to love working days, as time moved more quickly and far more pleasantly than on Sundays or feast days.

Those were the most challenging for him, and among all feasts, the one he found the most difficult and longest was the fourteenth of January—the Feast of Saint Sava. The idea that a Serb saint should be celebrated at all was simply beyond his understanding, as well as that of the thousands of Greeks (and Cincars) living in Belgrade. As an apprentice and *kalfa*, he had only wondered at it; now, as his own master, he both wondered and fumed. He always completely forgot that day—for in his Greek calendar, it was not marked in black or red—and only on the night before the feast, when they reminded him, would he snort, throw back his head, close his eyes for a moment, and say:

"How can be Serb saint? One Serb—to become holy!—Then he would start counting on fingers, "Can say Agios Sosontios, Ilarios, Agios Agapios, Polikarpos. Can Agios Tarasios, Fefronios; yes, have Saint Sava—but Jerusalem, hey, Jerusalem, not Novi Pazar! Have such saints, yes, because have *forma*... but Rastko, Racko... how Racko can be saint, say *Saint Racko*! Here, look," he would say, bringing out his Greek calendar to show the others. They searched for Saint Rastko and, of course, did not find him. "See no have, no have; because no can be, no have *forma*!" he would say, shaking the calendar angrily. "*Forma no*

have... One Serb to live in desert, miracle-worker, great martyr, servant of God! What miracle he make? Kill dragon like Saint George? No!... Walk on water free-free like on royal road... like Saint Nicholas? No!... Stand on one leg twenty years like Alypius the Stylite? No! Bless olive tree to be tree of God and curse willow to have no fruit? Make devil spit out six eaten children of sister Melelia like Saint Sisoi do? No! ... No can, that why!... Serb have strength for that? No have!" Thus, Kir Geras would ask and answer himself. "How then Serb be saint?" ...

That is how the Greeks spoke among themselves. Egged on by Kir Geras, they played dumb, went on strike against the calendar and the canonized saints, refused to go to church, yet dared not open their shops that day either, because they still remember how Prince Miloš once fined each of them several oka of wax and incense. Since then, they complain, but from Saint Stephen the Archdeacon onward, they ask their Serbian neighbours, "When is that Saint Sava[1] of yours again?" Then they shut their shops, complain inside the closed shutters, and predict the end for the entire Orthodox Church.

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On such feast days and every Sunday, things were most difficult for Kir Geras, as they are for every diligent and hardworking man for whom time is money, and idleness means waste and death. During those times, he felt completely alone because Kir Geras did not keep even a *kalfa*, let alone an apprentice—not even one as small as a fist—and all because of the hard and lean times, and because of the corrupt and unreliable youth of those days, as he would often say.

Sunday mornings still felt bearable, as he regularly attended church. He usually stood where the churchwardens did and helped them: lighting and selling candles, counting the donations, and stacking the coins into neat little piles. It suited him; it somehow convinced him he was not wasting the day. Occasionally, he would even carry the collection plate (out of respect, they let him carry the very first one), and when the church was more crowded, he would slip behind the choir screen to sing the Cherubic Hymn—but the Greek version: "I ta heruvim mistikos ikenizondes..." Just as, throughout the entire service, he quietly hummed the hymns to himself (all in Greek, naturally), and near the end, when the schoolboys started singing "Ton Despotin ke Arhierea imon, Kyrie filatte: Is polla eti, Despota," Kir Geras would be in perfect bliss, melting with heavenly sweetness at finally hearing some Greek chant during the day. He felt satisfied, rewarded, and comforted; for

[1] See M. Đ. Milićević: *Kneževina Srbija* (Sremac's note)

though he had waited long, the sweetest moment had arrived at last. Then, mingling with the metropolitan's retinue, he would walk proudly out of the church, thinking to himself: No matter how these barbarians start, they always have to finish in Greek!

But on Sunday afternoons, he felt despair over the long, empty hours. He did not visit the taverns to play *mica* or *žandar*, nor did he care to visit Topčider, Vilina Voda, or Bulbulder, as others did; he could have gone to the Reading Room, but he chose not to because they didn't keep a single Greek newspaper. Instead, he sat in front of his shop, rolling his prayer beads between his fingers (each year, he bought one new amber bead for them, which is why they were so uneven), watching the passersby and returning greetings—more politely and warmly if they were Greeks, more indifferently and coldly if they were foreigners. Or he would wander around the closed shop and talk with his cat, who dozed and purred on the counter.

That cat was his only companion and friend, his inseparable companion, whom he parted with only for short periods—specifically when he lent him to someone (he would lend him to his fellow Greeks privately, but to Serbs only against a written receipt) for a day or two to keep down the rats and mice in a storeroom. Or when the cat itself, according to the inscrutable, eternal, and unchanging laws of nature, in February—when those cat madrigals known to everyone are usually heard on rooftops—took leave of its own accord and returned after a few days, humble and quiet, scratched all over the nose and with torn ears that no longer resembled ears at all but two flaps. Despite all that, he was a good and diligent cat from the reputable merchant household of Papa Nasko. Kir Geras had sought him out especially and cared greatly about befriending and establishing some connection with one of the more prominent and reputable families and firms. Moreover, he preferred having a cat from a Greek house rather than a Serbian one because, in a Serbian household, they are usually gourmands; every other day, something is slaughtered, cooked, or baked. All household members eat plentifully and often multiple times throughout the day, and thus the cat is usually spoiled, and its character corrupted: it is always greasing its whiskers, eating greasy and spicy *đuveč* and similar dishes, and it becomes sluggish, lazy, and indifferent to the vermin it was initially meant to hunt. In short, living among Serbs, a cat usually becomes as lazy as a Serb—just as much a *dembel* and a *levend*—with the only difference that it does not loiter about, play cards, or rack up debts in taverns. That is why Kir Geras preferred a Greek cat over a Serbian one, and why a cat from a Greek household was better than one from even the best Serbian merchant family.

On Sunday afternoons, he spent the most pleasant time with that cat. He talked to him—in Greek, of course—and thus infused the Greek spirit into him, so that afterward the cat didn't understand a word of Serbian. You could shout "puss, kitty, shoo!" as much as you liked—he paid no mind, as if it didn't concern him in the slightest. For Kir Geras himself followed that old rule which applies to everyone just starting in the world: take the bread from your own mouth; it's better to put money in the *čekmedže* than in your stomach; better to go to bed hungry and dream of lavish suppers than to lie down stuffed and dream of *aramijas* and other horrors.

That is why Kir Geras, for years, seldom sat down at the table to have a proper lunch. Instead, all day long, while measuring out cheese, olives, herrings, smoked bleak, carob, and figs, he would nibble a little of each. Anything he had taken from a customer by measuring short would usually serve as his lunch. Only when evening arrived, and the shop was closed, would he, as they say, sit down properly and eat the supper he prepared for himself in the small room behind the closed shop.

It was a supper like no other. Many people knew of it; it even became a proverb. For years afterward, it was talked about and often quoted. For decades, principals scolded the extravagant generation of *kalfas* and predicted that they would never be or become what Kir Geras had achieved through his modesty and thrift.

Every evening, as soon as he closed the shop, Kir Geras would light a small fire in the brazier. In the glow of that fire, he would cut stale bread into tiny, thin slices, like flint, for his *popara*. Then he would pour hot water over it. After that, he would select a nice, clean little candle worth a nickel coin—one that was broken and no one would buy—and split it in two. From one half, he would pull out the wick and give it to his beloved cat, while he threw the tallow onto the *popara*, which steamed and greedily absorbed the bit of tallow. He would then stir constantly in the small pot to ensure the whole *popara* was evenly and richly soaked with fat. Only then would he light the other half of the candle. The room would brighten, and Kir Geras would feel a pleasant warmth in his nicely lit little room. After the day's labour and effort, he now took his supper. The candle burned while he ate, and for a bit longer. When he finally lay down—whispering numbers or prayers—he slowly surrendered to "the arms of Morpheus." Accompanied by the crackling of the candle burning down and the monotone purring of the cat at his head, Kir Geras would fall asleep and snore peacefully, quietly, and contentedly—just as all righteous souls sleep and snore, ones that have no sin, and therefore no pangs of conscience...

Chapter Four

Small causes, significant consequences, or: How Kir Geras got married.

Living as he did, in the manner described in the earlier chapters, it was no wonder that Kir Geras prospered day by day: his business branched out and flourished, life was sweet to him, and everything had meaning. When people congratulated him on his success and paid him compliments, Kir Geras did not get the least bit embarrassed; he felt he had grown into his position and that things had to be this way and no other. He told them there was nothing to marvel at. "Everything in measure," said the ancient Greek philosopher Solon, and Kir Geras had kept to that rule since his earliest youth. He would add that such wisdom was given by God to Greeks alone. "Where I from?" Kir Geras would ask himself. "From land of Metsovo!" he would answer, and then wonder why on earth they were surprised.

And Kir Geras was quite right to mention this with pride and to compare himself, a Greek, with the rest of the Serbs, for there is, indeed, a great difference between a Greek and a Serb. A Greek starts small, encouraged by the thought that the world itself was created out of nothing, so he does the same. He sets up trade anywhere: on someone's doorstep, under a gateway, in a corridor. After a while, he rents a tiny shop, then a bigger one, then expands it, leases the neighbouring shop, knocks through the wall, and turns two small shops into one large one. He spreads like that to the detriment of his surroundings—just like the hedgehog in the fable who crawled into the mole's den, warmed himself and stretched out, and when the mole complained of the cramped space, said: "It suits me fine; if it's too tight for you, go outside!" So does a Greek: he begins in Palilula or on the edge of town, and little by little, bit by bit, rolls his way to the main bazaar. A Serb does it differently. He goes straight to the main bazaar, rents a huge shop, orders an enormous quantity of goods on credit—everything he needs and everything he doesn't—then, to serve his customers more quickly and accurately, hires numerous assistants. They work, and he, from time to time, stops into the shop to supervise the *kalfas*, who usually have better acquaintances and give nicer gifts than the master himself, for the master gives his own, while they give what belongs to others. A Serb starts big and keeps getting smaller; he begins in the main bazaar and ends in Palilula; he starts with a large shop and ends up renting, sharing a tiny stall with some cobbler—until finally, in this rolling farther and farther downhill, he ends up as a clerk in some financial institution where his former Greek neighbor is a shareholder

with at least fifty shares! There is no need to go far for proof. In the three or four years around Kir Geras himself, three neighbouring merchants had gone bankrupt: two had taken humble municipal jobs, and the third had vanished somewhere far away and opened a grocer's shop in some godforsaken alley at the very edge of town.

"You ever hear, at the holy liturgy in church, how they sing the Cherubim Hymn? Kir Geras would say to confirm what he said earlier. "You ever hear when a real Greek, proper Greek start the Cherubim Hymn? He start soft-soft, low-low, almost whisper... then lift, lift, higher-higher, all the way to the sky, and finish the song like it must be finish!? Ha?" ... Kir Geras would say triumphantly, taking a pinch of snuff, enjoying the effect his example produced. And a Serb?" he goes on, taking another sniff. "How Serb sing the Cherubim Hymn—and whole liturgy too? How he begin? High, loud, wide; twist the neck, lift and drop the eyebrows and the lashes, look up to the chandeliers, to the dome... but he cannot push it to the *đunija*. No! He crack... crack like rooster that swallow olive stone and cannot crow!" He pauses again, content with the picture. "There is one word from great Greek wiseman Thales: *Know yourself!* ...This is for trade also! *Everything with measure*! Say famous Greek Solon from Hellas."

And that's how Geras did it, too. He started with a small alley, a tiny shop, and a staff just as modest. There was only him and his cat, already known to our readers: he to attract customers, and the cat to chase away mice. He also had two apprentices who helped him and cheered him with songs because whenever they were making sweets—like *pečati* and *šipčice*—they had to sing church songs in a duet—anything from *Vozbranoj* (Unto the Defender General), *Na Rjekah Vavilonskih* (On the Rivers of Babylon), or that school song: *Blago nama pticama po zelenim šumama* (Lucky are We Birds in the Green Forests) and similar tunes. All of this made Kir Geras happy and relaxed, for he believed that when they were singing, they were only working and singing, not eating sugar—because long ago it was said: he who sings thinks no evil...

So, that was how many members Kir Geras's small trading company had, and even that small number did not stay the same. One winter, their numbers decreased; one of them disappeared... It was Kir Geras's favourite—his cat. Here's how it happened: one evening, the cat meowed at the door, wanting to go outside. Kir Geras got up to let him out, smiled kindly, patted him, and said, "Hehe! My little *Adžamijče*!" But his beloved pet did not return the next day, nor the day after, nor in the days that followed. It was difficult for Kir Geras to be without his favourite, but he comforted himself, remembering that this had happened before, and trying to reassure himself: "What's life... what's

man! Youth—foolish youth! He come back!" But several more days went by, and the cat was still nowhere to be seen. Even the mice noticed his absence, and Kir Geras, along with his sorrow, felt the loss and hurt. He picked up a calendar, wondering how long this February could last and whether it might be a leap year. When he looked at the calendar, he saw that it was indeed a leap year: February had twenty-nine days, which had come and gone, and now it was March 17th, the day of Alexius, Man of God—and still no sign of his cat! For two or three weeks, he made careful inquiries, near and far, about his cat. He described him in detail, both in looks and character, promising a reward to anyone who could bring him back or at least give information, but all his efforts were in vain. No one could tell him anything about the cat, neither good nor bad, as if he had disappeared off the face of the earth!

In those days, a she-cat would sometimes appear, wandering sorrowfully around Kir Geras's house. "We lose him," Kir Geras said to her.

He mourned the cat sincerely, often thought of him, and more than once whispered a formal epitaph for his fallen favourite. A little comfort, a small consolation, was that he found a replacement. But what a difference—in nature and character—between the old and the new cat! This new one, though just a small spark of life, as they say, still in the budding stage of his existence, already displayed the nasty traits of an old, jaded cat. He was lazy and completely unreliable; he stole whatever he saw in the kitchen, and in the shop, he pretended to be clumsy and deaf to the squeaking and gnawing of the mice, who now felt bolder than ever. And Kir Geras began to fully realize the horror of his lonely bachelor life and the weight of his loss. Then his old favourite came to mind, and he silently lamented him in the style of ancient poets. "What dark, frozen night," whispered Kir Geras, "on what roof, by whose hand and what weapon—stone, stick, log, clod, or boot—died my beloved? Was it near the house, or far from home, far from the shop and counter where he sat for years, purring and dozing with his eyes half shut—where did he close his eyes forever, my scarecrow of shop-mice and house-mice alike?... Where and how did he end his days?" wondered Geras. "And who knows in which tanner's vat now rests that beautiful, shining greenish fur of his! ... At least he had a good life," thought Kir Geras, trying to comfort himself. And now he thought of himself too, of his solitude and his monkish isolation; he felt alone. For what were those two apprentices to him, born in Serbia, and that new cat from a Serbian home? Barbarians—nothing else. The departed one at least understood Greek, while this one neither understands nor wishes to understand, neither a good word nor harsh; when Kir Geras scolds him, he plays the fool: lifts his leg and licks it from tail to paw! Kir Geras was alone, all alone—like a dry tree on a mountain. He sighed heavily

and compared himself to the phoenix-bird, who alone—the only one of its kind in the world—lives. And he sighed even deeper when he remembered that even that phoenix is happier than he, Geras, though it too lives alone and has no companion, though it burns itself and turns to a handful of ashes. For from those ashes the phoenix is renewed again, born anew, young again, to see the beautiful day of God for five hundred more years, and to be remembered, while world and age endure, by the grateful Greek people. So the phoenix—but he, Geras?

Then he realized he could not continue like this. He must get married! That was his decision immediately; afterwards, he thought it over again, weighing the pros and cons, and once more firmly resolved: it was time for him to marry. And what he had decided, he entrusted—following the customs and traditions of the Greek merchant world—to his compatriots, asking them to also consider it carefully. They responded happily, discussed it, and all agreed that Kir Geras should marry: partly because they were his good friends, and partly as good Hellenes, who felt that their population was decreasing, that the marketplace ground was slipping away from beneath their feet, and that in the bazaar there were more shop signs ending in -ić and -vić, and fewer ending in -as and -os, -ades and -ides!

What was decided was settled quickly—as is the rule among people whose motto in life is: time is money.

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What was decided was settled quickly. Two weeks later, the banns were read in church for the first-time groom Kir Geras Paskalis and Euterpe Lazarides. The proclamation was made in both Serbian and Greek (in the former because it is the official language of the church, and in the latter because the engaged couple were Greeks and because there were always far more Greeks than Serbs in the church anyway) and the pious Christians were invited to speak freely if they knew of any "zakono prepjatstvije nameravanom brakosočetaniju".

Young Euterpe was from an honourable Cincar trading family, the Lazarideses. She was beautiful, gentle, modest, and—what was no less important—she understood business well. She was a true reflection and product of her era. She always went around town only with her mother. When she walked, she looked straight ahead, small, slightly knock-kneed, heels turned outward, toes inward. When she strolled with her sisters and mother, their whole bodies moved in that Greek style, resembling a family of geese or ducks wading to the pond. She never looked at a man and couldn't bear a man's gaze without blushing all over (a fact that today seems almost unbelievable but was quite

normal then). When dancing, her hand never touched a man's, because in those strict old moral times, the "tancer" and the "tancerka" danced by holding only the ends of a stiff handkerchief or an embroidered towel. Once, in a dream, a man came to her—her household servant, no less, the long, shaggy Ristivoj—lifted her in his palm, and kissed her. She struggled, wanting to jump to the ground, but dared not, being so high. When she woke, she didn't even have lunch that day, and all day long, as if guilty, she avoided the eyes and glances of her strict, moral parents.

So young, beautiful, and modest, it was only natural that she did not have to wait long from engagement to marriage. Within a few weeks, the wedding took place, which in its solemnity—and even more in the effort of the guests—strongly resembled those ancient Olympic games—for here gathered all that was noble in the Hellenic world living among the barbarians. And what a spread of food! There was everything and anything, and the finest of all was the famous Cincar pie, with chicken pulled into fine threads. There were fiddlers and all sorts of dances, but mostly Greek ones. The Greeks and the Cincar, quilt-makers, tailors, and liqueur-makers all joined in the horo; the leader, a klepht—specially dressed and armed for the occasion—waved his handkerchief in his right hand, and the dance surged and swirled madly and magnificently, so that it seemed as if from the graves of the Trojan fields had risen the ancient Myrmidons of Achilles, in honour of their compatriot and descendant, the fortunate and blessed Kir Geras Paskalis!... There were Serbs too, and for their sake—and generally, for his many customers who were not there—some Serbian dances were performed as well. Kir Geras made a sacrifice, and it was decided that the festivities should end with the *šareni oro*, a sacrifice, I say, because the *šareni oro*, as everyone knows, is danced only after dark. That afternoon seemed an eternity to Kir Geras. While the Greek dances were being performed, the Serbs watched, and the Greeks explained everything to them, telling them about the dances with the *yatagan* that palikars, klephts, and the Souliotes perform there in their vilayet. When the festivities concluded, everyone was satisfied. The only sounds were: "Kala! Kala!" They congratulated each other on surviving and thanked God that it had all gone so well, without blood or human sacrifice, for they said that back in the vilayet it could not be done without it. Often, they said, all perish—bride, groom, and all the guests. Only the one who pours the wine survives, and even he would not have, had he not drunk himself to sleep earlier in the cellar. In short, they said, blood flows and spills like at Missolonghi, but here, in a foreign world, they must restrain themselves and control their impulses.

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They say a man marries to multiply the human race and to see himself continued in the children born from his heart. Every nation follows this, and that is why people marry. A Serbian wants the same, but when a Serbian marries, he changes his old bachelor lifestyle only a little, or often not at all; at most, if he happens to remember just before the wedding, he might give a photograph of the bride, wrapped in her hair, to a chambermaid or housekeeper. Often not even that, for at her request, he keeps, hides, and preserves it among dry, formal documents—like bonds, deeds, and court decisions. He does not change his lifestyle, does not break with the tavern and his tavern friends, and then, naturally, nothing happens... But Kir Geras and his household were not like that. Kir Geras rarely left the house, and since marrying, he hardly ever did—practically never. When he got up—he used to get up before his wife—he did so slowly so as not to wake her. He lit the fire himself, prepared the coffee pot, made coffee for both of them, poured it into cups, and covered them, then sat by the bed, waiting to see if she would wake on her own. He looked at her tenderly, and he often liked to tease her a little. He would take the soft clothes brush and bring it to her lips, and she, still with her eyes closed, would spread her arms and shape her lips for a kiss. The kiss snapped and vanished; she would wake, open her eyes, blush, and cover her face with her hands. Kir Geras would tease her, ask what or whom she had dreamed of, with whom she had kissed in her sleep, and whether it was the fidelity she had sworn before the altar! She denied it, but Geras said it did not matter—the kiss had happened and had been felt. She would then grow very embarrassed, blush even more, and he would laugh and soothe her: “It was me, me, my little dove! ... Get up, let’s drink coffee.” Then they would sit together, smile at each other, and drink coffee in bed. They would discuss lunch, and during lunch, they would plan dinner; and during dinner, she would ask if he thought of her while she worked in the kitchen, and he would ask if she thought of him when a handsome young customer entered the shop. On Saturdays or holiday eves, if they made stuffed cabbage, he helped her stuff them or chopped the meat for meatballs or shredded the white meat from a chicken for a Cincar pie, always showing her a better way. Whenever he went to the shop, he kissed her; whenever he returned to the room or kitchen, he did the same. That is why Serbian women sighed and said, “Blessed is the one who marries a Greek—she knows how to live!” ... On Sundays, they walked together, usually down some side street, and if they saw someone from afar, they would turn into an even smaller street: they needed no other world; they were each other’s world! ... And in such

mutual tenderness, is it any wonder that Kir Geras had a child before the four Serbs who married that same day in the same church?! ...

The first child, the first joy in Kir Geras's house! First, and a boy—a Hellene! What joy for the father! All his compatriots rejoiced with him. Immediately, they gathered to choose a name. A name, yes, but one that would mark him as the son of his people and not let him stray into another nationality. Many proposals were made: Miltiades, Themistocles, Leonidas, Aristides, Alcibiades. The Greek schoolteacher suggested Deucalion, but it seemed too foreign and Greek, so they rejected it. Then Prometheus was proposed, but it was rejected; or *Riga*, suggested the teacher, in memory of Rigas Feraios, who died in the tower of Belgrade—but that was also not accepted. Finally, they agreed on Aristoteles: first, a pure and beautiful Hellenic name; second, fitting the son of a grocer, a future grocer, since Aristoteles once ran a grocery in Stagirus, as teacher Argiropulos explained.

On the day of the baptism, little Aristoteles was showered with gifts: waistcoats, traditional trousers, fezzes with large blue tassels like those worn by Skadar merchants, red slippers with multicoloured woolen tassels at the top—and above all, the united wish of the entire Greek community in this barbarous environment: that the newborn child would bring honour to both his parents and his people; that he would be learned and fond of books like his great namesake Aristoteles, and wealthy like both his kinsmen in Vienna, *Sina* and *Dumba*; if not as rich as the two together, then at least as rich as one of them, whichever it might be!...

Chapter Five

This chapter describes Kir Geras's initial joy and first sorrow caused by his sons, aligning with the traditional didactic song: "O, young man, you are joy—O, young man, you are sorrow," *and so on.*

The Greeks and the Cincars think carefully before making any decision: they consider, analyze the issue from every angle, weigh options, deliberate thoroughly, and do everything they can before settling on a choice. But once they decide and commit to a task, they don't hesitate or waver—they see it through to the end. This was the case here with Kir Geras. They had just stored the cradle in the attic, considering it unnecessary for little Aristoteles—who struggled in his tiny *palikari* slippers across the room, helping himself and holding onto table and chair legs—when apprentice Milosav Pinosavac was sent back to the shop. A few months later, they retrieved the cradle from the attic again, now seeing it as needed. Kir Geras had another child.

Again, a son, again baptism, gifts, hopes, and great wishes. This second son was named Xenophon at baptism, with the hope that he would be as literate and brave as Xenophon, the author of *Anabasis*.

Not even two years had gone by before they took the cradle out of the attic again and carried the old tub down to the basement—so it would be within easy reach, since it would soon be needed again, sparing them the trouble of climbing up to the attic and poking their noses into cobwebs like thick curtains searching for the tub. Kir Geras had just made plans and a schedule for his two sons when this new child threw his arrangements into disarray. Euterpe had given him another son—not exactly joy, but confusion and disruption. He had already assigned the grocery to one son and the tavern to the other—now there was a third, and he didn't know what to do. Perhaps this was why the third son didn't receive a glorious Hellenic historical name like the first two, but a barbaric Serbian one. Kir Geras, completely indifferent and relaxed in his Hellenic sentiment, agreed to name his third son Miloš, just as he had agreed to name the fourth child Ljubica. With the fourth child, he had to be reassured by others that it was from God, and that what comes from God is sweeter than honey; and they would add that, as long as parents and children are alive and well, for everything else one must rely on God.

And now, Kir Geras worked in the shop with four times the energy and perseverance. But the more satisfied the ordinary folks who came to shop at his grocery with his friendly welcome and kind words, the more dissatisfied their masters were with his short measure.

Now he had to buckle down and work to bring money home. Because there were the household, the wife, the children, headaches, clothes, shoes, appetites, expenses; and that, Kir Geras would say, "Somebody's got to pay for it—whether it's the Vlach or a Turk!"

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Many years had gone by. The passage of time, which wears everything down, had wrinkled Kir Geras's face, thinned the lush hair on his crown, and now he resembled that biblical prophet Elisha (whose baldness had once caused children to mock him, only for a bear to tear them apart as punishment). Time had also worn down his once thick, abundant *palikari* mustache, so that his whiskers now looked like two shabby painter's brushes, smaller than the prominent gray eyebrows over his still lively and sharp Greek eyes, which could still see everything and reach everywhere. His body had weakened somewhat, but his spirit remained fresh and alert.

When Aristoteles was twelve and Xenophon ten, and they had finished primary school, Kir Geras organized a small family ceremony at home. He aimed to introduce both his sons—his future wings, which would later soar higher and further—into his grocery and tavern businesses. He prepared a short speech and two aprons himself: for Aristoteles, the future *bakalin*, a new sack apron; and for Xenophon, the future *kafedžija* (and, God willing, the first hotelier!), a blue cloth apron. That day, he solemnly presented them to the family, displayed the aprons, and carefully fastened them with his own hands, inducting them into work much like the ancient knights who welcomed new heroes into the chivalric order. He cleared his throat and began his speech, just hinting at what he expected of them along this path—when his wife interrupted him for the first time since they had been joined in holy matrimony! She stood in his way, began to cry, and insisted through her tears that if he wanted to make them shopkeepers, he should have given them other names, not Aristoteles and Xenophon. Were those, she asked, suitable names for a *bakalin* and a *kafedžija*? Let him keep Miloš in the shop when he grows up, she said, and let the others study, continue to higher schools and learning, since they bore such names and God had blessed him with the means!...

The mother pressed on, refusing to yield, and so what could Kir Geras do but—being the wiser—give in and agree.

And so Aristoteles Paskalis and Xenophon Paskalis were enrolled in school—both by their own will, but against their father's wishes—under the surname Paskaljević, which Kir Geras dared not protest due to certain procurements.

They enrolled in a *realka* (practical secondary school) and advanced to the fourth grade. They studied very diligently—so diligently that their Papa Geras often melted with pleasure in the evenings while listening to them read aloud and explain texts from *Robarica*, *The Basics of Commercial Bookkeeping*, or *Commercial Geography.* They read, interpreted, tested each other, and the parents sat and listened. Papa Geras listened, understood everything, and admired them. In contrast, mother Euterpe, also listening, understood nothing, yet cried with joy that she had borne such learned sons, feeling proud and happy that her sons made her understand absolutely nothing! She remembered such evenings well, and when the sons finished the fourth grade, she again intervened on their behalf. And that was when Kir Geras once again pressed them hard with those two sack and cloth aprons, wanting to strap them on the boys and usher them into the *bakalin* and *kafedžija* guild. Again, the mother jumped in to protect them. And however absolute and autocratic Kir Geras was in business

matters, when it came to the issues of the heart and purely family affairs, he had to compromise and yield to his wife.

It was agreed that Geras would keep Miloš at home in the shop, while Aristoteles and Xenophon would be sent away for further education. Geras could do this more easily because he was supported and encouraged by an unexpected—and for the Greeks, shocking—event right in the heart of Belgrade Hellenism: in the Greek school itself. From the start, they distinguished themselves from the Serbian townsfolk in every way and aimed to rise above the Serbs as oil floats on water: in church, the market, the tavern, reading rooms, and especially in school. In school, mainly, because they followed the golden rule: whatever a new container is first filled with will smell—or stink—for its entire lifetime. As patriots, Hellenes, and good parents, they made sure the young Hellenic spirit was filled with Hellenism from an early age, so that, they said, it would smell of Hellenism until death. Therefore, from the beginning, they established their own school, employing a teacher from Hellas or at least from Epirus. They found, paid, and supervised him themselves. Each Greek household contributed twelve groschen annually in cash or in kind, and the entire Greek community provided yearly: twenty oka of pure olive oil, ten oka of olives for Christmas and Easter fasting, three oka of Ohrid eels, and for mezze, two oka of dried sardines and a bag of chickpeas. Additionally, he had the right to dine with prominent Greeks on holidays, regardless of whether they had children in the Greek school.

At this time, their Greek teacher in Belgrade was Kir Zografides, and fate decided that he would be the "last Hellene," meaning the final Greek teacher in Belgrade, even though they had long been satisfied with him and proud of him, looking down with some hauteur on Serbian teachers and feeling pity for Serbian children.

This lasted for a year, until a younger, more intelligent Greek, *dru* Eftimiades, decided to oversee the work of teacher Kir Zografides himself during an exam.

The exam started. The subjects were: Christian doctrine, history, arithmetic, and the Greek language. Most of the time was spent on St. John Chrysostom—whose individual sermons the students were required to learn by heart—and on arithmetic. The exercises were usually designed to encourage this "young Hellas" even further in a foreign land. In these arithmetic exercises (taken, of course, from the world of trade), the Serbs usually went bankrupt, while the Greeks came out with substantial profits.

The students lined up at the blackboard: small, dark-haired Greek boys with large hooked noses (each student, so to speak, half child and half nose!). One left; another came up, passing the chalk and sponge back

and forth. The teacher was satisfied, and the parents blissful. Whenever a child finished a calculation or recited a sermon of Chrysostom and returned to his seat, all the parents present would stand, approach the father of that student, shake his hand, and offer congratulations:

"Hero me, kiria! Na sas zisi to palikari." (I rejoice, sir. May your young hero live long!)

This happened regularly, every time a child returned to his seat. Dr. Eftimiades simply watched, fidgeting in his chair and enduring it for a while, glancing in surprise now at the teacher, then at the parents (which, of course, they interpreted optimistically). After a while, his patience ran out, and he addressed the satisfied parents with the question: What are they congratulating, and why, and whom? ... They answered, astonished: that they congratulated both the teacher, themselves, the children, and Hellenism, because everything had gone well...

Then Dr. Eftimiades exploded, saying that none of this was acceptable. It was a disgrace, a disgrace in front of the barbarians, that the most civilized nation could have such a teacher.

Like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, this dreadful news struck all the Greeks present. "Who was this, what had he done, what had this teacher Kir Zografides accomplished?" asked the young Dr. Eftimiades (and the puzzled parents now wondered the same), but there was no answer... Everyone fell silent, and Kir Zografides remained as still as a cold stone, like that stone bust of Plato (a gift from the pharmacist Eskulapopulos) that adorned the classroom.

He was paid immediately and dismissed.

What the sinful Kir Zografides had been before becoming a teacher was unknown to any Greek; however, after his teaching days, everyone—Greeks and Belgrade Serbs alike—quickly learned that Kir Zografides had been a *furundžija*, a baker in Calafat...

The Greek community did advertise the teaching position, but the very next day, some Serbs sent them a one-eyed village schoolmaster with written credentials as a candidate (noting that he also spoke German), and that struck the Belgrade Greeks like a slap from the devil himself, extinguishing any last desire for separatism. The "young Hellas" marched off en masse to the Serbian schools.

Kir Geras withdrew his Miloš from school and kept him at home. As a result, the youngest, Miloš, was immediately given a ceremonial grocer's apron, worn slightly high just under the armpits, with a parental note that there was no nobler duty than to sacrifice oneself for one's brothers! Now, Miloš was expected to fulfill this duty: waking early, going to bed late; enduring the summer heat and exhaustion, the winter cold and chill; even sacrificing a bit of his own conscience when measuring out goods for customers. Furthermore—sacrificing himself for

his older brothers—he would trudge around in every last rag and clunker Papa Geras had ever owned, thus missing out on the joys every child enjoys on *Vrbica* (a holiday), since he must never forget the money that his parents invested in educating his older brothers.

And so, Kir Geras, having taken an interest in educating them, sent them away: one to Prague and the other to Vienna. After two or three months, when he received letters from his sons, he was utterly delighted, even though he could understand nothing of them—one was in Czech, and the other in German. The German letter was translated for him by a man named Ranko, nicknamed "the Swabian," from across the river, while a local band corporal translated the Czech letter. Both letters were nearly identical in content. In their letters, the sons described everything—their journey, arrival, circumstances, life, and the cost of living—and both apologized for their brevity, saying they had no time because they were busy with learning and studying. They explained that they had so much to learn, they could not lift their heads from the weight of knowledge. Kir Geras noted that they indeed had to study, but he hoped they would not overdo it, since health was the most incredible wealth and more precious than any learning...

He received letters regularly for two whole years, but each new letter was shorter and filled with more requests. Their letters became shorter, while his grew longer; theirs were full of demands, and his were still more filled with advice.

Instead of four years, they studied only two. They returned home. There, they convinced their father that this was sufficient, which he, of course, believed: first, because it was cheaper; second, because he remembered that everyone in his family was clever, and, as Hellenes, naturally born merchants. And he approved, patting them on the shoulder with the words, "A clever head gets by with just one eye!"

*

No one was happier during those first days than Gerasovica, the overjoyed mother, watching her two tall, handsome sons with their refined European manners. They dressed so elegantly, spoke so beautifully, and while they talked, they trimmed their nails with a tiny file, brushed them with a small brush, and sprinkled every sentence with "please" and "pardon." They nibbled and licked their lower lips throughout! In short: polished, cosmopolitan young gentlemen. Everything about them was different, better. When they ate, they held the fork in their left hand; when grapes came, they neatly spat the skins onto their plate and rinsed their fingers over it. They didn't spit on the floor but into a handkerchief, and they put their hats under the chair

they were sitting on! They asked why the icon-lamp burned all night and criticized the old icon of St George. And so many other refined things: when they washed, they sang Austrian songs ("Tra-la-la" or "Oje, supe, šambr sepape!"). They jumped around, flung their arms out, lifted a chair, squatted, then raised it again—exercising in the most exquisite manner that delighted their mother. The only thing she couldn't stomach was when her sons boasted about eating frog's legs at an Italian restaurant in Trieste. That did not sit well with her; she begged them never to mention such things again, not to her and even less to anyone else... Yet she still boasted that in all her years, she had never seen such polished young men! Half the girls in Belgrade suddenly seemed far too coarse; no one and nothing was good enough for her boys, such paragons! And Geras himself, how happy and blissful he was talking with them, listening to their reports, opinions, and evaluations: on world trade, means of transport, roads and canals, river and railway networks, the tremendous progress and soaring flight of global commerce, listening to their sharp critique of his own old-fashioned ways, and hearing their grand plans for the future. Geras rubbed his hands with delight whenever he imagined a force they would be in business and how high his turnover would climb! What things the firm of Geras Paskalis & Sons would achieve, God willing, once the three of them joined forces; how they would divide Belgrade, the district, Serbia, and the entire Balkans among themselves! They would be as mighty as Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon were when they divided the earth, the seas, and the underworld among themselves! And Kir Geras let his imagination run free and began to dream. In his mind's eye, massive warehouses rose along the Sava as far as Rača and down the Danube all the way to Radujevac, each bursting with tallow, hides, and large lumps of wool fat!

"But whose are all these huge, identical warehouses?" a traveller would ask. "Just read!" they would tell him. "If I could read Greek script, I wouldn't be asking," the traveller would reply. And they would read it out to him, "Warehouse No. 27—Geras Paskalis & Sons." That, dreamed the happy father, is what travellers would one day read as they sailed down the Danube or up the Sava.

*

Kir Geras granted his sons a few days of freedom and didn't pressure them. Letting the young ones enjoy a little spring romp was only proper. He expected them to approach him voluntarily, to say enough of this holiday lounging, time to roll up their sleeves and get to work. Ten days went by, then two weeks, and still no word from them

about why they had returned home. Kir Geras began to worry. Finally, after a whole fortnight, he reminded them himself.

And so, for the third time (thinking: God helps three times), Kir Geras made two brand-new grocer's aprons. He had sewn them the very day after the boys arrived, but this time not from rough sackcloth like before; these were proper master-aprons made of fine new green broadcloth, fastened with handsome yellow buckles instead of string. And for the third time, he felt the urge to 'solemnly' usher them into the shop. He had even laid out a spread for his closest merchant friends to come and celebrate the occasion.

But for the third time, nothing came of it. The sons begged him (with their mother backing them) to leave them in peace for just a few more days. After that, they said, everything would fall into place easily enough; they knew their duty perfectly well. Mother supported them in this; she still needed ten or fifteen visits around town (visits that had already entered her calculations, namely, which houses might produce a suitable bride).

And Kir Geras gave in. In the past, he had been the wiser one and, as they say, "his word was law," but now he started to give in, telling himself the boys had seen more of the world than he ever had; they were educated, so they must be smarter than their old father.

He gave in, but it caught in his throat. He sent word to the guests that the "ceremony" was postponed and asked them not to come after all!... The feast he had prepared (roast lamb, good wine, the works) was never tasted either by his friends or by him; because he had no desire to eat—everything had turned sour for him. Instead, Aristotle's and Xenophon's young pals swooped down on the spread; they ate and drank, sang and danced, and when they'd had their fill, they slipped on those two famous new aprons and went gallivanting off somewhere wearing them. Where they went and what they did, God only knows. All that is certain is that the next morning, those two aprons were mentioned in the report of the officer on duty at the central police station, attached as *Item One*. Only the day after that did Kir Geras receive them back from the central police station, against a receipt, with a note that they had been found at a certain location...

*

Old Kir Geras disapproved of it, of course, but a father is still a father, and so he found excuses—youth, their German schooling, and above all the fact that, so young and inexperienced, they had spent so long and so far away from the Hellenic hearth. That is why he set himself to bring them back into the Greek fold, to teach them again, recalling those words of Christ about leaving ninety-nine sheep to seek out the

one that is lost—and how, once found, that single stray gladdens the shepherd more than all the ninety-nine left safe and sound.

A few days after the unpleasant episode, there followed a gentle, properly Hellenic parental warning. Above the bed of the first son—the one who came home at dawn—Kir Geras wrote out, framed, and hung these words of Chilon of Sparta, one of the Seven Sages: "Use your time well." Above the bed of the second—the one who returned even later—he wrote out, framed, and hung the golden maxim of Pittacus of Mytilene, which earned that sage his place among the Seven: "Learn to read the times; all good things lie in the right timing!"

For a long time, the golden lines went entirely unnoticed by those for whom they had been put there. The father had hoped the boys would read them—if not often, then at least twice a day: once at nine, when they lay down to sleep, and again at five, when they got up. The last thing to meet their eyes before surrendering to Morpheus was those words, and the first greeting at dawn—once more, those golden words. But things turned out differently. The sons spent hardly a moment in their bedroom; they came home late, woke late, and had no interest in reading. In the end, Kir Geras himself marched them in, read the inscriptions aloud, reminded them of Pittacus and Chilon, and began questioning them: had they ever heard those names? But dazed and foggy-headed as they were, they answered any nonsense that came to them. One declared they must be some local Greeks from the marketplace; the other thought they might be some of those Greeks who had stayed behind in the vilayet. And the saddest thing of all was this: he spoke to them in Greek, and they replied in Serbian! That struck Kir Geras to the quick. Painfully, he reproached them—that they were educated men, yet did not even know that Chilon was a Spartan and Pittacus a Mytilenian from Lesbos. But what pained him even more, he told them, was this: that even barbarian nations knew such things and lived by them, while they—educated men, sons of Kir Geras himself, Hellenes—not only failed to live according to those maxims, but had never even heard of them, nor of Chilon the Spartan, nor Pittacus of Mytilene!...

Chapter Six

In it, Kir Geras reflects on the old and the new times and draws a comparison between the old and new merchants, to the detriment of the latter.

Old Kir Geras felt utterly powerless and unnecessary with his Chilon and Pittacus. "How degenerate and corrupt the present generation has become!" he thought with sadness. For what the ancient Hellenes

once carved on the doors of their magnificent temples, their unworthy descendants today will neither remember nor inscribe even "on the tablets of their own hearts"! There, his own sons—his flesh and blood, bone of his bone and blood of his blood—are yet not the least bit like him. They continued their dandy ways, neither reporting to him nor allowing him to reprimand them. Only after several months did they barely announce that they had found positions suited to their intelligence and education. Both had placed themselves in financial institutions, for they wouldn't hear of standing behind a counter even if their lives depended on it, and in that, their mother supported them. "Why," she told them, "would they bury their beautiful youth behind a counter, wearing an apron like that?!"

Although initially, and for a time, he opposed it, slowly he began to accept the idea, and eventually not only did he get used to it—he even found it oddly satisfying. Kir Geras felt a new spirit, a new life, a new era. As a Hellene and a sensible man, he soon saw that there was a clash between him and his sons—a clash of two directions, two styles of upbringing, two cultures—and he understood that, for better or for worse, it had to be endured, for it had to be so.

He reflected on and compared the good old days of merchants with the modern ones: the old merchants with the new; the old *halfas*, even the apprentices, with the current-day *halfas* and apprentices—and he realized there was a significant difference, both in body and spirit, between the former and the latter.

Even at first glance, the difference is striking! The old ones wore sideburns on their jaws as sturdy as millstones grinding salt, while these new ones sport some French, frivolous little beards—tiny, like a comma in a primer. The old ones, with swollen hands and large, knobby legs, massive like a Wertheim safe, when they walked, looked only straight ahead (and if they ever glanced at a person, they always saw him as some sort of sack—bigger or smaller, heavier or lighter—and measured whether they could carry him on their shoulders up to the attic); and from half a mile away they reeked of marjoram and herring—and you could smell marjoram and herring on them from that distance too; whereas these new ones have legs like some refined little lady of fashion, slender and thin as a *Brennschere* from a lady's boudoir; when they walk, they peer in all directions, eyeing and ogling the ladies, wondering if she's not married: how large a dowry does she bring?; if she's married: is she approachable?; and from afar, you can still recognize them by the scent of violet or musk. The old ones wore woollen bracelets of many colours, which they could only put on when engaged, and they kept them on from St. Demetrius's Day to St. George's Day without change; these new ones wear detachable cuffs that they change every

single day! As for character, what a monstrous difference there is between the old and the new merchants! The old ones left the shop barely three or four times a year, while these new ones leave at least five or six times just during the day. The old ones' pocket money never exceeded a *groš* or sixty *paras*, and that only for the collection plate when they went to church; these new ones take cash from the till all day long, and sometimes even drop by the shop at night for pocket money. The old ones had leisure only on Sundays and holidays, while the new ones have it every day; the old ones lie down for a nap only on the first day of Christmas, when they eat their fill of roast pork and *česnica* bread. In contrast, the new ones obligatorily sleep every single day and only wake when it's time for beer...

And the very *kalfas* themselves were of a different breed in those good old days. Back then, a *kalfa* was only allowed to have money in his pocket twice a year—before St. George's Day and before St. Demetrius's Day, when he went to get his hair cut. But nowadays, these young *kalfas* keep cash even tucked down in their socks, tip the barber as much as the old masters—even the most stubborn among them—used to pay for the whole haircut, and they get haircuts much more often because there's hardly one who doesn't have a mistress.

And all this, thought Kir Geras, is the fault of all these countless financial institutions, erected—as their sonorous names loudly proclaim—solely to suppress foreign goods and achieve economic independence from foreign capitalists. Thanks to all these institutes, today's easy borrowing has flourished. And in this too, Kir Geras found yet another monstrous difference between the old and the new shopkeepers: the old ones borrowed with difficulty and repaid easily; these new ones do the opposite—they borrow easily and repay only with the greatest difficulty. The old ones couldn't close an eye all night, neither before nor after taking a loan; these present-day ones, it seems, are not disturbed in their sleep by such trifles in the least.

Thus, Kir Geras pondered the old, bygone days and the present, about masters, *kalfas,* and financial institutions. Yet, whenever he remembered that both his sons worked in those very institutions, he grumbled much less about the institutions and their promissory notes. His boys were doing well. Their bosses praised them—said they were hardworking, well-mannered, quick learners. Only both supervisors commented on both sons—almost word for word, as if they had agreed in advance—that the only issues were that they sometimes arrived late and a bit hungover at work, and that they were spending a little more than they should. But since they were sons of a wealthy family, people turned a blind eye. They winked and tolerated it as long as they could. However, when one of Kir Geras's sons caused a sizable deficit, and the

other forged a promissory note, the situation suddenly came to a head right in front of their bosses. Kir Geras covered the deficit and, with a discreet payment, hushed up and buried the forgery. The entire Greek colony ran about in a flurry, Kir Geras most of all. And in the end, everything turned out fine. They pleaded youth as an excuse; the supervisors were satisfied with promises of reform, and the brothers simply swapped places: Aristotle moved to Xenophon's institute, and Xenophon to Aristotle's— and the matter was quietly wrapped up and laid to rest.

*

None of this pleased old Kir Geras. He was crushed by everything that had happened. As a merchant of the old school, he was dissatisfied with his sons, the new-generation merchants; yet, as a father, he still defended them, trusting in their promises. But his greatest trust, at least so far, had always been in his third son, Miloš, the one in the shop— though even he had lately begun to please him less.

In earlier days, Miloš had been him, the very image and likeness of him; neither more nor less, but a little Kir Geras. He was hardworking and obedient, never sought the company of boys his age, carried whatever was given to him without complaint or grumbling—the trousers of his father, which he belted under his armpits, and Geras's coat around the waist, whose back buttons reached almost to the boy's knees. That is why the neighbour's apprentices teased him, singing whenever he passed:

May God strike the tailor down.
Who cut that dolama for you!

Such was Miloš during the two years when his brothers studied abroad. But now, since his brothers had returned, he too had changed. They lent him their clothes and shoes, and now he looked more like a haberdasher's *kalfa* than a grocer's lad. He even wore patent-leather shoes, which, like every grocer's boy, were a bit too tight. So, whatever he did, he mostly stared at those shiny shoes and kept smoothing and admiring himself. He started rubbing some pomade into his hair so that he looked like a mouse caught in lard; every so often, he would pull out a small comb, bend under the counter, and comb himself— probably hoping to impress some little German maid from next door, the servant girl who often came in to buy trifles. He was always smoothing and admiring himself. "Yes, yes—handsome you are, very handsome!" Geras would tell him when he caught him doing it; then the boy would get upset, ruffle his hair, but afterward, he would comb it again in the latest style. Kir Geras even found a mustache brush in his pocket, although there was no sign or trace of a mustache on him.

Then Kir Geras scolded him firmly, telling him that not even after five years should a serious grocery *kalfa* carry such a thing in his pocket. Papa kept the brush for his own mustache, warning the boy that if he caught him once more primping and smoothing himself, he'd give him a mustache brush indeed—the one used to scrub the floor! ...

Kir Geras was angry with his son. "However, he might be," thought Kir Geras, "he runs the shop, he is diligent, he understands the trade, he makes no mistakes in weighing; he will inherit the business, and the name of Paskalis will live on, well-known in the world of merchants!"

Chapter Seven

In which Kir Geras becomes even more convinced than he was in Chapter Six that times have changed and that the roles among nations have been turned upside down; or: the barbarian Milisav Pinosavac and the Hellene Geras the Epirote.

One day, Kir Geras was visited by Master Milisav Pinosavac, a grocer and tavern owner on the Smederevo Road, who was also known in town as Milisav the Speculator because he bought and traded in bulk—leather and wool fat. He had once been Kir Geras's apprentice and later a kalfa—his spiritual son; he had learned everything from him. Whatever he was as a respected and prominent merchant, he owed entirely to Kir Geras. That's why, out of gratitude, his shop still bore the sign "The Shop of the Industrious Hellene," with an artistically painted old man (meant to be Kir Geras himself) counting the day's earnings—piles of gold, silver, heaps of copper coins, and stacks of banknotes. When he entered, Milisav sat on a sack, folded his legs, and took a moment to rest. After a brief exchange of courtesies—how's the family, are they all alive and well?—Master Milisav got straight to the point and explained why he had come. He mentioned that he had many unpaid customer accounts he had yet to collect, but he had a big plan and needed capital. Money was tight; the peasants weren't paying because it was tax season; for his big scheme, he required a somewhat larger amount, he said, so that he could make a two- or three-hundred percent profit in a short time. He had come to him, Kir Geras, to seek advice from his old master—from the man who had been like a father to him, his teacher, and benefactor.

Milisav Pinosavac had come before, often asking for advice and small loans, following the advice, and always repaying the modest sums honestly and on time. So it was now as well.

"Tche," began Kir Geras, "what advice to give you? You were clever even with me still as kalfa, and as a man of merchant honour!... Why ask me for advice, how to tell it to you, when you yourself already

said it, when you said you need capital!... If the children hadn't ruined me... if I had money... I would give it to you here between four eyes, on honour, the way in old times merchants gave to merchants, the way it was in that old time of Guša, Antula and Kutula, but now there is no longer such friendship and such honesty!... But I have no money, the children ate me up... If you know where there is money, tell me too, let us go together to ask, either I lend you or you lend me!... A spoonful of blood I would pour for you if it helped," Kir Geras assures him, "but money I have not! Hard times, the surtaxes ate us, excise on rakia, taxes, inspections, scale-men... And if I had it, by my soul I would give it to you! Here, here are the keys, open the safe yourself, look yourself; if there is anything, we share it!... Jatos rafos—jatos tefteros!" says Kir Geras and feels in his pockets for the keys.

"Ah, God forbid, Master Đerasim!" Master Milisav recoiled, all flushed. "God forbid! We haven't come to that pass, thank heavens! Yes, yes, I believe what you say; I would do the very same for you in the same way, and, as they say, there is no sacrifice I myself wouldn't make for you..."

"I believe you, I believe you, Master Milisav!" Kir Geras comforted him.

"And if—God forbid," says Pinosavac, "you should ever find yourself in need of some help, don't you dare pass us by, Master Đerasim!... I swear to God, I'd take it as a deep insult if I didn't count for you as truly your very first friend... Don't call on God for me, don't greet me—why, don't even speak to me again—if I wouldn't do the same for you! So, as I said: if ever you're in trouble (for who knows what the day brings or the night!), just... just let me know... come as though it were your own purse and safe... I'll sign ... anything on a bill, freely, gladly, I'm at your service and won't step aside..."

"Thank you, thank you, Milisav! God forbid anything should happen that would force me to come straight to you..."

"Well, the reason I came," Milisav cut in, "is that it costs you nothing at all, while it would be a real help to me.... I have a bill of exchange ready with signatures—me and two others; solid merchants, sturdy; they deal with the main bazaar and, as they say, even with Pest itself... so you've nothing to fear!... At the bank, they told me it would be good to add just one more signature... just for appearances, one more respectable, honest, well-known name... The others are all strong men... Here's Master Ljubisav Trnavac—owns a lime factory. Here, another, Master Petronije Kožetinac—half the district owes him money (if only I had what he makes on interest alone!) ... But, you see, their shops are a bit farther out; they don't mix with the intelligentsia; they're more, you know, peasant-type merchants, so the bank doesn't know them and they don't know the bank—they've never needed it, they're not short of cash!...

So, as I say, and they told me the same at the bank: 'Get Kir Geras Paskalin,' they said, 'and then you can drop the others if you like! Get Kir Geras if you know him and if he knows you.' 'How could I not know him!' I told them, 'Whatever I am as a man and a merchant today, whatever success I have, is his doing. He was the first to pour this *mercantile spiri'* into me, and for that I will be forever grateful.' 'And if I'd split with my brothers,' I told them, 'I swear I'd have dropped my own surname and taken Kir Đerasim's—so highly do I honour him and so ready am I to show my gratitude.' "As God is my witness," swears Pinosavac, "may I not see tomorrow's sun if those weren't my very words to them!"

"Heh-heh!" Kir Geras rubbed his hands together in satisfaction and nodded, deeply touched.

"*I* don't know Kir Geras?" "No, you'll tell me about him!" Milisav went on. "I ate his bread for years, first as apprentice, then as *kalfa*... I minded his little Rista (Aristotle), rocked him, made him toy carts out of watermelon rind, pop-guns from elder branches, taught him to walk and to swear in Serbian—so how could I not know Master Gerasim, or he not know me? ... Only yesterday, your Rista ran into me in the street and shouted across: 'Say this, Milisav: The priest digs beans—who dug the priest's beans!' You know, that's what I taught him when he was little; he used to stumble over the words. And he still remembers it, and it still makes him laugh every time he sees me. 'See, Milisav,' he says, 'how well I can say it now, just like you!' 'Better than me, lad,' I told him, 'and easy for you when you've got a father like that!' 'I wouldn't swap him for anyone!' he says."

"Heh-heh!" Kir Geras laughed, moved. "My Aristotle is a good boy... good boy! ... He'll be a *bangker*, yes, a *bangker*..."

"So I ask you, Master Đerasim, if you would... just put your signature... As I said just now, it costs you nothing, yet it does me honour and helps me greatly!" ...

Kir Geras scratched the back of his neck a little. He grew quite uneasy, resisted, and hemmed and hawed. But Milisav pressed him harder, reminded him again of his long years of service in his home, and that already half-conquered him. When Kir Geras further recalled Milisav's shop sign that still read, in his very honour, "The Shop of the Industrious Hellene," he asked only: "How much is the sum?"

"Eighteen thousan' dinars!" blurted Milisav with relief, pulling the bill of exchange wrapped in a handkerchief from his pocket.

It was not easy for Kir Geras. Yet, recalling everything and having a high opinion of Master Milisav Pinosavac, he signed the bill.

"Aahhh, thank you, Master Đerasim," said Pinosavac, said his goodbyes and departed cheerfully, leaving Kir Geras a little pensive, precisely like in that song:

Off rode Marko down the highway singing,
Musa stayed behind, kicking the ground with his heel.

*

Not even three months had passed when, one day, Aristotle stormed into the shop, completely flustered, and pulled Geras aside. He asked him about Master Milisav Pinosavac, and although Geras tried to wave him off, the son told him he knew everything already—and that he hadn't come to ask, but to read him something. He took out an issue of the official *Serbian Gazette*, unfolded it, and began reading aloud:

"I hereby inform the public that I have opened a grocery and colonial goods shop here in Belgrade, on the Smederevo road, and have registered it with the Commercial Court under the name: 'Jelisaveta Mil. Petrović Pinosavac'. I have appointed my husband, Milisav Petrović Pinosavac, as manager of the shop, with the stipulation that no one may recover from the shop either his past debts or any future debts.

In this shop, I have appointed my husband, Milisav Petrović Pinosavac, as my manager, with the condition that no one may collect any of his past or future debts from this shop.

Since the Commercial Court requires it, I hereby publish this for the knowledge of the trading industry.

Jelisaveta Mil. Petrović Pinosavac

I approve of my wife's—my spouse's—action.

Milisav Petrović Pinosavac,

Shop Manager."

"There it is in the official newspaper. In black and white. An undeniable fact, because it's official," said Aristotle.

Kir Geras sank onto a stool like a fallen branch.

"Bankrupt?" whispered the unfortunate guarantor.

"Bankrupt!" repeated the son, and he read once more the crucial sentence: ...with the condition that no one may collect any of his past or future debts from this shop. "So, that means," he said, "that even if you lend him something later, in the future, you still won't be able to collect."

"Bah, never mind the future; I'd settle for collecting what's past!"

"Well, now you figure it out as best you can!"

"He'll pay me, by God, he'll pay! Even if he's bankrupt to the whole world, he'll pay me!" Kir Geras tried to comfort himself.

Yet that very afternoon, he hurried over to Pinosavac's place. He didn't find him at the shop and learned nothing more than what the newspaper had already told him. He looked around, glanced above the shop door, and saw the new sign: Shop of J. Milisav Pinosavac—just

that, nothing more. Of the old "industrious Hellene," there was not a trace, not a whisper; it was as though it had never existed!

The old saying, "He who stands surety, pays," proved true for Kir Geras with terrifying, crushing force. He couldn't save a single para because the other two, Trnavac and Kožetinac, did exactly what Pinosavac did: both became managers in their wives' shops, and Kir Geras, as they said in the bazaar, was left with a hollow nose right up to his eyes. Even worse, this pulled many other payments along with it and severely damaged Kir Geras's reputation in the mercantile world.

It simply floored him; it was a disaster for him and a great shame among his fellow Greeks. The idea of being cheated was unbearable. If a provincial, a Greek, or a Jew had done it, it would have been a misfortune but not a disgrace. Although the Greeks are clever and gifted, and he himself was a Greek, there are even cleverer Greeks; Kir Geras reasoned that it was no surprise if someone smarter outwitted a clever one. Similarly, if a Jew had cheated him, it wouldn't be shameful—Jews will cheat even the devil himself, let alone Geras the Greek! But to be cheated by a Serb, a peasant named Milisav, and Pinosavac of all people! The entire Greek community in the main bazaar and Dorćol could not forgive him for that.

They all blamed and criticized him, and there was no comfort anywhere. If only he could have found at least some solace from his own sons! They, too, criticized him. Instead of comforting him, they only made him angrier. Now they had seen the chance to repay him in kind! One evening, Kir Geras received yet another heavy and unjust written reproach from his educated and learned sons, in addition to their daily verbal criticisms. Above his bed, he found a framed, written, and hung inscription—not some gentle maxim from Chilon, Thales, or Pittacus, but Vuk Karadžić's blunt proverb that read: "Woe to the feet under a foolish head!"

Chapter Eight

In which it is shown how wretched Kir Geras deteriorates further, just as in those lines of the poet (Sterija) which say: "When a stone begins its downhill run—Who's strong enough to halt its slide?—Who can stand up to fate itself—And tell it not to do what it has willed?"

This latest act of his careless, ungrateful sons hit him hard. As if the material losses weren't enough, nor the mockery of outsiders, the reproaches of his fellow Greeks and townspeople, or the gnawing of his own conscience, now he had to endure even this: that his own children

should judge him so harshly and ridicule him! From the warmth he once expected, he was met with coldness.

Because of this, there were constant arguments between the father and his sons. Quarrels almost every day. They reproached him for ruining the business, and he reproached them for being grown men who still did not support themselves. And so it continued, until none of them could tolerate it any longer. Finally, his sons left him. They moved out, each in his own direction; and of the children, only his son Miloš stayed with him, along with his married daughter Ljubica, who visited more often.

But that was not the end of his misfortunes. After some time, his wife fell ill, went to her bed, and never rose again. She died, leaving him inconsolable. That was the greatest loss of all for Kir Geras. After that, everything quickly went downhill. In his grief, Kir Geras sold the house. He could no longer bear to sit there—everything in it reminded him of happier days and of his unfortunate, unforgettable Terpa. He moved to a completely different street. He took over a small shop and let Miloš go across the river for a while on a "vandrovka" (wandering apprenticeship). And what would he do with him anyway? Why keep him around that little piece of ware in that tiny shop where, once three customers entered, the place was packed! Thus, Kir Geras found himself doing the same kind of work he had done forty years earlier. He threw himself into his trade and neither knew nor cared about anything else. He didn't interact with anyone—not neighbours, not fellow traders, not even his own Greeks from the vilayet. He avoided them all. He kept his little shop guarded; he was the first to open it and the last to close it, working from early dawn until pitch-dark night. Little by little, he grew accustomed to his new position and customers. And the customers were now again—just as forty years earlier when he first started his trade, in the name of God—all manner of carpenters, Gypsies, wool-spinners, sawyers, and such folk. But he respected them, even trusted them, and they bought, paid cash, and also ran tabs. The cash he swept into the drawer, and the debts he recorded on the oilcloth. The oilcloth was full of written debts—small amounts, true, but under grand titles. He wrote one beneath another: Lady Dafina 2 Gr, 10 paras; Master Neca the sawyer 3 Gr, 20 paras; Master Rista the labourer 4 Gr, 30 paras; Godfather Laza the Gypsy 1 Gr, 20 paras; Lady Cana, the bandmaster's wife, 6 Gr; Franz, sergeant of the band, 13 Gr—paid in cash.

Thus he worked, and in work found diversion and consolation. His spirit did not falter; he even sent word to Milisav Pinosavac that money gained by foul means is always ill-fated and unlucky, and that poverty with honour is better than riches with shame! When such a message was delivered to Milisav, he defended himself before others,

saying he had merely taken what was his! Considering how he had served Kir Geras, he claimed he had taken too little, and added that things were easy for Kir Geras anyway—after all, he knew how to eat tallow candles.

Kir Geras bore all this stoically; in his misery, his guides were once again those great and ancient Hellenes. His models and examples among men were they, and among the silent creatures, his examples were the industrious ant and the persistent beetle, who never despair nor weaken, but set to work even for the hundredth time, and naturally reach their goal...

And so old Geras lived alone, with no sons, no friends, no neighbours, and no acquaintances. True, people looked for him, but he always avoided them; when they asked how he was, he quickly pushed them away and responded with words like: "God sees—people don't believe," or: "God forbid worse, and this can still be borne!"

But even that did not last long! His sons had long abandoned him and never came; and considering what they were and how they lived, it was perhaps better they did not appear before him. True, now they were both working and, in a business sense, were respectable enough... but in a moral sense, they were worth nothing. Both, against their father's will and with not a shred of that old merchant's shame and honour left, had entangled themselves in trouble: the elder with a fashion-seamstress, and the younger with a harpist and singer. And that alone would have been enough—too much—for Geras's fragile shoulders. But fate was not satisfied; it had turned against Kir Geras, and new, even heavier blows of merciless destiny began to fall upon him... One day, he received news about Aristotle and the seamstress. They told him he had become a grandfather before he even became a father-in-law! He had barely recovered from that shock when, after some time, news came about the younger one. An even worse message, an even greater shame. The younger had quit his employment and was now a cashier at some music hall where that woman of his sang. He sat near the entrance at a small table selling tickets; halfway through the show, he moved from table to table checking tickets and arguing with freeloaders and travelling performers, pointing them to the poster which clearly stated that free passes were not valid for anyone.

This news was brought to him by his fellow Greeks, who themselves felt as though they had been struck dead as they told him.

This destroyed him. Finished him off. His vivid imagination revealed darker and worse possibilities in the future... One day, he thought, he would hear that his son was walking tightropes, swallowing fire, or doing some other marvel or disgrace... And he lost all desire to work. The shop, the goods, the customers, the accounts—all became

hateful to him. One day, he sold the shop to a fellow countryman. When they settled the accounts, he embraced him and advised him never to trust anyone, and to give credit only as much as could be written in chalk on an oilcloth no wider than a man's palm! And as for himself, he withdrew even further. He withdrew completely from the world and from people, whom he could do without, for he still had enough to ensure that until his death, so ardently desired, he would need to beg no one or be a burden to anyone! ...

Now, old Kir Geras was completely withdrawn from the world. He took a small apartment on the upper floor of an old two-storey Turkish house in Jalia. There, he lived alone, cleaning and tidying his room and bed himself, preparing his meals on his own. He comforted himself with the thought that even the great Greek natural philosopher Diogenes didn't have as much service or comfort as that! ...

He went out alone, walking the streets without greeting anyone, as if he didn't notice anyone at all. If someone called out to him, he would glance back shyly and distrustfully, then return their greeting. When he walked with his hands hidden, he always mumbled something to himself, his eyes fixed on the ground as if he had lost a ducat. Children would always gather around him, follow him, hunching over like him, searching the ground with their eyes just as he did. They'd walk beside him for a while, unnoticed by him, and if he noticed, he would scowl, shoo them away, and ask why they were trailing after him. They'd say they were looking for the ducat he'd lost, then point to the ground, asking if he had dropped it. He'd then get angry, flailing his arms and legs, cursing in both Greek and Serbian, and chase them off. But they'd only step back a little, pointing to horse droppings and shouting, "Old man, there's a treasure!"

He walked on without looking back, eyes fixed on the ground, picking up anything he found. He brought home old shoes with soles wide open at the toes, barely recognizable as footwear—more like a rare sea creature opening its jaws for water. He collected slippers with missing soles, empty machine boxes, colourful cigarette paper, sardine tins—anything that might have had value—and piled it all up at home, hoping it might someday prove useful. Sometimes he would lock himself in, sit down, and examine it all, contemplating who might have owned each item: that "Strumpf bundle," that Bruner woman's shoe, or a fingerless glove; who had shaved with that razor whose case he now held; which lady had carried that parasol, whose handle and ribs he now possessed, and whether it had been expensive or if her husband had found it easy to buy for her. He sifted, sorted, and inventoried everything, making sure all was accounted for.

On Sunday mornings, he regularly attended church, most often to Ružica Church. He stood by the large candle stand, prayed, and made sure the candles burned straight, adjusting them while murmuring his prayers. In the afternoon, he sat on a small chair outside his house, counting his prayer beads; beside him lay a small pile of stones, which he used to keep dogs away, while the cat—his only pet—sat nearby. If someone familiar passed by, he appeared not to notice them. He disliked the living, sighed for the dead, and always attended funerals. Often on Sunday afternoons, he visited the cemetery, spending time among old friends, reading gravestones, overwhelmed with sorrow, whispering to himself, "All that was good lies beneath the earth; what was bad is of no use even to God!" ...

His townsmen watched him from afar, saddened by how withdrawn and neglected Geras had become, and carefully tried to revive and support him. Three of the most determined—Kutula, Džanga, and Danga—came on behalf of the others. But just as with righteous and long-suffering Job, whose three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, brought more anguish than comfort, so too did Kutula, Džanga, and Danga. Their delayed advice and unnecessary reproaches only made his life more bitter. It was no wonder he received them with irritability and sent them away. They left, shaking their heads sadly, declaring him beyond help and his misfortune immense and unparalleled. They called him another Belisarius, one who had suffered greatly from human ingratitude, on whom the vanity and fleetingness of human fortune had been most cruelly displayed!

Chapter Nine

In it, the reader will see how the unfortunate Kir Geras gradually begins to find a measure of vindication.

Six years had already passed since the woman from Pinosavac placed that advertisement in the official papers, and Kir Geras was still just as lonely. He felt abandoned, hurt, betrayed, and scorned by the rest of the world, so he no longer reached out to, received or acknowledged anyone. He made no effort to find out about his sons, rejecting all their attempts at reconciliation. Both sons were remorseful—bitterly so—especially the older, Aristoteles. He had already married his *mašamoda* (the sweetheart he had taken up with), converted her to their faith, and had five children with her. She kept the shop, which was doing well, and he had become a model employee earning a respectable salary, which he also used to help his father. He sent money regularly but did not reveal who it was from, only saying it was "a repayment from an old

debtor." Kir Geras accepted it, thinking it was from some remorseful man—perhaps that Pinosavac—and thanked God, scolding himself for thinking so little of people, and acknowledging that people were, after all, good. The younger son, Xenophon, had dismissed the harpist; three years had passed, he had come to his senses and started working, and Kir Geras would have been satisfied with him too—if only he were willing to hear anything about him. But he refused: whenever Xenophon's name was mentioned, he would immediately cover his ears with his hands because he had grown used to hearing only bad things about him and feared he might hear something worse. Yet Xenophon cared for nothing now, least of all about adventures and scandals. He married a poor girl, and his salary was small, not enough for the two of them, let alone their two children. So he began borrowing more often. His brother helped him but never asked for repayment. Xenophon felt ashamed and reluctant, so he also borrowed small sums from his aunt Cleopatra, which he paid back regularly—until he fell into larger debts. Then things got more difficult. He was no longer always paying in full—sometimes only half, leaving the rest owed. As a result, his debt grew until it reached 350 dinars. And then—as happens in such cases—he started, at first, to stay away, later even avoiding not only Aunt Cleopatra but also Uncle Antanas and all his mother's relatives. When he was repeatedly reminded and reproached, he responded harshly and offensively, closing the door of that house to himself.

This weighed heavily on him after a while. He wished to reconcile, but it seemed impossible: first, because he had no way to repay the debt, and second, because he did not know how they would receive him. Then suddenly, fortune appeared. He won about a thousand dinars in a lottery. The first thing that came to his mind was to repay his aunt. But he also cared deeply that she forgive the insult. He pondered for two or three days until he devised a plan. He decided it would be best to burst into the house, repay the debt, and with some grave, overwhelming announcement, throw them into such alarm that they would forget all that had passed.

So he did. He counted out the 350 dinars and headed off.

He entered the house looking completely downcast. Everyone exchanged looks when they saw him. He said nothing, only placed the money in front of his aunt and said briefly, "Count it—is it all there?" Then he nodded, did not shake hands, did not greet anyone, but without waiting for an invitation, sat on the divan and buried his head in his hands. They all stared at him. He took out a handkerchief, turned his head aside, and brushed it across his forehead and eyes, then again hid his face in his hands and remained silent. The household watched him and finally addressed him, asking what had happened, whether some

misfortune had struck. Only Uncle Antanas did not ask—he suspected it might be another deficit or forgery. He kept silent for a long time, saying nothing, until he finally whispered:

"We've lost him... We will never see him again! ... He went without a blessing... without forgiveness..."

"What is it—what happened?" they all cried.

"A great misfortune," Xenophon said.

"Speak—what is it?" they pressed, while Uncle Antanas shrank into himself, already imagining an explanation about how the money had been invested in certain enterprises.

There, in the bazaar... everyone's talking about it... I heard it too—it hit me like lightning. He's dead...

"Who? Who has died?" ...

"Geras... Father." ...

"Geras!... Oh, dear God!" ... they all wailed.

"Yes, long ago he had already buried himself alive, and now he is truly gone..."

"But have you been there?"

"No... I haven't... As soon as I heard, I ran here to you first..."

They all grew alarmed and darted about the house. Although they were not at fault—since it was he who had chosen to live that way—they nonetheless reproached themselves for having abandoned him to die alone like some wandering German vagrant, as if he weren't a baptized soul! They immediately rushed to the deceased's house. Uncle Antanas went to the telegraph office to inform acquaintances both at home and abroad.

Within a few minutes, the entire neighbourhood knew, and in half an hour, the sad news had spread throughout the town. When they set out to visit the deceased, everyone they met asked in astonishment whether it was really true that Kir Geras had died, whether he had been ill, and whether he had left any sort of will...

Chapter Ten

From this, the reader will see most clearly how, in the world, people only realize what they had once they lose it!

It was already evening when news of the death of the old, long-time merchant Kir Geras spread through the bazaar. The entire marketplace was in an uproar. The Greeks and the Cincars hurried from shop to shop, gathering in groups, talking, gesturing, quarrelling, and reproaching each other. They lamented how undeserving they were of the sun's warmth,

given their behaviour. “We had him, and yet we couldn’t keep him!” they said. They asked who had last seen him, whether anyone had visited him or brought him offerings; whether he had suffered long, died peacefully, and what his last words had been. They agreed that one of them should be the first to visit the deceased’s house, then the others would follow. But no one wanted to go first. Each excused themselves, claiming their heart was too soft, that they would not be able to endure it.

When they couldn’t persuade anyone to go alone, they decided to meet after dinner at the Greek school and then head out from there to sit with the deceased for a while. Afterwards, they dispersed, shaking their heads and sighing: “Poor, poor Geras! He passed like green grass!”

After dinner, they gathered at the Greek school and set out together towards the deceased’s house. They moved in formation. The Greeks led, followed by the Cincars. Among them were Hristodulos and Čistopulos, Farmakakis and Sapuncakis, Čikirides and Blesides, then Džufa and Dufa, Džanga and Danga, Duka and Fuka, Luča and Fuča, Fota and Liota, Deda and Dada, Antula and Kutula, and Guša and Nuša. They walked two by two, as they always did on Sundays when visiting the icon. They moved with dignity, dressed solemnly, heads bowed, prayer beads in hand, speaking quietly and slowly, as befitted an old and noble race.

Since they had a long way to go, they talked quite a bit, often pausing to gather around the most eloquent among them to listen before falling back into pairs to continue. Their conversation focused entirely on the deceased. They discussed his abilities, virtues, worth, and honesty. They also remembered him as a private man, talking about his habits, his favourite topics, the foods he liked—moussaka and “papučaka”—the songs he loved in his youth and old age, and how, in his younger days, he could sometimes be a pretty lively fellow. Now, they admitted, no one—no one like him—knew how to cheer and entertain a crowd as well as he did when playing his favourite game *Pos pun pezun to piperi*.[2] What clever tricks he would come up with! The younger players would burst into laughter, while the elders who didn’t play would get stomach cramps from laughing, crying out helplessly: “Enough already! Have you no soul?” In short, his spirit brought life to everything whenever he lined up the moves and showed how one could grind pepper in all sorts of ways!...

They walked on, talking like this, remembering him in all his small details. And now that man was gone! The mouth that had made

[2] “This is how you grind pepper! Like this!” – a game also played among Serbs (Sremac’s note)

everyone laugh in the game "This is how you grind pepper" was closed forever, silenced—yet even in its silence, it seemed to chide his townsfolk, eloquent and fearsome in its absence.

They already felt a terrible emptiness yawning in their ranks without him. And their eyes kept drifting, almost unwillingly, to the shop signs, which were clearly visible in the moonlight. All the names were strange—nothing that sounded like a proper merchant's name! Once, it was all Greeks ruling here, Greek signs everywhere, with only a rare Serbian one... Everywhere you looked, it read: this one from Kleisoura, that one from Moschopolis, and others from Gopeš, Magarevo, Smrdeš, Metsovo, Ioannina, or Korçë. Now, it was the opposite: only a few stray Greek signs here and there, and most were Jews and Serbs! You couldn't hit a Greek even if you aimed a gun at one! The time had come when more of them lay in the graveyard than in the bazaar, more with crosses than with business signs. Yet, at least on the crosses and tombstones, their Greek was still written. The time had come for the living to envy the dead; they would cry out to the dead: "You get up, so we may lie down!" As they walked through the market, they read the shop signs. Now, they displayed all manner of people from Karanovac and Kruševac, from Knjaževac and Šabac—and townsfolk were one thing, but even villagers began pushing them out; there they were, all from Jasenica and Lepenica, from Darosava and Pinosava! ...

Now, they remembered the villain Milisav Pinosavac, who had caused the death of their Geras. Until now, no one had even heard of a Pinosavac—but now they remembered him better than Thermopylae! How times had changed! How the descendants of renowned ancestors had shifted! Thousands of Persians were trapped at the Thermopylae pass, here a Greek was stuck in some Pinosava! ...

Everyone agreed that this was a rare tragedy—the tragedy of their unfortunate Geras, a case only seen in the old days when fate and angry gods poured all the misfortunes of the world upon a weak shoulder and head. They compared him to Priam, to Hecuba, and even to Niobe...

"No—no!" cried Kir Kutula, cutting their comparison short. "No, no!" he repeated, then fell silent for a moment, as if to let them settle. "Belisarius!... Belisarius!" he exclaimed once more, drawing a deeper pinch of his famed Wiener snuff. "Hear me now!" he said, halting in his tracks.

All nineteen Greeks and Cincars stood silently, gathered around him in a circle as a sign of their deepest respect. For Kir Kutula moved among them as the most learned and widely read: twice daily, he visited the Reading Room, read all the newspapers, knew everything happening in the world, and—most importantly—could recount it with

rare charm. Therefore, they always listened to him gladly and with full attention.

"Hear me now!" Kir Kutula began. "I once read, in a Serbian book, a poem—an elegy, as we say in Greek—a poem about Belisarius, all in verse. The late Geras—he is Belisarius! A Christian man, a Belisarius—such was our Geras!... He was wealthy, he rose to high fortune, then fell, was undone, and died!... Belisarius!..."

All nodded, approving, murmuring, "That's right!"

"And as proof that it is, *demek*, truly so," he continued, "here, listen to what the elegy itself says," said Kir Kutula, lifting his eyebrows, and began:

"Envy not, good brothers mine,
The outward show of fortune bright;
In such estates, there is no finding
Peace for heart, nor rest for soul!"

Some step closer, some cup a hand behind their ear to hear better, and all nod to show they understand, approve, and call out: "Go on, go on!"

"All the world's prosperity
Once was seen bestowed on me;
But know that Fortune is deceitful,
And most uncertain in her ways!..."

"Fortune," says the poet, "is most uncertain. What noble phrasing! Greek phrasing! They must have stolen it from us!" comments Kir Kutula. They all agree and say a Greek must surely have written that poem, stolen by others; and he continues:

"She lifted me—yes, lifted me—
Above the glory even of Rome;
Yet into the abyss she hurled me,
And swiftly cast me from the height!"

"Truth! True indeed! Just so it is!" rings out from all sides. And Kutula concludes, raising his voice for the final stanza:

"Before me once, in awe and trembling,
Nations bowed and paid me homage;
Now, blind, I cry: 'Have mercy—

Give alms to Belisarius, the general!"

All acknowledged it as true. Since Belisarius, there had never been a man more unfortunate than Kir Geras. Tears filled their eyes, and a lump rose in their throats. And they spoke no more, walking again in twos, thinking only of Geras, reproaching themselves for not even knowing the alley he lived in, and those who did, not knowing the house where he freed himself from earthly cares. Upon reaching the alley, they inquired about the house and agreed that the first to enter alphabetically should be Kir Antula...

*

The relatives arrived even before the acquaintances. Aunt Cleopatra had already begun wailing from the courtyard gate. Something gripped her and started choking her (like an *aramija* grabbing someone by the throat) when she saw how empty and lifeless everything was, with the graveyard stillness filling the yard. She hurried up the wooden steps and burst into the room, followed by everyone else.

But she jolted and stopped in the doorway, even ceasing her crying. She stared, unable to believe her own eyes. Before her lay a sight she had never expected. Was it real or a vision, a dream taking shape before her? Was it him or a phantom? In the corner, a small lamp flickered on the table; beside it crouched a cat, peering at a plate. At the table sat no one else but Geras himself, feeding a few tamed mice that had climbed onto his palm and were nibbling breadcrumbs, so tame they weren't even afraid of the cat. The cat wasn't even looking at them, as if they weren't mice at all, but simply grooming and licking itself, as cats always do after a good meal.

When the others crowded in behind her, a murmur arose; Geras jerked, lowered the mice—who scampered into their hole—and the cat dove under the bed. He squinted and glanced their way.

"Who're you?"

"It's me..."

"Who're you, woman?"

"It's me... Cleopatra... Antanas's..."

"Ah, it's you... And why you come here? What you doin' here?" ...

"Aren't you dead?"

"Buried, yes, buried alive... but not dead yet! Saint Archangel still don't be askin' for my soul—not yet, not yet!"

"Are you truly alive? You haven't died?" Kleopatra asked joyfully, ran to him and kissed his hand.

"Well, I eat supper... I guess I'm alive!"

"Oh God, child, how you frightened me! ... Xenophon told me. Here he is, too; he ran over as well."

"We heard in the bazaar, Papa, and so..." began Xenophon, then paused, choked up, and broke into tears, kissing his father's hand.

Moved, Geras embraced his son, tears streaming down his face.

Just then, Aristotle burst in with his sister Ljubica. They, too, had heard the terrible rumour in the bazaar and hurried over. There, they also paused, unable to believe their own eyes.

"Papa!" they cried, running to him and hugging and kissing him.

Geras completely melted with happiness: he looked around him joyfully; his eyes were clearer and livelier. He gazed at those gathered around him with such warmth and beckoned them to sit beside him on the divan and chairs. They asked how he was and why he had withdrawn so suddenly. They shuddered at the thought that all this could truly have happened. He sensed their genuine joy, which pleased him, and he grew even more cheerful. Everyone was happy, but he was the happiest—now that he knew there were people who would mourn him and weep for him after his passing.

He stood up and retrieved from somewhere a whole pound of candles, saved from his old shop; they lit all six. The room brightened, along with the cheerful Geras's face. He urged them to stay and said he would be right back. Then he went down to the cellar, which he barely opened with the rusty key, and brought up a few bottles of wine from who-knows-where. The bottles were covered in such thick layers of sand that they had nearly petrified. If we didn't know Noah was the first to plant a vine, one might claim those bottles were from before the Flood. And what theories an archaeologist would spin! He'd swear the wine dated back to the Migration Period or the Romans; he'd even name the Roman poet who drank it while singing dithyrambs and Anacreontic verses, and identify the legion that dug that cellar. There'd be a whole learned treatise; the Academy of Sciences would award it; the evening papers would applaud it; on the strength of it, the young scholar might win a place at the Great School, might even find a wealthy match, and no doubt he'd develop a swollen head and do nothing ever again. But in truth, it was all much simpler. Geras had buried that wine when his first son was born, intending to open it at his son's wedding feast. After the catastrophe, when he withdrew from the world and moved out here, he had buried it again and forgotten it entirely. Now it came back to him, and he dug it up to share with the family he had reconnected with. He brought out the wine, uncovered some hidden glasses—souvenirs and witnesses of his former prosperity—filled them, and served them. They all sat around him on the rug, clinked glasses, and burst into song.

Chapter Eleven and the Last

From this, the reader will see how closely old Kir Geras resembled that mythological bird, the Phoenix.

Meanwhile, the merchants arrived in front of Geras' apartment, a two-storey house that stood below the Zerek. They paused for a moment, sighed, and all muttered, "By the saints, Kir Geras!" Then they pushed themselves forward, letting the younger Cincars go ahead, and appointed Kir Kutula, the most learned among them, to lead first. They started up the stairs, but not in pairs; one after another, they climbed: Kutula and Antula, Dada and Deda, Fota and Liota, Danga and Džanga, Dufa and Džufa, Luća and Fuča, and Guša and Nuša. Behind them, the Greeks—again one after another—Hristodulos and Čistopulos, Blesides and Čikirides, and finally Farmakakis and Sapuncakis. One by one, a Greek or Cincar on each stair; when Kutula reached the topmost step, Sapuncakis was at the bottom, and just as Sapuncakis lifted his foot to step up, he suddenly felt a strong push and fell sideways. The whole line from Kir Kutula to Kir Sapuncakis tumbled over each other (like a row of cards when children play, and the first card is flicked, toppling all the rest). They rolled and crashed, not knowing why, except for Kir Kutula. All that could be heard from the top was: "*Fevge*!" and one fell on top of the next, spilling outward, and still no one knew why. They only knew that Kir Kutula must have seen something terrible, stumbled back, knocked someone behind him, who knocked the next, and so they all fell...

And so it was, for Kir Kutula had witnessed an incredible, unseen sight. When he slowly opened the door, expecting to find Kir Geras in the middle of the room with his jaw bound and a fez without a tassel on his head, he instead saw him healthy and cheerful among his relatives! ...

After they regained their balance and sighed with relief, they recovered and went inside again, freezing before the scene. In the middle of the room sat Kir Geras, embracing his brother-in-law Antanas and his sister-in-law Cleopatra; around him were his sons and some other relatives; before them lay wine, and Kir Geras cheerfully sang a monotonous Aromanian song that sounded like wailing, while the others accompanied him, clapping their hands.

Everyone looked at him in astonishment, and Kir Kutula, reaching the centre of the room, tilted his head to his left shoulder, and was the first to speak:

"Đeras, bre? Kuskre, bre! Brother! Is that you? Are you alive? You haven't died?!" ...

"*Rodio sum se* (I'm born again)!" answered the happy, cheerful Kir Geras. "*Nesum umreo* (I didn't die)!" ...

"Alive! Alive!" rang out from all sides, and everyone rushed to him with outstretched arms.

The joy of seeing him alive, the greetings and embraces of Kir Geras with everyone in sequence, from Antula to Džufa—no pen could capture it; no reader could visualize even the faintest image. And so, the writer will not even try.

...Kir Geras was touched, happy, and overjoyed to see so much sympathy from everyone—relatives, countrymen, and acquaintances. Many Serbs had also arrived and were pleased with what they saw.

Then Kir Kutula, the most learned and widely read among them, on behalf of all the Cincars, Greeks, and Serbs, raised his glass to Kir Geras. He lifted the glass and, gifted by God with the rarest talent for speech, immediately found the perfect comparison for the joy and good fortune that their beloved Kir Geras was experiencing today. He said that this joy and good fortune were great, akin to the joy and good fortune of the famous Chilon, the Spartan ephor, who lived to see his son crowned victor at the Olympic Games, and for that very reason he wished and prayed to God that Geras might fare in all things exactly like Chilon, who died of overwhelming happiness in his son's arms; may Geras too die in the arms of his sons, but *not before reaching at least a hundred years of age*!

The effect of this toast was indescribable, as everyone was astonished when Kir Kutula started talking about death and then turned it into joy by wishing Kir Geras a hundred years of life!

Everyone was delighted—Cincars and Greeks alike. "Long live Kir Kutulis!" they shouted, toasting him and calling him by that Graecized name to claim him as their own. They said he was perfect in every way, only missing the name Kutulis...

Kir Geras thanked everyone, replying in kind. He admitted the joy was truly immense, even surpassing Chilon's. While Chilon was pleased by his son alone, Geras felt joy from his sons, friends, countrymen, and townsfolk—and he said that was greater happiness, beyond what Chilon knew. But he was not finished. No, he said, after all the hardship and suffering he had endured, and now this sign of sympathy and shared feeling—he felt he could not, would not, and should not die; he would live long because he was like the Phoenix. Yes, he said, he was akin to that Phoenix that burns and rises again from its ashes, young, strong, and ready for a new life!

*

Two or three days later, condolences started to arrive from both the interior and abroad—from Pest, Vienna, Trieste, and even Alexandria and Smyrna—from his compatriots. Kir Geras read them, wiping away tears at the sincere grief expressed by so many. Only now, seeing himself as "dead," did he realize how many friends he truly had in life...

He straightened up, felt a strong will to live again, and began caring for relatives, visiting them and gathering them close. There were significant changes, with many additions and growth among both relatives and friends.

During these few years of his hermit-like life, Kir Geras' family grew larger. He remembered everyone he had met but still struggled to recall all their names. And it was no easy task: his daughter Ljubica had two children, Xenophon had two, Aristotle five—all sons. And what names they had! Besides one familiar, the others were old Serbian, grand-princely names that Kir Geras had never heard before: Ljubica's two sons were Beriša and Ljubiša, Xenophon's two grandsons were Predrag and Nenad, and Aristotle's five grandchildren were Višeslav, Gradimir, Budimir, Branislav, and Geras. Who could remember all these names? Kir Geras could hardly recall or pronounce them, let alone know whose was whose. He tried, but mistakes happened: one he called Nedrag, another Beribiša. But that did not bother him. It was enough that he knew they were all his grandchildren, that they knew he was their grandfather, and that they called him Grandpa Geras—what more did he need! One word was enough: "Grandpa," or "Ah, *bre* boy!" for all. And that's how he called them, and they all responded beautifully. Pure joy! He only had to shout: "Donkeys!" or "little donkeys!" and they responded, crouching in his arms, shouting: "Grandpa!" and he greeted them: "Ah, my little barbarian grandkids!" He took them two at a time on his knees, caressed and kissed them, asking what they would become when grown, what they would most like to be, and he was pleased to hear all his grandchildren say they would be merchants and partners with their grandfather, and even tutors in the church. And old Geras was melting with delight, his eyes full of tears; it warmed his heart to see that everything there was his own blood, that they were striving toward their grandfather's ideals. For Kir Geras was now both things at once: both trustee and partner. The townspeople had unanimously elected him trustee (guardian of the community's charity fund) out of gratitude for his exemplary zeal and piety, and his partner was his son Miloš. There it gleamed—the huge signboard, its golden letters dazzling the eyes, and the golden letters on the signboard read: Trading House of Đerasim (Geras) Paskaljević & Son Miloš.

The old, former, Geras Paskalis had—so to speak—capitulated. In the end, he too threw up his hands and swam with the current of the new era, a current that had carried away so many of his kind. “The world belongs to the young!” And he did not want to be the white crow among his own. Like a new Phoenix rising from the ashes, the old Kir Geras Paskalis was reborn as the new Đerasim Paskaljević!

Translated from Serbian by
Persida Bošković

MOMČILO NASTASIJEVIĆ

AN ACCOUNT OF THE GIFTS OF MY COUSIN MARIA

After what incomprehensibly happened to me, I want—truthfully, and as far as words can grasp—to write everything down as it was. I do this not to put myself forward (my time left down here is but short), nor to leave a memory of myself, but to ease my soul so it does not depart burdened by a secret which, having no one to tell, I wish to entrust to paper in silent writing. I tremble at whether I can accomplish it, and so within me is a prayer that the power be granted to me.

The root of my suffering was planted before I even existed in my mother's womb. I am unsure, but it seems things went like this: for as long as I can remember, I have always carried the sorrowful awareness that somewhere there was Maria, my cousin. Our mothers, born of the same womb, quarrelled endlessly when it was time for marriage: they both desired the same young man, and he chose the younger, prettier one. My future mother, to avoid witnessing her sister's happiness, left with the first foreigner who came asking for her hand. In all the years that followed, word about my aunt reached us only twice: once when she had a baby girl (on which occasion my mother spat out ugly wishes against the newborn—and would often repeat them later), and once when, by some tragic accident, she slipped on ice, broke her spine, and died. When my mother heard, her face went white, and she only muttered: "Didn't I tell you so!" I never understood whether that implied regret or malice, because she never spoke of the deceased woman again. Yet on the eve of holidays and on All Souls' Days, she would always light one extra candle at our cemetery. Once I summoned the courage to ask her, "Who is that one for?" "For other people's dead, my son!" my mother answered absentmindedly, avoiding my gaze.

When all this befell me, a candle had already been lit many times for her soul as well.

How the news of Maria's death hurried me there, and what I discovered

At that time, I had grown fond of—and was preparing to propose to—a dark-haired girl with gentle eyes and a mischievous smile. You know how a sour cherry looks when it ripens—that is what she was like. She is gone now as well, and sorrow forbids me from speaking of her more than I must. Let only this be known about her: her little foot—so small that the sight of it always set my heart pleasantly on edge. And just on the eve of the day when we were to seal our engagement with a ring and a vow, a message reached me from a town no more than a five hours' walk away: "Your cousin Maria has died," it said, "an old maid, alone in the house except for one old woman, and after her there remain chests of gifts. "And you," it said, "take care, don't let yourself be tempted by heirless property, because she neither left it to anyone nor lived and died like ordinary folk." And once again, it said, "Use your head, lad!"

Why, at that exact moment, did I choose to do the complete opposite—ignore the warning and go against it—I still can't explain to myself, even now. Without thought or informing my fiancée, I secretly packed in haste and left. That is how the mysterious knot of my suffering began to be tied.

I arrived. The house sat at the very edge of the village—wattle-and-daub, peeling, with the bare clay showing through like wounds. Two or three scabby plum trees, shrivelled from never bearing fruit; a pear tree by the fence, bristling and barren; a naked vine twisted around its neck like a noose. Any passerby would turn their head and hurry past. I went in. The gate screeched as if it barked. There on a small stool sat the old woman, knitting a woollen sock; beside her a huge tomcat, busy purring. The old woman asked—in a voice like blowing into a broken whistle—what I wanted, and stopped her fingers mid-stitch. The cat kept purring. I could see they were in no mood for visitors, but never mind, I told myself, and introduced myself.

The door was open, and a stale, musty smell drifted out. What was I doing, aimlessly wandering through this sorrow? Had I truly come to lay a rightful heir's hand on this wretched inheritance? If not, then what was I doing here? I asked and asked, but no answer came, nor did I truly seek one. Just then, the old woman returned, carrying a tiny cup of coffee to welcome me. Fine. It is what it is. I took a sip, and she muttered over my head: "Serves me right for being foolish enough to

leave that girl's things in the house, so now strange hands rummage through what is hers, and the deceased girl grows angry with me from beyond! Oh, you old fool," she said, "you ought to be smashed to bits and thrown on the dung heap!" "You're not speaking fairly, old lady! I'm no maiden who needs her gifts, nor a thief to snatch them. I came just... just because. And know this: even if I were starving and those things were embroidered with gold and studded with pearls, it would grieve me to touch them!"

"You have a kind heart, son, I can tell—but what you're doing, meddling in this, is not right. Better you go home in peace!"

I didn't move. She did everything she could to avoid making eye contact, busying herself with anything she could find; the whole afternoon she spent chasing the neighbour's rooster away and defending her own, a scrawny, cowardly hen. By dusk, the roosters settled down on their own, and the old woman paced back and forth before turning to me again: "Well," she said, "it's time for supper and bed, and you still haven't moved! What's wrong with you, man?"

I simply shrugged. With no other option, she went inside, stoked the fire, and cooked me some cicvara.

Apart from the glow of the hearth, there was no other light in the house. Something drew me in; I slipped inside. Was it the flicker of flames, or did the room itself shimmer and stir, or was it the cracked mirror hanging askew, giving off its own strange gleam? One thing I know for sure: beyond the reach of ordinary senses, I had never felt anything speak to me, yet now my senses were confused by a presence I had never encountered before. Once, on a bet, I spent a whole night in a tavern attic waiting for a chained Turk to appear—nothing happened. But here, it was different: something truly unfathomable was taking place. Outwardly, everything was still, yet within the objects themselves, something lived, bound to them, lasting as long as they did.

Hunger gnawed at me, but from the very first mouthful the cicvara did not disgust me (judging by how the old woman and the cat relished it, the food was tasty); instead, it clung to my heart in some unpleasantly sticky way, as though it had been fried in balm or something of the sort. I pushed the bowl away. The old woman took offence and grumbled.

"I can't," I said. "Some sorrow makes it stick in my throat. Anyway, I didn't come for your supper, but for you to tell me how Maria lived and how she died: open the chests, one by one, and unwrap her gifts. That is how I want to come to know her now that she is dead. And though human law would give me the right, I swear to you by my youth that I will not take so much as a thread for myself!"

"Oh, you're downright wayward! Not a single thread will you take, yet you want to go rummaging through her chests! And you don't even ask if it's allowed, when she, sensing death near, locked them herself!"

I flew into a rage. I had always considered myself mild-mannered. Suddenly, I realized I was capable of violence. I shoved the old woman aside and rushed into the room. It was crowded with chests, so dark and narrow that only a corner remained for the bed covered with a white sheet. A vigil lamp burned there. Opposite it hung a mirror, cracked diagonally so that it reflected the entire room and somehow distorted it. Everything seemed still, yet I swayed like a stalk in the wind; glancing into the mirror, I did not recognize myself. A bluish haze blurred before my eyes, and I sank into a strange, numb drunkenness. Stumbling forward, I collapsed onto the bed.

The old woman's rough hand rested on my forehead. "You'll make yourself sick with that hard head of yours!"

"Never mind, granny! Look—her pillow smells like her hair! Tell me, did Maria have long hair?"

"So long that her hand could not reach all the way to comb it through!"

"And her figure, her eyes—what were they like?"

"The kind words cannot fully express—once seen, dreamed of forever."

"Then how, with such beauty and all those gifts, did no man ever take her—how did she remain an old maid?"

The elderly woman found it difficult to answer. She fidgeted, paused three times, swallowed her words, and started over. At last, she broke down.

"I can't hold it in any longer," she said. "It feels as if it would seep out of my eyes, drip from my fingers, and breathe out of me. Listen now, I'll start from the beginning: ..."

The old woman's tale of how Maria lived and died

I took her in my arms the moment she was born; she grew up in these hands, and she became more precious to me than my own children. My own daughters dispersed to serve in other people's homes, for this girl was dearer to me than if I had carried her beneath my own belt and brought her forth in pain. As for her mother—may she find mercy in the hereafter—I have nothing good to say! The moment she got rid of her husband (he burst like a balloon from overeating), she gave herself over to wandering; sometimes she would come home at night, sometimes not. Once she even tried to bring a sweetheart home—some snake-headed lout—but I blocked the door: "I won't allow," I said,

"your filth to touch the child! Off with you—roam where you've been roaming!" So, they left in shame. Later, fate caught up with her: she slipped on the ice and broke her back. Some said she was alone; others that she wasn't—that he was with her, and that during a quarrel, he tripped her and ran off. Even the court couldn't figure it out. They called me too, and I stood with my hands on my hips and told them: "Your honour, let this be known once and for all: under my roof and in front of that child's innocence, no wrongdoing was ever committed! And outside that roof and fence, whatever trouble they started—I neither know nor care!"

That passed. The child stayed with me, and, better than a birth mother, I did my best to raise her with care. The washboards of strangers' houses know how much I toiled, but my suffering paid off. (If ever you truly love someone, endure any hardship for them; it will turn into sweetness. That is precisely what happened to me...) The girl grew up, blossomed into a fine young woman, and news of her spread. Then they all began passing down our winding lane because of her. It's just like with a flower: while it's still a bud, hardly anyone notices or cares, but the moment it opens overnight in all its glory, suddenly everyone comes running, every hand wants to pluck it.

Our garden was in full bloom: peonies blazing red, carnations filling the air with fragrance—and she was out there every single day, moving among them so gracefully you'd think she was in their company, the loveliest one of them all. The lane strolled various bachelors—sons of all kinds of fathers—dressed in their finest, perfumed, lingering in hopes of striking up a chat with her. She, whether out of modesty or pride, wouldn't so much as turn her head, let alone greet them, as if she were of noble birth and they the lowest of the low. Now and then she'd straighten up, tall and slender, and throw a glance their way—just enough to tangle the poor lads up, leave them stammering, not knowing where to put their own feet.

Sometimes I would take her out for a walk. We'd stroll down the lane—me, a pitiful scrap of a woman, and her like that beside me. Wherever we went, it felt like a holiday. Everyone would rush to the gate or, if they were outside, step aside to let us pass. These were people I'd known all my life, yet neither I nor they ever thought to offer each other a greeting. And if you can believe it, old men—whose grandchildren were already grown—would become flustered when they saw her. As for the young ones, God help them, they froze wherever they happened to be. I neither allowed myself to rejoice nor drive the fear from my heart, and without pause I prayed silently, "God, let this turn out for the good!"

We had no mirror in the house. Then one day she said to me, "Get me a mirror!" I tried to laugh it away: "Get away with you," I said,

“troublemaker, that’s the last thing you need—to start spinning around like some of those other girls! You should know, mirrors are deceitful things; a girl starts staring at herself, and no good ever comes of it—some calamity is sure to hatch!” But the girl burst into tears and threw a tantrum until, in the end, I gave in—there it is, hanging on the wall. And with it I brought trouble straight into the house: once she saw what she looked like, she lost her head over her own reflection. The girl started holding her head higher, as if even she felt she ought to bow to herself.

And in town—pure madness. The men lost whatever sense they had. A son robs his own father’s drawers, a journeyman steals from his master, a partner cheats a partner; then come the drinking, the rages, the smashing things up and down the lane. One group meets another, words are exchanged, knives come out, blood flows. Some poor fellow who’d only just got married is seized by the devil—he beats his wife black and blue. They carry her on a rug to her parents’ house so the poor thing can recover there. Then one day, a group of the wildest ones load themselves into a cart, tie loaves of bread on the oxen’s horns like some pagan offering, deck themselves with rosemary, hire musicians, and the whole circus stops right in front of our gate. They start roaring: “Old woman, bring the girl out—let’s have a wedding, let’s go mad!” Then they start whooping and firing guns into the air. I wrapped my head in my shawl from sheer shame, while that wretched girl nearly died laughing.

Now and then, one of them would fool himself into thinking he had a chance, and he would show up, constrained and sheepish, to propose. My girl would leave him waiting and trembling outside the gate first. Then she’d finally let him in, and like a strict schoolteacher grilling a pupil, she’d question him, trip him up with wicked little remarks until the poor man could barely find the door and flee drenched in sweat. Word of it spread, more stories got tacked on, malicious tongues did the rest, and the scandal buzzed all over town. After that, the suitors gave up. They’d sooner walk into any other disgrace than come knocking at our door to ask for her hand.

But in the end, the unfortunate girl paid the price. There was a neighbour’s boy—gentle-hearted and shy—and his father, a prominent man, came on his behalf. “This is how it is,” he said in a trembling voice, “he’s the only thing dearer to me than my own eyes. You know my house, my honour, my wealth; no girl would feel ashamed to be led there as a bride. I’m a father, and I have to try to turn this trouble into joy for everyone. And you should know, the misery is great, which is why I do this.” I didn’t know whether to keep silent or what to say to the man. Then, God help us, there she was, as if the devil himself had prompted her. She looked down at him sideways, lips half-smiling, but

her eyes cold and proud, enough to make a grown man flinch. He barely managed to stammer, “Maria... would you be my son’s wife?” She just tilted her head and laughed, the unfortunate girl—my god, how sweetly she laughed. He stood there a moment, as if he couldn’t believe his own ears, then turned and walked away, stumbling with grief, a man like that.

The next day, we heard: the boy had vanished. His parents watched him night and day, locked the doors, and posted a servant at the gate; somehow, he slipped out anyway. They searched everywhere. Toward evening, the fishermen found him: he had hanged himself from a crooked willow down by the river.

For three days, it tormented me to look at the girl or speak to her. She, like a sick bird, stayed huddled there, shrinking without bread or sleep. I did not know how to help her, nor could I bear to see her like that, and I tormented myself, wondering whether there was any way, after what had happened, to bring her back into any light. Until she, sometime deep into the third night, rose and let tears fall on me like drops: “I want,” she said, “to ask you something, but tell me honestly, from the heart—not what would please me.” Her voice was trembling, and I was frightened, so I started trying to calm her with all kinds of words. But she said, “None of that helps. Tell me truly—about that misfortune—who is to blame, I, or he, or both of us together?” As if someone taught me, I told her: “Leave that be, child! You did not wish for his death, and he, poor soul, did not think he would meet it in going after you. The knowledge of who is guilty is older than us, girl, and it’s useless for us to seek it. All we can do is endure and hope something better will grow out of this one day. That’s all you have left—find some peace, anyway you can.”

And she seemed to calm down—like an apple picked at the perfect moment, ripe and fragrant, but already picked. Its beauty moves you because its sweet soul is starting to fade—no more wildness, no more laughter. I didn’t even dare take her out; the whole town was in mourning, and everyone was angry with her.

But the main worry was always bread on the table, so I was forever out working, always at someone else’s washboard. I worked, yet she was always on my mind. I knew that I would always find her in the evening where I left her in the morning. A great sorrow gnawed at me, and wayward words kept creeping in: “Damned be beauty when it leads a person to such misery! So many ugly girls, ugly enough to spit on and still they have easier lives! And look at this one, everyone who sees her envies her, yet more sorrow has flowed through that girl’s heart in a few weeks than would through theirs in ten lifetimes!” I muttered such things to myself, then suddenly feared I was blaspheming and

tried to smother them with prayer: Forgive me, God, and have mercy on the poor girl that she may endure!

And then—would you believe it—she found a way out into the light. I came home on the eve of St. John's Day, trembling, because when I left that morning, she had looked at me with these widened eyes. What I saw was a beam of light striking the window at an angle and shining far into the room. My God, what could be inside? I was afraid to go in, so I peeked—and she was a sight to see, sitting there glowing as if lit from within, and—dare I believe my eyes—she was embroidering. With every stitch, her lips moved in a whisper and a smile, her head swayed in some private joy, but I feared it was a dream and would disappear; I held my breath so it might last longer.

I went in: my heart both glad and heavy, the way it is at early-morning mass when the icon of the Mother of God glows, and I come forward to venerate it. Softly she said, "Don't be afraid. Heaven has kindled inside me, and life is bright. Look—I've embroidered three little green leaves and a blue flower so the Coming may be fulfilled!"

I froze, thinking the girl had either been sanctified or lost her mind, and I trembled beside her the whole night. She kept embroidering and uttering holy words, so that I nearly fainted from sorrow and joy, yet I had no idea what those words meant.

(The old woman rises, gropes about in the dark. Here she is—she's carrying little slippers in her hands. The moment I see them, I silently swear to steal them.) "Here," she says, "that's how tiny her feet were. From the very first embroidery, she also made these slippers, 'so I can put them on,' she said, 'when the Coming is fulfilled.'"

(She gazes at the embroidery, engrossed in memory. I quietly lower my hand on the slippers. She starts, snatches them away, and hides them somewhere in the kitchen. I strain my ears, follow every step, and learn exactly where they are. The old woman comes back.)

I've seen madwomen: their eyes clouded, with darkness and fog seeping from them. But it was as if my girl's madness turned in the opposite direction. I'd sit across from her (and you should know that once she became fixed on her embroidery and that smile, she never returned to me), and I'd lose myself, with a growing thirst to gaze at her. Whether she noticed or not, it always seemed like a ray of light shone on her, or even radiated from within. So, God forgive me, in her presence, I began to drift away from the church and the sacred.

Sometimes she was as restless as water: a little bird lands on a branch, she starts, listens. I tell her, "It's only a bird!" She shakes her head as if she knows better and, as if forewarned, hurries back to her work.

And my God, the things that came from under her needle: scattered flowers with eyespots that shimmered as if she'd used stars as her

pattern—those stars shining in a clear sky—or a long-necked bird pecking at a golden bunch of grapes; or a single flower like a peony, but mightier, with petals blazing like fire.

Sometimes, she'd start embroidering violets when real violets bloomed with fragrance outside, and by the time she finished, autumn would arrive, and the trees would be bare. And wonder of wonders—the smell of autumn would fill the room, yet she could still smell them outside. She would even tell me, "Water them, please—they're thirsty!" What was I to do? I went out and pretended to water the yard.

Thus, years went by, and as I kept bringing her chests for her embroidery, I somehow realized that eight years had passed and we were now entering the ninth, just the two of us—no one, not even a stray cat, came through our gate.

So that she'd never want for anything, I took any job: one day I'd bathe and dress the dead for burial; the next, help a woman in childbirth. Weddings, funeral receptions, whatever needed doing—I was there. If someone fell gravely ill and needed to be watched overnight, they'd call me. People looked after me and helped me, but no one ever mentioned Maria. And whenever I tried to bring her up, they acted as if they hadn't heard and changed the subject.

Then, around the time of the Great Lent, when the south wind began blowing, a terrible fever swept through the town. It spared no one—neither old nor young; whoever it caught, it took down. All day long, the bells tolled, mourning in grief, and sorrow was everywhere. I went from house to house trying to help, but everyone avoided me and, as if by unspoken agreement, sent me away, saying, "Go to hell!" Until I came upon a drunken and horrified woman, who shrieked, "How dare you!" and then continued, "You wander through our homes and alleys! You feed that witch with our bread, and this is how she repays us! Ptui!" (She spat at me.) "If there were any honour or justice," she said, "they'd coat her with tar and burn her in front of everyone! To slaughter such fine youth! To drown such little children! Ptui, the evil bitch!"

I myself flinched in terror and asked my own heart: "Good God, can these horrifying words be true?" But nothing in me confirmed it, so I began to defend the girl, "Get out of my sight, woman!" I cried. "You're drunk; your tongue has slipped its leash and spat filth on her! Know this: she is sacred in my house, and whatever poison you're dripping on her is nothing but the rot spilling from your own blackened soul!" At that, the other women who were there joined in and started shouting, "Get away from here, you filthy old hag! You're no better than yourself if you defend the likes of her!" Had I not fled, in their fury, they would have torn me to pieces.

I ran, their viper faces still before my eyes, and I spoke aloud to them, "You rags! Apart from the clean clothes on your backs, everything about you is rotten and torn, and that's why sickness finds you easy prey! Your slandering won't give Maria so much as a headache, and even if the serpent's venom dripped from your tongues onto her, it would turn to balm! And by your hatred—because your daughters are decay's offspring, born of the same rot as you—you will wipe yourselves out! And if ever again I take a piece of bread from your hands, may it turn to stone in mine that very moment! Amen, and amen, and amen!"

At home, I gazed intently at the girl, searching for even a trace of evil, but she was as pure as an icon, and I wept bitterly over the injustice.

"Why are you crying, granny? If it's because of the fiends, don't be afraid: I always see snakes twisting and coiling around our gate, thinking they're a barrier. I let them be out of mercy—that's their only joy in life. But know secretly: when the ray announces the Coming, they will uncoil and slither back into the dark!"

"Child, in town, the drunken and raving call you a witch, yet to me, you are healing like holy water. If you have the power, tell me so I can defend you better—what is it inside you? What power? Whom are you watching from afar as you embroider so hurriedly? Is it blessing or further suffering, my gracious one?"

I was bewildered, for there was no stopping her once she set her mind, and the poor thing grew agitated, beads of sweat breaking out on her as she gasped and hurried back to her embroidery: a white flower rose alone on its stem, surrounded by a coiled, reddish-brown snake. Then, threading the last stitch, she pulled all the finished pieces from the chests, spread them out, and kept vigil over them the entire precious night, withered like a plant left unwatered in a drought. Dawn arrived; I tried to help gather them, but she pushed me away with both hands—she feared some impurity from me. She wouldn't let herself sleep, but at first light, she stretched out new cloth.

After that, things got worse. Even the dogs in town started snarling at me; at home, we had barely any flour left; Maria grew restless, running out of thread. I got up and went to the nearest village. They thought I was begging and hurried to give me alms. "No, sisters," I said, "I'm not so poor you need to give me charity. I'm skilled at all kinds of work—set me where you need a hand, and let your bread be sweet to me!" Under divine guidance, they welcomed me and put me to work. They admired how quick I was at carding and spinning—I did the work of three women, and households fought over me. I worked all day, but as soon as it was dusk, I went home; I wouldn't stay overnight. One evening, the head of the household I was working for that day came galloping from town—he was a loud, abrupt man—and called down

from his horse: “Tell me, old woman, who do you have at home that every evening you rush back to town, old as you are? What trouble keeps you from ever spending a night in the village—our beds are for people, not cattle!” He asked sharply; there was no keeping silent or lying. “A frail girl,” I said, “who needs tending like a plant.” He snapped: “So you’re the witch-keeper! Get out while you’re still intact—because if fury blinds me, heaven help you!”

At home, Maria was weaving threads of darkness; you couldn’t tell whether they were snakes, scorpions, decay, or some other vile things. Here and there, a glimmer of clarity broke through: a shaft of light, or the tip of a tiny herb. She wove the threads, yet kept her ear sharp: “There, listen, they’re hissing, twisting up to our threshold, crawling over the roof!” “Why do you put them in the embroidery, Maria?” “So that I don’t feel horror but love, granny!”

Oof! When I looked at her more closely, her slender strength and face, and her eyes—God, those eyes—while she remained utterly still, only grew larger. She huddled in the corner. That smile radiated even stronger from her, so much so that even I, as if seeing her for the first time, was terrified and fled.

I fled to the third village beyond the hill. Only in the dead of night did I ask myself: What am I running from, and why? At least they never saw the girl; struck by misfortune, they seek an outlet for their frustration. But she was my bread and water, so how could I now point at her and cry out, “Yes, she’s a witch!”? God, no punishment could ever atone for such an act!

So, I smeared my face with dirt, covered my head in dust, and went door to door shamefully begging, “Can you spare something, sisters, for God’s sake, for there are those who, even in holiness, cannot obtain bread for themselves! And as for me, cursed as I am, beat me with a stick and set the dogs on me to tear me apart!” They’d cross themselves, taken aback, and escort me to the gate with alms. Then I met a gentle-eyed young woman who said, “Tell me what you long for most, and I’ll give it to you!” She began to cry, and I with her. “There,” I said, “what I long for most is mercy, and you have given it to me with your tears, my dear!” She hopped away like a dear little squirrel, and soon she was back, bringing me some folded cloth, “A little linen so you can make something for yourself, old woman!” Her kindness left me speechless; I lifted my eyes to the sky in prayer, “God, wherever You are, high or low, what words can praise You! To me, covered in shame, kindness has been shown! This little soul, taught by You, has given linen for Maria! Blessed am I, for I have learned what water carried the girl away!”

At home, I called out from the door, “Maria, I’ve brought you linen—it was a gift!”

She stretched out both hands, seized it as a starving person seizes bread, and in a feverish tremor began to embroider. God, what horror was she stitching? Some foul growth that sprouted from rot? Are those eyes—what is it staring out of them! Red, glowing eyes from the cloth! I hid, but it was no use. Even if I crawled under the earth, those eyes would stab me with terror. She beckoned me to come closer. And wonder of wonders—beside her mercy, I grew calm! She whispered, "They've crept into the room; I locked the chests for safety, I'm putting them to sleep—close your eyes if the terror is too much!"

I pressed against her, eyes shut tight, and heard her panting in exertion, with the needle flying swiftly through the terrifying silence. Sleep began to weigh on me, and I was drifting off when—CRASH! The mirror shattered as if someone had slashed across it with a stick. I staggered blindly around the house, deaf and dazed. At dawn, the darkness lifted, and I saw: Maria, right where she had been, completely grey, calming down; the embroidery had not fallen from her hands—she held it tight. And—God, I can never forget—why was she so pale and wide-eyed, and what was she smiling at, precisely the same way as the first time she ever smiled?

After the old woman's tale and my theft of the slippers

Suddenly, the old woman scowled and fell silent—she regrets having spoken, but it's too late; a word, once it escapes, is quicker than a bird. She hates me now; if she could, she'd strangle me. But I, confident in myself, slyly pretend innocence.

"Granny, let me kiss your hand!" (She wouldn't let me.) "Your words are balm to my soul; I can never repay you! It's time for me to go; I've troubled you long enough, but believe me, I cannot; sleep is overpowering me; my very soul has fallen asleep. My very soul, Granny!"

She believed I was asleep, but she was afraid and stayed there, rigid, standing guard. After a while, she grew tired, tiptoed out, made her bed in the kitchen, and lay down. With sharp ears, I followed every sound: heavy sleep took her, her old lungs soon whistled their elderly tune. She was asleep—now, carefully!

I knew exactly where she hid them; darkness was no obstacle. My outstretched hand felt them. There! A trembling touch, followed by a gentle grip: laid across my palm, they stretched from my fingertips to my wrist! Nothing, no torture, even if it cost me my life, would make me part with them!

But that was not enough. A violent urge surged within me. I knew exactly what I had to do: with a quick, cat-like leap, I was above the old woman. The object is secretly pressed against her chest; a hand that

has slipped under the blanket reaches closer again and feels it. Not out of fear she might wake, but because I dread touching her withered body, I slit her waistcoat and nightdress with a sharp little knife, as if at a fair, and the keys dropped straight into my hand. Done!

I will discover what my soul senses but cannot name, even if it tears the life out of me. There was still some oil in the lamp, casting the chests in a dark, frightening shadow. Trembling like a miner sensing a vein in the rock, I slide the small key into the upper left chest. All that remained was to turn it, and it would be open. But my hand trembled, or perhaps rust had finished what the lock had started. I pressed harder and harder until the key was sticky with blood. The old woman's rooster interrupted the night, the lamp was dying, and darkness thickened. There was no more time: with the last ounce of strength—real or imagined—the key clicked and turned. I tried to lift the lid, but it would not budge, as if an immovable weight pressed down from above. God, my arms are failing! Some force sealed the secret! It would not open for the living! Cold sweat poured over me; I smashed the window with my forehead.

I fled as dawn was breaking.

Look, I have the tiny slippers in my hand. I gaze at the embroidery: indeed, there are three little leaves and a flower! It is from them that the dawn proclaims itself in such blue and green and gives off fragrance! Dare I place a kiss there?

The morning is crystal clear; blossoms open gently in harmony—responding to the whispered name on the heights. Dare I speak it? And instantly, as if in response, my mind soars upward: the hour is approaching when those who've passed will be called back, the knot of suffering will be loosened, and secrets will be revealed!

Never taking my eyes off the embroidery, I bring it to my lips and draw back. Dare I place a kiss there?

At home, I remembered the unbetrothed girl; she was hazy in my mind, as if I had seen her years ago, and I shrugged. Someone knocks. I open the door. God—it's her! She looks at me gently, without reproach, like a lamb gazing at the one about to slaughter it. I turn my head away; it hurts too much to see her that way. She wagging her finger at me mischievously; with horror, I guess her thought: I know, to hide the evil marks, you have brought me a gift—an embroidered gift for the bride. I want it with all my heart, darling! Come on, don't hesitate, show me! Or better yet, so the joy will be greater, I'll find it myself! And she starts searching with playful mischief. I am powerless to stop her; everything goes dark and blurry before my eyes. Then, like lightning piercing darkness, I realize with perfect clarity: she has got herself mixed up in this innocently, the poor girl is doomed! Even

though I had hidden them carefully, out of sight, she finds them. She squeals with happiness, kisses them all over, slips them onto her feet, and begins dancing in circles.

What happened next is almost impossible to put into words. It was a kind of half-sleep, an empty state where nearly nothing happens, and what does is unclear. People asked me silly questions; I spat in their faces. The fact that I was lying down suggested I was sick, even though nothing actually hurt. The main thing was to stare fixedly at a stain on the ceiling. For reassurance, I asked them, "Is this the right way?" "Perfectly straight, like drawn with a ruler!" they said.

But then someone seemed to open a window, letting a scent drift in from outside. So, whatever is outside is forgotten. Still, this wasn't right because the three leaves and the flower were in their own room, and I was in a strange one! That can't be, that isn't right! Something had to be put in order. Little by little, as I tied together the torn threads, I began to cry. Everyone was delighted: "Very good," they said, "excellent that you're crying!" "Whether it's good or not is none of your business! Just get out of my sight; you're as tasteless as unsalted food!" "Splendid!" they shouted, gathered in council, decided I was no longer ill, and left.

Only now, as I write this down, do I realize: the place where I lay was a madhouse. Because everyone shuns me; even my closest acquaintances hesitate to be near me, and when I ask them about God, they refuse to answer, pretending they don't know. That is enough for me. And whoever I ask, "Where is my fiancée now?" they reply, "She has gone away." I know perfectly well where she has gone. So, I set out to look, and after much wandering, I actually find a cross on a grave with her name on it. So, this is where she is, and the little slippers must be here too, because they fit her feet so beautifully. Perfect, everything is in order, just one more thing and then peace. I walk back—the house is a heap of ashes. They tell me: "All from carelessness: there must have been fire on the hearth, and near it flax for spinning, and the old woman dozed off; a spark jumped into the flax and that was the end of it! Pure carelessness!" I smile. They see something is not quite right, slip away one by one, and I am left alone among the ashes.

Finishing this, I have nothing left to do down here. The time drags on, and my only amusement is trying to find a word powerful enough to summon death because I am in a rush, and it refuses to come.

Translated from Serbian by
Persida Bošković

GORDANA ĐILAS

SIX POEMS

PRAYER / LILAC

Serenity radiates from the whiteness
Of the barely fallen petals
Everything, like gentle words,
Rises high into the air

An indistinct prayer is heard

So close and sun-touched
memories of the original bliss are nested
Making a lilac bloom
Somewhere, at the far end of the world

You will pass by it carelessly,
Ruffling it gently

A sweet trace of its scent
Will be felt by the one who walks
behind you silently
He holds everything
And you, be cautious now,
Dare not turn around

THE WHITE PEONY

Bathed in sunshine after
The rain had flown
It lifted the fallen petals, heavy with
water
To the posture where it was known
The moment of consent seems like a surrender
When one could sing of consenting and surrender

I shake water droplets from it, tenderly
While sadness and delight before the face of perfect beauty
Take me over in the moment I know will last forever

Whenever I call it, it will be there

EARLY AUTUMN

You will step into the softness of light
As into something crystal clear and calm

Gently, you will lift the first fallen leaf from
The magnificent canopy of the world

There will be a lot of love in your movement
For everyone, because light helps you
accept
The approaching days, and rejoice in
even more precious
Time that comes your way

And the snow will cover all the scars of summer,

And, for a moment, the eternal crisis in the East,
The North wind

You will rejoice in a warm cup of tea,
With quiet, scented vibrations of some new connections

And everything will be as a dream for you

At times absent but very close to
all the opportunities you that open up for you

But you will, somehow you know,
This early autumn, too
As if falling, seize
The nearest point of support

WINGS

In the evening, the titmice called out
A small flock of blackbirds nested
In the nearby canopies, and the sun
Relentlessly hurried behind the hill

Nature, in its inner order
And somehow distant,
Prepared for another repose

None of my words
Reached her

While in my hands, motionlessly
Lay two wings I did not know
What I can do with

PEDESTRIAN

Not a single kind word he spoke,
Like he was competing with himself
To crown me with as many flaws
as he can
What distance a pedestrian covers
if moving at a speed ... and the like
Oh, yes, he certainly succeeded
The heart in my chest was racing like
A scared rabbit, occasionally
leaping
To the outside. My breath would
falter

While some incomprehensibly different part of me
Watched him watching the reaction of his words
Upon my cheeks.
But a silent ray was slipping
Between us and somehow additionally divided us
Small cherubs ought to be bathing there
If I could see them,
They would certainly make me laugh

MY MOTHER CALLING THE MATICA SRPSKA

My mother dials the Matica srpska,
She speaks no Hello or Good afternoon
Just asks if this is the Matica and
If Gordana is there
She calls from a remote village,
somewhere on the border
To Romania, she has long forgot
Hills and valleys of endless green
Lack of dust in the air
The scent of immortelle from the blistering karst
Sometimes they visit her in dreams, at random
Just to determine the order of the dreamed
More and more of whom are on the other side

It seems to me that she calls from the other side, too
Calling something great and powerful and
What she is in awe of
But has never seen, the Matica,
Nor will she ever, and I doubt she cares for it at all
She only wants me, to ask me a little something,
To tell me what hurts, to have me agitated
And back to the parental threshold
While I, from another threshold
Yell into the phone
It's me, mom,
It's me, Gordana

Translated from Serbian by
Olivera Krivošić

VLADAN DESNICA

THE VISIT

When he stepped out of the station, a thin mist still hung over the town. Steeples in the distance lazily protruded through the white vapour. A spring Sunday morning, dull and lightly overcast, was waking slowly. Ivan paused at the edge of the sidewalk, undecided. He watched the milk carts and the first trams passing by. Across the empty square, a few rare pedestrians moved along, hunched and still drowsy, not raising their eyes to the statue in the middle of the square. And the statue—a bareheaded townsman in a long coat—having emerged from the night with his raised arm, appeared somewhat useless, aimless, like those empty chestnut-sellers' kiosks a little farther away. That futile rhetorical gesture looked meaningless and painfully tiresome, like a school corporal punishment. "Statues should really be put away somewhere at night, given some rest, or at least covered with some kind of cloth," crossed Ivan's mind.

He hailed a coach to take him to the centre. The gentle swaying on rubber wheels with the rhythmic clatter of the horse's hooves evoked memories of distant arrivals in unknown towns during his childhood, when he travelled with his parents. Since then, an aversion—still unshaken—to dawn and early rising has persisted in him. Even now, that early hour stirs a faint nausea in his stomach and leaves an unpleasant taste in the awakening reality, which he suddenly has to take in with an empty and unsettled stomach, like a heavy meal of barley mush.

He had come at the invitation of the committee celebrating the eightieth birthday of the famous Professor, the renowned "Old Man," whose portrait he was to paint. He had corresponded with the Professor's daughter, and this was to be his first meeting with the man he had heard so much about. Yet even this meeting, which had so delighted and intrigued him just the night before, now left him feeling somewhat indifferent.

He paid the coach fare and stepped into a tavern. Only a few patrons were there—elderly early risers with newspapers in hand, merchants or pensioners whose daily routines or aching bones that emerged before dawn kept them from staying in bed even on a Sunday. He sat on a bench by the window and ordered coffee. Outside, in the alley just beginning to turn green with spring, the plane tree trunks gleamed pale. From time to time, a half-empty tram rattled past. An elderly gentleman, gaunt and bent, strolled by the window, leading a dog; evidently, he had gone out just to give the animal a hygienic walk. For a while, no one else passed, until a man with a forester's look moved past with a heavy, determined step: short-necked, broad-backed, wearing a loden coat, carrying a bundle wrapped in newspaper under his arm, and a small blue pot swinging from his crooked forefinger like a tiny lantern. Into the quiet of the tavern strode a long-haired night owl, his face drawn and sleepless. He stared at the few patrons for a long time, as if searching for someone. In truth, he sought no one; his staring merely justified his entrance, though why he had come at all, he himself did not know. Then he left again, without a word, just as silently as he had appeared.

Ivan skimmed the morning paper and flicked through a stack of illustrations the waiter placed before him. Then he yawned and looked at his watch. It was still too early for the visit. He paid and left.

A cab sped past him; inside were two figures, one dark, one white. Behind it, three or four more cars filled with smiling faces, both men and women. Newlyweds.

He strolled through the town, stopping at bookstore windows and reading theatre posters to pass the time. Just before ten, he headed to the professor's home. It was a quiet street lined with chestnut trees. A starched nanny paced up and down the sidewalk, pushing a baby carriage.

He knew that the professor had significantly declined recently and had not taught for several years. Still, at their first encounter, he was taken aback: he appeared as an utterly exhausted and helpless old man, and he could not hide his surprise before the professor's only child, Ema. The "Old Man" was sitting in the dining room by the window. Seated in an armchair, wrapped in a woollen shawl, and covered with a checkered blanket over his knees, he looked as if he were sitting by a train window and travelling—except that outside the window, the landscape did not glide by but remained ever the same, enchantingly still. Ivan intended to study the Old Man's features a bit and, casually during the conversation, sketch a few outlines and make notes. But communication faced an unexpected difficulty: the professor was nearly deaf, and his voice had thinned, become barely audible—a squeaky whine in his throat like a small current of air in the statue of Memnon.

Ema left them alone, apologizing for the household chores. Ivan sat aside with a pocket sketchbook on his knees, watching the emaciated old man who, paying no attention to his surroundings and shielded from them by a cloud of his deaf solitude, stared dreamily through the window. His profile still retained the shape of a thinker. A look of contemplative absence masked his decrepitude. Watching him, one got the impression that the Old Man was not entirely mindless, but that now—since he was cut off from everything external by deafness and communication difficulties—his ability to isolate himself and retreat into his own thoughts had only grown stronger. His absence fluctuated in degree, sometimes more intense, sometimes weaker. Until recently, on several occasions, he had surprised those around him with brief flashes of lucidity, which made people cautious, behaving carefully, treading lightly on the surface, unaware of what treacherous depths might lie beneath. Dealing with the Old Man thus carried a certain deceitfulness, like an ambush game where the environment seemed to watch for moments when he was oblivious, while he watched for their hidden intentions. Indeed, from his appearance and the distracted look in his eyes, Ivan thought that his mind, in its loneliness, wandered drowsily through realms inaccessible to others—hovering on a delicate boundary from which he could perceive even the things on the other side. His pupils were not fixated lifelessly on one spot; instead, his gaze flickered constantly, subtly shifting across objects, shimmering like reflections of light on benches in quiet spa gardens.

The painter tried to start a conversation to bring some life to the old man's face, hoping for a change in expression. However, he absorbed every message without surprise or interest, never asking for more than what was said. When Ivan spoke, he would turn his wavering gaze toward him as if emerging from some misty distance, listen silently, nod slightly, and then drift back into his unknown, distant, shimmering spaces. Ivan observed him move his lips at intervals, as if whispering some prayer to himself, strange and obscure words that, if spoken aloud, would sound unheard-of and incomprehensible, filling the room with their alien, unearthly vibrations.

The dining room was dim and quiet; it seemed that everything there had remained unchanged for years: simple dark bourgeois furniture, the same silence, the same serious, calm atmosphere. The old man's presence, lost in thought and motionless, did not disturb the emptiness of the room. Only now and then, he would shift slightly, spend long minutes drawing out his handkerchief with trembling hands, slowly unfolding it, wiping his glasses, folding it again, and slipping it back into his pocket. Then, the need for movement—for him and for the observer—was satisfied for at least half an hour. Even time in that

room seemed not to flow; in silence, it lay gathered at the Old Man's feet like a drowsy house dog, and when conversation arose, it drifted in slow spirals, unraveling into threads and fibers, merging again, circling the room, slowing its pace in the warmth of the dark corners, yet always lingering there in that enclosed space—always the same used-up time—in its eternal spinning and twisting. Sometimes, soft and dreamy, it fell like a dandelion seed onto a pause in the conversation and rested quietly for a moment; then, stirred by the faint breath of a new word, it fluttered up and resumed its endless journey. Ivan felt himself gradually drawn into the trance of that environment; its gentle stillness lulled him like a spring sunshine.

Ema returned and sat with them. She picked up her needles and yarn and started chatting with the painter. She spoke warmly and naturally, as if talking with an old friend, asking about his work, sharing updates on her father's decline, and mentioning his growing weakness lately. Amid a string of more or less trivial details from the life of a woman in her later years, one caught Ivan's attention more sharply: she was engaged. Her fiancé was an older, steady man, a colonel and head of the military cartographic institute. Every evening, he visited and stayed for a few hours. That day, he was invited for lunch, and Ema asked Ivan to stay and meet him.

The Old Man made a sound: a thin, plaintive whimper. Ema understood immediately, brought him a glass of orange juice, and held him gently by the neck as she helped him drink. Ivan watched her head with its soft chestnut hair and her composed, gentle face bent over her father, and reflected on the life of this woman who had entirely effaced herself and found her purpose in serving the small needs of a great man. He drank greedily. When he had to satisfy some physical need, it was as if he returned from his trance. The dreaminess stopped, and his face took on another expression—a strange, unfamiliar one. But once he had received what he needed, he again drifted out of reality.

While Ema was speaking, the professor repeatedly took his watch out of his pocket and fiddled with it. "He often glances at it—probably out of habit," Ema whispered, noticing the painter observing this. "And yet it makes no difference to him what time it is!" she added with a faint, sad smile. "It had recently started faltering. He had got it into his head that it stopped because of the cold, so I had to sew that little pouch for him, and he has kept it warm in it ever since."

Ivan believed the watch was the only truly living thing left in the Old Man, the sole object still maintaining a steady beat—for in those silted veins of his, one could barely feel a pulse anymore. It seemed to him that this care for the watch reflected a deeper, instinctive need, as if it were the old man's artificial heart. After making sure everything

was in order, the professor returned his treasure to his pocket. Not a flicker of his vaguely distrustful, deaf man's gaze indicated he sensed he was being observed. This detail touched Ivan.

The colonel's arrival brought some relief. The new acquaintance between him and Ivan enlivened the lunch conversation. The professor, of course, did not participate; he had slipped back into his other state and mechanically took in nourishment, oblivious to everything around him. On his face, that unpleasant, ugly expression reappeared. He ate greedily. Toothless, he swallowed unchewed food: he puckered his lips as if sucking, and the mostly soft food gurgled uncomfortably in his throat. He watched the plate with anxious eyes as it moved from hand to hand, fearing they might forget about him or give him too little. Once, in the middle of a conversation, all three froze: he choked on a gulp and nearly suffocated; terror stiffened him completely: something tickled his throat, tears welled in his eyes, and he was afraid to cough, afraid to swallow, afraid even to blink, as if death would pounce on him if he made the slightest move. He froze, holding his breath and fighting the cough, trembling and squeaking. It was unclear whether he intended to warn the others of mortal danger or whether those sounds were his crying—a cry of despair. That old man's fear over a life already considered worthless, that frantic clinging to the last thread connecting him to it, aroused sudden disgust in Ivan. He caught a fleeting flash in Ema's eyes. It was quick as lightning, not lasting long enough to be reflected on her face; it only flashed in her eyes and disappeared. The colonel was the first to spring to the old man, patting him on the shoulder and shouting into his ear, "Don't be afraid, it's nothing, nothing! Just swallow, swallow freely!"

Only then did he regain a little composure, but he was trembling all over and covered in cold sweat. The shock had exhausted him completely. He dozed through the rest of lunch, pale and drained, and afterward Ema led him to take a nap for an hour. "A sad sight!" the colonel said to Ivan once they were alone. "Especially for those who knew him earlier. What can you do—law of nature! But there are moments, believe me, when it becomes truly painful. And as for Ema, I needn't tell you. Oddly enough, one couldn't say his physical condition is worsening rapidly; the doctor says he could live like this for years. What's more—imagine the irony!—The other day, he found he had a tapeworm! Imagine—a tapeworm in such an old organism!"

Ema appeared at the doorway. She sank into an armchair and closed her eyes. Only now did the deep fatigue show on her face. A resigned weariness emanated from her. From childhood, she had developed the habit of submitting and fully dedicating herself to another; perhaps this gave her personality that extreme softness in which her

whole being seemed to dissolve. Watching Ema and the colonel from the corner of his eye, Ivan thought, "These two are really just waiting for the Old Man to die." After sacrificing herself nearly to the point of old age, Ema finally wanted to start living her own life. She probably, unconsciously, resented the Old Man for lingering on—almost reproaching him for his lack of consideration. Thus, that flash in her eyes was explained. At other moments, she likely regretted it; felt her anger was unkind, inhuman, and felt pity for him, so old and helpless. She realized it was foolish and unfair to demand he step aside so as not to hinder another's life. But once he died, she would remember him as he was in his prime; she would rarely think of him as a frail old man coughing, choking, groaning, mechanically pulling out his watch, and rubbing his glasses. Then she would not be able to recall him without tears and a pang of conscience.

A silence settled for a moment. Then the conversation resumed, initially slow and sluggish. When at last the Old Man's thin, squeaky call was heard, Ema hurried to help him dress and guided him to the study.

Ivan stood up. It was time to take his leave, but he wanted to try once more before saying goodbye—to sketch something. He followed the Old Man into the study. It was a small room with a large writing desk and bookshelves, decorated with commemorative plaques and casually framed yellowed photographs on the walls: the professor with colleagues at some congress or with his students. On the table was a pile of journals, their wrappers still intact, steadily arriving and stacking up. Nowadays, the Old Man only stayed there while the dining room was being aired out.

Ivan let his gaze drift across the room. So, this was where the great man had worked for years, where he had pondered, from where he had waged his renowned polemics, and where he had written the works that would keep his name alive as long as time allowed. The room that must once have been warm with his presence, with the quiver of his voice, was now filled with the cold, unwelcoming chill of a chamber no longer inhabited. It was as if the sheen that the professor's eyes had once cast upon every object had long since faded; untouched for ages by the warmth of a human hand, they had grown cold—like bats in hibernation—and had stiffened into the stern rigidity of dead things.

The old man again sat by the window. Once more, his face wore a thoughtful expression. But Ivan now realized that it was merely the result of a long habit of facial muscles and nerves pulling the skin into a grimace of concentration. The grimace was no longer caused by thought but by discomfort elsewhere in the body—such as a bubble of gas twisted in the intestines, creating pressure, or something similar.

The old man looked around the room; Ivan watched with curiosity, wondering what he was searching for. But nothing could hold or captivate his trembling gaze, which was hollow and cold, passing over each object as if he saw right through it. The narrow confines of the room did not trap him nor impose its reality upon him. Memory and thought no longer restrained him. When his gaze fell on the wall of shelves from which he had once, with practiced and confident movements, taken whatever book he needed for his work, he looked at it as he would any other empty wall. Two thick volumes of his last work, bound roughly in calfskin, still rested on the table, but if he accidentally touched them, he handled them mechanically, like two bricks.

At one point, Ivan almost saw the professor's condition as a form of superiority: he had shed the burden of reality and slipped out of the enchanted, narrow circle of human thought. Earthly relations and measures no longer restrained him. Freed from the cruel tether to the real, he must surely look at mankind's primitive and shackled cognition with an internal, ironic smile. His face, lit by the sunset amidst the struggle between the agonizingly red light outside and the dusk inside the room, once again showed a new expression: his profile, outlined against the blood-red sky, stood out sharply but also seemed distant and unreal, almost apocalyptic. Ivan quickly grabbed his notebook to capture the moment. For a brief second, it occurred to him that this blurred face was just a mask, wrinkled and dried out, hiding something else behind it; a wild thought flashed through his mind that the professor, behind his back, had entirely different eyes and a thin, cunning smile. He stared intently into his face. The professor looked back at him with a perfectly calm, expressionless gaze. In the silence that followed, a muffled gurgling from the old man's bowels echoed, and he grew restless. "Is this powerless, humiliated body truly all that remains of a man? Is that 'spark of spirit' buried within it?" Ivan wondered. Now, the Old Man seemed to him something lifeless, just an object. "What 'thought'! What 'spark of spirit'! A vessel in which a tapeworm lives—that's all! Nothing more! A purposeful living partnership, parasitism carried out with rational economy, based on the principle of maximal exploitation: a worn-out genius still useful for a 'secondary', 'old-age' function—to house a tapeworm. That's now his purpose in the world, his new purpose. He carries it, walks it around, eats for it. He serves it; he is used by it. The tapeworm rules him. Through him, it speaks its hunger; under its control, he does everything: eats, drinks, sleeps, strolls, or rests—according to its needs." He sits quietly in the armchair, gazing outside; suddenly, he stirs—you think, "There, the tapeworm wants to walk; it's awakened." And he obeys: rises, walks around the room, carrying it like a careful nanny carrying an infant. He squeaks, "Water!

Water!", and again you think, "The tapeworm is thirsty and has whispered to him to ask for water, and he listens. And he even pretends (for cunning outlives the last trace of mind), feigns thirst, presents it as if it were for himself! Horrible, horrible!"

Ivan felt deeply depressed, susceptible as he was to sudden collapses and abrupt shifts of mood, into that painful descent from the "heights of spirit" to the shallows of "general nothingness." The tremors of his delicacy had a mystical resonance, and he liked to see them as "reflections of the Eternal" and parts of the "revelation of the Spirit." From such lyrical moods, he would, even with the slightest provocation, fall into the desolation of raw matter, governed by a solitary, blind, and relentless law: the law of mechanical purposiveness. Such a fall, of course, would utterly defeat and crush him, plunging him into a sense of futility and the uselessness of all human effort. And then he found in it an almost vengeful pleasure in extending and deepening that "general nothingness," making it, if possible, even more universal and void. "So, this is what all those magnificent constructions of thought come to," he now reflected, "all their 'conceptions,' 'closed systems,' 'coherent images of the world'; this is where the keen reasonings, the delicate 'distinctions,' the 'forms of perception,' the 'contents of consciousness,' all their 'subjective view' and 'objective view,' all that dazzling, nickel-plated apparatus of thought, by which they try, as with pliers and tweezers, to grasp and seize a particle of the unknown and bring it into the circle of knowledge's light, end up: in a few dozen kilograms of decrepit 'organized matter' (of which, they say, some seventy percent is water), which, having grown worn and useless as such, serves only as a source of nourishment and as a material medium for another organized entity, younger, hardier, and more capable of life—in this case, the tapeworm—which, in that organized form, will endure for a time (without 'subjective and objective views' and without 'contents of consciousness'), only to later become material and medium for yet another organized entity." "*Matter is the only truth*," he repeated his favourite phrase, which long ago, during a moment of similar depression, he had devised and which, although little comforting in itself, had given him considerable satisfaction for having crafted it to express what he felt (—and the happy formulation always seemed to compensate, in part, for the misery it expressed). It seemed to him that this phrase truly encompassed and expressed everything, and solved everything, even if only in a negative sense. Yet, by his nature inclined to this, he began again, somewhat unconsciously, to create a certain mystique out of that "raw matter," from that "matter-truth." He started to sense in it something akin to the "spirit of matter itself," which, in some unfathomable, secretive way, reveals itself to man, speaking through instinct and whispering solutions through intuition.

Based on the belief that an artist must deeply understand and empathize with all facets of human spirit, thought, and emotion—that he must be able to connect with every human soul and understand what lies beneath each person's exterior—he often found himself thinking and feeling two opposing things at the same time. He would frequently agree with one person's opinion while also agreeing with the exact opposite; he understood both perspectives well and empathized with them both. However, he couldn't determine which was truly his opinion or what he personally felt: he poured his entire personality into understanding others. Sometimes, after reading a philosophical theory, he would enthusiastically accept it, only to find himself equally accepting its opposite upon further reading—without betraying the initial belief. "*Everyone is right*," he concluded, and he liked that idea. He increasingly believed that two opposing truths could coexist peacefully. In fact, they complemented each other beautifully, offering the human soul and imagination the same vibrant variety as flowers, fruit, and all of God's creations offer to the eye and senses. (He couldn't understand how great minds and thinkers could be so narrow-minded as to limit themselves to just one theory!) Furthermore, he came to believe that thoughts are not just thinking but feeling. When a thought seemed undeniably true, he felt its truth rather than merely thought it. "*Conviction is a feeling*," was his third maxim, and this brought him great comfort. These three ideas, along with lengthy, detailed commentaries, made up most of his "philosophical notebook," which he kept hidden with youthful shyness in the bottom drawer of his desk beneath other papers. But one day, already feeling discouraged, he looked over these three principles that formed his "system." When read plainly, without commentary, they appeared to be in obvious contradiction. This discovery left him bitterly disappointed. It also became clear that the secrecy surrounding his philosophical musings and the careful hiding of the "Notebook" had already hinted at the coming disappointment. And only the thought that he had been wise to keep his philosophical reflections private offered him some solace in the sense of personal failure. From that moment, he lost all faith—and even sympathy—not only for his own system but for systems altogether.

The room was beginning to darken. Ivan set aside the notebook that had lain lifeless in his lap and walked to the window. He stood there for a long time, lost in thought, gradually slipping into a daze. Down in the street, the grand crowns of the chestnut trees swayed gently, and dusk was settling in. In the distance, lights started to turn on: one by one, a new light flickered into existence, sometimes at one end of town, sometimes at the other. Through the twilight, suddenly, the unheard jingle of tram bells echoed softly along the rows of street lamps. The

professor gazed intently out of the window, as if, in the shimmering distance, he had glimpsed what his eyes had just vainly searched for in the room. Standing beside him, Ivan, watching the same scene, became wholly absorbed in the play of the trembling, incessantly flickering points of light. And when the distant, piercing wail of a factory siren—like a warning—shook him from his reverie, he felt as though he had just emerged from an endless moment of oblivion. It seemed to him that during that moment, he had stood outside the flow of his own life, outside the flow of time altogether, and he thought that this vegetative state in which the professor found himself was actually some primitive condition, the state of the first vague stirrings of consciousness in a living being—a forgotten possibility buried for centuries, yet one that still lives faintly in humans and can be easily awakened, learned, or even more simply, mimicked unconsciously. It also seemed to him that at that very moment, deep within his soul, some unknown, new sensation was already beginning to emerge; that between himself and the Old Man, a silent, intimate understanding was starting to form, one from which there would be no return if only it lasted a moment longer. He was suddenly overwhelmed with a desire to go outside, into the open air, to escape that sleeping room over which dusk's haze had already fallen. Stealthily, like a nanny who has just put a child to sleep, he tiptoed out and quietly closed the door behind him.

Translated from Serbian by
Persida Bošković

NENAD ŠAPONJA

JOYFUL WATER
or
How to Catch the Dream Through Which Fugitive Souls from this World Breathe?

OH YES, YOU'RE THE BAIT: THE HOOKS I CAST

I consider all the differences
between illusion and vision,
between you and me,
between you and everything,
and I suspect you are there,
always on my shoulder
even and when I don't feel
that feather of a difference,
the one in which we are.

Oh yes, I have everything,
only when I have nothing.

Believe Me:
We Are Bristling with
Past and Future Lives

We recognize each other
midst the general confusion.

The soul's beauty we share,
selflessly,
only with the soul
that rejoices amply.

We snuggle,
with heedless rain,
in the depth of belonging,
under petals above the world.

And we inquire,
amid echoes and moans,
who belongs to whom,
and how much
fire belongs to water,
or water to joy?

And we know
water's joy is fire.

FOREVER:
SOUL AND TOMORROW

I kept moving my soul
away from the story that is no more.

I dream that you exist.
But do you?

So kind and sweet,
so beyond
the visible
and the invisible.

And so,
I opened
the window to pining.
On which floor was it?

Need one be
radiant enough,
to take flight from it?

Must one be
a captured story,
amid the forever?

Must one be
an apologetic story,
beyond the forever?

BE WARY:
WHEN REVEALING YOUR SOUL

How long does the challenge last,
and what is courage
where do we have a say,
and to what do we respond?

I've disguised myself
both in appearance
and in motion.
Nobody notices that
I am not from here.

And instability is
that place of joy
that emerges from us,
like water.

WATER: OVERJOYED

I warm myself in the right gazes.

Fire sleeps in joyful water,
just like the missing excess.

I live the lives of my ancestors.
I bathe in the inexistent water.

I dream of you appearing
out of nowhere and nothing.

I dream of groping the world
from all sides.

How to recognize kindness,
how to forever get close to it?

Does kindness have any measure,
does it hide
or reveal itself,
before and behind us?

With whom else can I speak
without words or speech,
with whom I am
even when I am not?

Am I dreaming
that I appear to be
only in your midst,
in the midst of your world view?
Far from what appears
and what resembles,
which resembles the appearance
of etched words,
long and sad.

And are you the water
overjoyed enough,
in which I am becoming
different and my own?

WATER: BITTER

If the soul is a boat,
if scars are holes,
how many scars
can the soul bear,
without sinking
in the confusion?

If confusion is the sea,
if salt is love,
what then happens
when confusion evaporates?

Translated from Serbian by
Vuk Tošić

IVANA DIMIĆ

GOGOL AND I

(*A Little Triptych*)

1. *October Encounters*

"Look, there's Gogol," I think. "I'll run and ask him something right now," so I dash after him and catch up—no great feat, since he was walking at an extremely slow pace. I start immediately.

"Just today I was talking with someone about your life circumstances when I realized I don't know why..."

Gogol stops me.

"What has become of good manners? Is this how one addresses people—running up to them in the middle of the street, shouting, and waving one's arms?!"

"Forgive me, Your Eminence, I didn't know exactly how to address you. I don't speak Russian, and besides, you've been dead a long time, so I thought I'd better hurry and *in medias res*."

"God be with you," Gogol says, looking at me sternly and righteously.

"And with you, Nikolai Vasilyevich. So, why did you never marry? That's exactly what I wanted to ask."

"What a fool you are, Ivana Ivanovna! You meet Gogol and of all things you ask him the stupidest possible question."

"Forgive me, Your Eminence. I never part with it, so please don't let my stupidity offend you. All the same, please answer.

"Foolish and persistent—truly a woman," Gogol shudders, but also grows uneasy. I seize the moment and press on.

"You see, I figure you never married because you were a great writer, so there simply wasn't room in your heart for ordinary human love..."

"Ugh, what a fretful nuisance," Gogol sighs, collapsing onto a bench and looking up. "Lord, is this my punishment for burning the second part of *Dead Souls*?"

I quickly sit down beside him and continue my exposition, this time without haste. Gogol is quite crushed and decides to endure it all in a Christian manner, though the idea does occur to him to write a letter to his mother, not for money, only to complain. Just in case, I grab his sleeve so he can't slip away and offer him a little bag of candy. In his dejection, he starts sniffing and twitching his pointed nose, but he doesn't forget to take one. He likes candy.

"You see, I'm a writer too," I begin again.

"Delighted," Gogol says, deeply saddened.

"But I'm a writer of domestic proportions, and also a woman..."

"No doubt about that," slips an honest sigh from Gogol.

"Well now, you see, I've realized something—why shouldn't I, for example, get married? It's fine that you didn't, but for me it's very sad, admit it."

"It's sad," Gogol agrees indifferently, since it costs him nothing.

"That's what I say too—sad. So, look at us, already in agreement. Now just tell me what to do, and I'll stop bothering you."

"If you're waiting for me to tell you, then here it is: get married, my dear, don't waste a single second," Gogol brightens, hoping at last to be rid of me.

"Yes, Nikolai Vasilyevich, but who should I marry, I ask you?"

"How should I know? Whoever you like."

"Well, for example—you aren't married..."

"I'm dead."

"Don't nitpick."

"Lord, Chichikov in a skirt..." whispers Gogol, horrified.

"Yes, only he didn't want to reform even though the old man told him: 'Discipline yourself. Do good and love will come to you.' But I try. As God is my witness. I do good at every step. So why wouldn't you do something good for me too? Now that you're dead, you don't have to write anymore, meaning you have no particular obligations. You could get married. It would be interesting for you and you'd be doing me a favour..."

"How did I even end up here?" Gogol begins to wonder seriously, looking around.

"You were walking."

"What business does a dead man have walking?"

"How should I know? But once I saw you, I simply couldn't not approach you, right?"

"Oh, Lord..." Gogol begins to cry; tears start rolling down.

We sit like that on the bench. Gogol is crying, all snotty, trying to put candies into his mouth, not even unwrapping them, he's so beside himself—and I hold him firmly by the sleeve, not letting go, thinking with satisfaction: "Gotcha now, pal. You thought you'd wiggle out, but here you are."

2. *Interregnum*

The next time I come by, Gogol no longer even thinks about taking a walk—he just sits there and cries. I need to let him cry it out, I think to myself, and only then ask him what I planned to ask; otherwise, there's no point in trying to talk. And I'm really dying to know what he'll tell me. But then, I start philosophizing, still standing in front of the bench—when one person is hurting, the other has to be patient. That's the key to good relations between people. Anything else leads to misunderstanding. So, I simply sit down calmly without asking anything. I keep quiet for a moment, and just as I get up to leave, Gogol snaps, "You know how to sit and fidget, but offering candy—that never crosses your mind."

I slap my forehead, pull a bag of candy from each pocket, and hand them to him.

Gogol is so delighted that he doesn't even notice he has stopped crying—and that I've left.

3. *Third Time's the Charm*

"You've had a good cry now, Your Eminence, and eaten enough candy, if I may say so—so it's time to bring things out into the open," I say, sitting on the bench at once, arms crossed to show there'll be no more stalling.

"So that's how it is," Gogol suddenly looks at me with terrifying sharpness, his eyes smiling. I get scared and immediately start gazing wistfully into the distance to cover up my sudden confusion.

"I've been watching you for some time now, Ivana Ivanovna, and I clearly see you are insolent."

"Well, even if I am—and I am—what of it?" I'm secretly pleased that the conversation is about me, though I keep fearing what he'll conclude.

Gogol uses the huge advantage he now has to cross his legs, pull out a big questionnaire, and begin skimming through the questions. Whatever he asks, I decide, I will answer.

"When you walk down the street, you pick up little coins along the way—aren't you ashamed? People stare at you in wonder.

"I pick them up. They're good-luck coins."

"And whenever you see numbers, you start fiddling with them. You add them up and mutter charms, even though you don't understand a thing about arithmetic?"

"I can't help it."

"But when it comes to washing the dishes—suddenly you *can* help it. They sit unwashed for three days?"

"They do."

"You don't like working. Everything is hard for you. The moment something requires effort, you get sleepy, then furious?"

"True."

"But the moment you're bored, you want to get married?"

"Yes. Though sometimes I want to get married even when I'm not bored."

"Rarely. Only in exceptional cases," says Gogol, putting the questionnaire back inside his coat.

"But still," I add, hoping to improve the impression if possible.

"Here's how it's going to be, my dear: from now on, mind your own business. No more idling. Work. Stop picking up coins off the street; pray to God instead. No more spells and number games. Leave husbands in peace, and everything will fall into place..."

"So... you won't marry me?"

"No. I've calmed down."

"I don't need someone who's restless anyway. I'm already nervous enough as it is."

"Are you even listening to me?" Suddenly, for reasons unknown, Gogol—dead and serene as he is—jumps up and bites me on the ear.

"Ow! That hurts!" I cry.

"It hurts, of course—and it will hurt more yet," Gogol pulls my nose so hard that my eyes fill with tears.

"What is happening, Nikolai Vasilyevich? I can't see or hear!"

"There, that's better."

"Better? My ears are ringing, I'm seeing black-and-brown checkered squares dancing in front of my eyes!"

"Don't worry about a thing."

"What's going to happen to me? Where are you, Your Eminence?" I started groping around me, but the bench was empty.

"At last, Ivana Ivanovna, now everything will fall into place," Gogol called to me from somewhere high above, sounding exhilarated and cheerful. And in that moment, I suddenly understood that the end had come to all my worries.

"The sly fox," I think, "He pretended he wouldn't, but in the end, he helped me after all. So that's where my happiness was hiding: in Gogol's pocket, among the candy wrappers."

Translated from Serbian by
Persida Bošković

PETAR PIJANOVIĆ

MODELS AND VALUES

Abstract: The text explores the formation, transformation, and crisis of Serbian cultural, national, and political models throughout the twentieth century. Beginning with inherited archetypes such as the Kosovo covenant, Vidovdan ethics, pride, sacrifice, and the moral imagination of tradition, the study follows the ways in which these values entered modern cultural and political life. Special attention is given to the tension between Serbian national culture and Yugoslav, synthetic, and ideological models, from the civic and modernizing impulses of the early twentieth century to the socialist, post-Yugoslav, and globalist transformations of its final decades. The author discusses the role of writers, intellectuals, institutions, and cultural policies in shaping collective consciousness, with figures such as Slobodan Jovanović, Jovan Skerlić, Ivo Andrić, Dobrica Ćosić, Borislav Pekić, Milorad Ekmečić, and others occupying central interpretive positions. Serbian culture is presented as a field of discontinuities and renewals, but also as a canon grounded in Orthodox spirituality, language, Cyrillic script, oral tradition, literature, and the works of Saint Sava, Dositej, Vuk, Njegoš, Andrić, and Pekić. Ultimately, the Serbian question is shown to be refracted through culture itself, whose task is to preserve identity while enabling a meaningful place for Serbian tradition within the European cultural circle.

Keywords: Serbian culture; cultural models; national identity; Yugoslavism; synthetic culture; Serbian question; cultural policy; twentieth century; Serbian canon; tradition and modernity.

In culture, a model is understood as a measure or model by which members of a community are guided. It also determines values in various aspects of life, expressing itself in everything that is good and

beautiful, true and just. Thus, models are a frequent subject of art and aesthetics, ethics, philosophy and cultural anthropology. All this can be shown by examples from our distant past, but this is also confirmed by the twentieth century in its long duration—from its dramatic beginnings to its conclusion, which inscribed a dark chapter for Serbs in terms of statehood, in what was a nearly lost century. Time passes, and models in a community change and survive through the accumulation of experiences and the testing of new values.

Ivo Andrić made one important judgment for Serbs about moral values as models in his essay on Petar Kočić. In this essay, Andrić convincingly speaks about the psychology of undefeated but revolted people and nations. Because of freedom, they "find bitter and almost voluptuous pleasure in being [...] poor people rich in pride".[1] Our Dinaric people are also discussed by Cvijić in *Balkansko poluostrvo* (*The Balkan Peninsula)*: "In order to evoke the greatest sum of their strength, one must touch upon their sensitivity, sensibility, their individual and national pride; one must emphasize the question of honor, or the ideal of justice or freedom".[2] Moral and mental traits or values are examined and proven by Miloš N. Đurić in the study *Vidovdanska etika* (*Vidovdan Ethic)*. To exalt oneself through sacrifice in defeat is not only a personal act, but, among the Serbs, it was also an expression of feudal, ruling and church ideology according to which the representative of the authorities is God's representative and debtor in this world. However, at the same time, on completely opposite values, the myth of betrayal was also born which, like the Kosovo covenant, became a model inherited from our Middle Ages through literature.

For the Serbian man, Cvijić emphasizes, Kosovo is also a centuries-old ideal and value. Without denying the value of the Kosovo myth, Pekić sees it in a more rational light. In his *Pisma iz tuđine* (*Letters from Abroad*), he does not deny that the destruction in 1389 was "wonderful" and extremely important from a moral point of view, but he nevertheless concludes that a complete victory over the Turks would have been even more magnificent.[3] However, instead of the military failure that Pekić speaks of, the heavenly victory remained in the long collective memory as a pledge of lasting value. That value became a model. With this outcome, the Kosovo myth, as Miloš N. Đurić understands it, lost its "historical meaning and gained the power of mysterious

[1] Ivo Andrić, „Zemlja, ljudi i jezik kod Petra Kočića" ("The Land, People and Language in the works of Petar Kočić"), in: I. Andrić, Umetnik i njegovo delo (*The Artist and His Work)*, Sabrana dela, knjiga trinaesta, Udruženi izdavači, Beograd, 1981, 158. My translation. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[2] J. Cvijić, *Balkansko poluostrvo* (*The Balkan Peninsula*), ibid., 337.

[3] Borislav Pekić, *Pisma iz tuđine* (*Letters from Abroad*), Znanje, Zagreb, 1987, 161.

wisdom".[4] It is particularly interesting that Andrić, in his essay "Njegoš as the Tragic Hero of Kosovo Thought", also mentions the Kosovo mystery, i.e., the Kosovo covenant in which both collective and personal destiny are reflected. Kosovo as a figure, an important topos or a common place of our history and everything that was born in the lap of Kosovo thought, show how an eternally living tradition becomes a model-virtue or value.

Thus, these cultural models as archetypes in consciousness are still important today. Slobodan Jovanović also drew attention to their importance among Serbs, introducing the political, cultural and national model into the discussion. In addition, ethnopsychological, moral, mental, artistic, and even linguistic models and patterns of thought are also introduced into this discussion. The meaning of models is to cultivate, which means to ennoble and improve the life of a certain community, including the individual who is part of it. There are also ethnopsychological traits with a different effect. This also means that the national model is very often associated with the character or mental traits of our people called defiance and spite. They are confirmed, under various influences, when an individual, unwilling to accept "given circumstances, opposes them in order to change them, but refusing to do what is necessary, without sufficient reason does the opposite, just to express his own will".[5] These important features of our individual and collective identity have an archetypal origin, and were "formatted" in turbulent historical epochs. There is abundant evidence of this in private life, and in oral and written literature, but also more broadly in our culture.

The twentieth century brought completely new values and models in various cultural spheres—from private life and various forms of creativity to culture understood in its broadest sense. The models were profiled by both the patriarchal and the civic spirit, or rather their intersection, but also by the more or less pronounced influence of ruling, even authoritarian ideologies, especially after the Second World War. Models were determined by the classes and styles in society in a different way, its different values, including moral and other norms. They were also influenced by the attitude towards tradition, as well as the relationship to today's, i.e., contemporary—modern and postmodern understanding of the world.

The end of every century, as a crossroads of social systems and value systems, ideologies and conflicting cultural models, almost regularly brings great changes in the social and cultural history of a people.

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[4] M. N. Đurić, *Kulturna istorija i rani filosofski spisi* (*Cultural History and Early Philosophical Writings*), ibid., 270.

[5] Bojan Jovanović, *Prkos i inat* (*Stubborn Defiance and Spite*), Zavod za udžbenike, Beograd, 2008, 79.

The end of the 20th century, but also of the second millennium, brought the same to the Serbs. In our country, the beginning of the 19th century was the beginning of the Serbian Revolution, while the beginning of the 20th century brought a dynastic coup and final liberation from the Turks. Its end brought the end of the state in which Serbs, with great stakes and even greater expectations, spent their lost century. With such a course of our older and newer history, Slobodan Jovanović was right when he said that the Serbs have not managed to build a complete cultural model. As he thought, this requires long centuries without turmoil and without conflicts in the area where people live. Only under such conditions, instead of fighting for survival, can the people turn to culture and cultural well-being. That is why, during the 19th century and with the First World War, a national, but not a sufficiently "cultural" model was developed among the Serbs.

Along with the rather lively patriarchal heritage, the models and values of modern civic culture were particularly nurtured from the beginning of the 20th century until the Second World War. Among these patterns, the journal *Srpski književni glasnik* (*Serbian Literary Herald*) is of great importance. It was a publication that, with its content and profile, became an important support for the Serbs' entry into civic and modern European culture. After the Second World War, the agitprop culture, and then the culture of socialist aestheticism, with the so-called soft dictatorship in social life, would create new values and models in line with socialism with a "human face". This type of rule and culture would last from the 1950s until the end of the 1970s.

The 1990s were a turning point and a form of discontinuity in cultural development. New ideologies and values entered the scene at that time, as well as the paradigms appropriate to them in the social and cultural field. The end of the 20th century brought major changes to the previously valid models in the political-ideological, national, and even civilizational realm. In political life, three important models from the previous system lost their significance—brotherhood and unity, self-governing socialism, and non-alignment. The disappearance of the previous, i.e., federal state and socialist society, together with the already weakened awareness of Yugoslavia as the cradle of kindred nations, consequently and thoroughly challenged the dominant political models among Serbs after World War II. Without developed institutions, with only a semblance of democratic processes, and often with denied freedoms in the public sphere, political culture and civic thought were not nurtured nor could they reach their full expression. The reason for this was the authoritarian system of government according to which the political model and exemplary values were built. Until the 1990s, the consequence of this was a closed, but not an open culture, that

is, a single-mindedness opposed to which stood the still unconquered culture of dialogue and the beneficial power of critical speech.

Along with the political, there is naturally also a national model with ideas on how to best set and achieve the interests of a people. The last decades of the 20th century determined not only the fate of the Yugoslav state, but also of Serbia as part of it. Dobrica Ćosić, a writer and politician, a close associate and follower of Broz, and later a dissident who would become the president of a reduced or third Yugoslavia in his later years, was more of a witness or participant in important events than a creator of that destiny. Interpreting the Serbian national question, he wrote several novels, diaries, and essays in which he discusses the models of culture and politics. In this corpus, the six-volume *Piščevi zapisi* (*Writer's Notes*), covering the period from 1951 to 2000, and the three books in which he deals with the Serbian question, are of particularly important documentary and historical significance.

The same question is addressed by Ćosić's last book, i.e., *Knjiga o Titu* (*The Book about Tito*), first published in 2023. It also contains the statement: "The dialectic of our life takes place in paradoxes".[6] With this sentence, Ćosić tried to explain not only personal attitudes and actions, misconceptions and inconsistencies, but also the contradictions of Serbian politics in relation to the national question. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the elite has suppressed national thought with the idea of a community of South Slavic peoples. In December 1914, becoming part of the Niš Declaration and war goals, this idea, with a very unfavorable outcome, remained the direction of Serbian politics and the model that this idea created for the entire century. When, after Broz's death (1980), the second Yugoslavia had already begun to collapse, the Serbian intelligentsia still believed that the country could be saved through reform "based on democratic, socialist and Yugoslav postulates".[7] However, these predictions of our elite, for the third time in the same century, turned into a great delusion.

These are all paradoxes that Ćosić spoke about. However, the paradox he himself found himself in was even greater. Never breaking with the idea of Yugoslavia and Yugoslavism, Ćosić was long perceived by Serbs as the "father of the nation". A smaller paradox is that he and Borislav Pekić, writers on different ideological sides, showed mutual respect, which is a desirable model of political culture. Pekić viewed Yugoslavia with skepticism. In it, Serbs, instead of resolving their "neglected" status, showed a passion to "unite those who do not want to do so", which is contrary to "the first duty of a healthy state —to unite

[6] D. Ćosić, *Knjiga o Titu* (*The Book about Tito*), ibid., 308.
[7] Ibid., 321.

its own people".[8] From this angle, this writer also looked at the ideas of "non-partisan self-governing democracy" [9]that were in circulation in the post-war period. The different views of these two writers on the "Serbian question" also point to the diverse national models in the political life of the time. The presence and legitimacy of the opposing ideas are signs of the liberation of public speech. By encouraging reflection, critical literature introduced conflict "into the myth of self-governing and socialist harmony. [...] For by defending national sentiment and artistic and cultural creativity from the ideology prescribed by law, writers were actually defending a democratic society, and this is precisely one of the essential contents of the Serbian collective consciousness".[10]A significant contribution to this was also made by Ćosić with his novels in which he critically portrays the last decades of the 20th century. Both Ćosić and Pekić, as antipodes, contributed in completely different ways to the democratization of Serbian society and culture, and to the creation of patterns and values that changed both culture and society.

The preservation of the national model is possible through institutions or, even better, through the cultivation of values that are inherent to it. The national model is connected with the political and cultural model. This is why Slobodan Jovanović, referring to the period between the two world wars, noted: "The national model was neglected, because the national tasks seemed to be fulfilled by the unification of the Serbian people. Political models were also neglected. The old models did not correspond to the new political circumstances, and the new models, with the exception of the communist one, had not yet been built."[11] With such an assessment of the situation at that time, Jovanović's position is also significant because he understands models as dynamic phenomena. Although they can be stable in terms of values, these phenomena can signify changes, even the creation or construction of new values and a favorable cultural climate in society. However, in the second half of the 20th century, especially at its end, the situation was different: the state was broken, and with it the Serbian community. The communism that Jovanović mentions disappeared, as did the values that such an ideology created. Therefore, valid models and values disappeared or were significantly changed. In their place, a value vacuum emerged that should be filled with new and valid contents.

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[8] B. Pekić, *Odmor od istorije* (*A Break from History*), ibid., 19.

[9] Ibid., 54.

[10] Zoran Konstantinović, *Literarno delo i nacionalni mentalitet* (*Literary Work and National Mentality*), Narodnja knjiga / Alfa, Beograd, 2006, 167.

[11] S. Jovanović, *Iz istorije i književnosti* (*From History and Literature II*), ibid., 571.

During the 1990s, on the eve and during the civil wars, the unity and collective consciousness of the Serbs were once again at their best, as was the previously neglected national model. However, the unfavorable outcome of the wars with the victims and refugees, the poorly executed transition, the impoverishment of the people and the uncertainty that the people found themselves in the new social circumstances, caused their newly liberated driving energy to begin to falter. All these difficulties were accompanied by Serbophobia, primarily in their surroundings, and even hatred towards themselves and their people expressed by a number of Serbs in the political and public domain. This hatred is an expression of personal self-destructive impulses, but also a sign of serious social pathology. The consequence of this state of affairs is the fact that the Serbian corpus has since been increasingly reduced to what is related to Serbia, but not to Serbs who live or have lived, or were born, in other parts of Yugoslavia. That is why the terms *srpstvo* and *srpski* became increasingly undesirable, while *srbijanstvo* and *srbijanski*, as expressions of a narrower meaning, became increasingly valued, even in their homeland. On the same basis, Serbian identity is denied to many people who were born as Serbs outside Serbia, and who feel like such, and now their homeland is part of the newly created post-Yugoslav states. That is why, even at the end of the 20th century, it was not easy to build a national model. And it was not easy because of the heritage that Ćosić rightly draws attention to. He will say: "Serbs are the only European nation in the 20th century that is denationalizing in peace, under the influence of politics and money, power and ideology: it divides itself into Montenegrins, Bosnians, Vojvodina natives and Serbians".[12] The cynicism of our history is also in the fact that Svetozar Miletić expressed the same position on the division of Serbs a whole century before Ćosić. Moreover, the Serbs also bear some responsibility and even guilt for the state of the Serbian corpus in the 20th century. With this unpleasant truth, the national model had to be rebuilt at the end of the same century.

In the same vein, on the same "exam", both the political and the cultural model were also being put to the test. While the national model is an expression of collective consciousness about who we are or what we should be, the political model indicates the ideas and ideology by which these ideas are realized in the community, just as the cultural model reveals the desirable values by which that same community rises in civilization and its members cultivate or ennoble themselves. Until the 1990s, the cultural pattern in Yugoslavia, including among the Serbs, was highly ideologized and adapted to the value models of

[12] D. Ćosić, ibid., 293.

the party state. In such a system, things were not entirely unambiguous. Despite all the restrictions, even with public noise and anger, freedom was still expressed in rare but important works of art. And this was not because of the blindness of censorship, but because "oversights" were sometimes made intentionally, which means for the benefit of art or in the higher social interest. This may have been part of cultural policy or partly the cunning of the political mind. How else could the not-so-small production in the area of the "black wave" in film, theater and literature, and other similar "incidents" have passed?! Thanks to them, the culture that was created at that time, mostly outside of strictly controlled trends and models, also brought valuable artistic achievements.

All three models—national, political and cultural, each in its own way, had a share in shaping the Serbian and Yugoslav identity among Serbs during the 20th century. Serbian identity, which is hereditary and natural, is an immanent expression of values long established in the being of the people and cultural memory, while Yugoslav identity was a supranational and ideological construct that emerged from 1918 with the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the first, then the second Yugoslavia. In the interwar period, this was done by imposing integral Yugoslavism, and in the communist era by nurturing atheistic consciousness and neglecting Orthodox culture. In both cases, the culture of memory and national feeling were suppressed among the Serbs. All these phenomena were more pronounced among them than among other peoples in the same state. The consequence of this situation is the fact that, in relation to these peoples, expressed in percentages, the Serbian population in the total number of inhabitants from 1921 to 1981 decreased by more than eight percent. In short, during that time, a significant number of Serbs were assimilated into Yugoslavs. This weakened or dissolved the national, political and cultural model for most of their recent history. Thus, since 1918, by losing their national state, Serbia and the Serbian people have also lost part of their cultural identity, which was disappearing in the Yugoslav "melting pot".

The Yugoslav idea, however interpreted, played a very important role in the culture of Serbs during the 20th century. It would not be illogical to say that it, with all the contradictions it brought, indirectly influenced our national, political and cultural model. During that time, that idea had a visible foothold in public and political life, at court, in institutions and among the most prominent Serbs. Almost the entire Serbian elite in the first decades of the 20th century based their plans on that idea, plans for a state community in which all Serbs would live. Based on that idea, their gullibility or too strong faith in the community, Serbs brought national and state sovereignty into the supranational Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which would grow into Yugoslavia. This idea was

ardently advocated by its founder Jovan Skerlić, and was accepted by the leaders of the Karađorđević dynasty before the Great War, and then in the interwar period, by many intellectuals. Among them are Aleksandar Belić, the president of the Serbian Royal Academy for a very long time, Jovan Cvijić, Pavle Popović and Slobodan Jovanović as a distinguished scientist and statesman. The continuity of the Yugoslav idea is also seen in the fact that Belić remained at the head of this distinguished scientific institution even after the Second World War and the change of regime. It was renamed the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, but it remained on the Yugoslav standpoint. This was confirmed, four decades later, by the long-disputed *Memorandum* of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (1985).

Alongside Jovan Skerlić and Slobodan Jovanović, but with a different ideology, stands the figure of Dobrica Ćosić. As a writer and political figure, he contributed to the reputation of socialist Yugoslavia with his works and party engagement. However, since the mid-1960s, Ćosić had been a dissident and an opponent of the authoritarian rule of Josip Broz, but even after that he remained on the Yugoslav line. The platform of the magazine *Javnost* (*The Public*), as he wrote in his diary on November 23, 1980, which makes up the *Knjiga o Titu* (*Book about Tito*), was also built on that line. That platform was prepared by the opposition circle of the Serbian elite with Ćosić immediately after Broz's death, believing that Yugoslavia could only be preserved as a democratic and socialist society. On the other hand, the government of the time, still sworn to "defend "self-governing socialism"[13] and maintain the existing state of affairs, strongly opposed the platform of *Javnost*. Similar to the opposition circle that worked on that document, the commission for drafting the *Memorandum* also had its own ideas, encountering a rather negative reception from the authorities and the wider public. No matter how much they wanted it and whatever they wanted it to be, the Serbs had no luck with Yugoslavia. Neither parliamentary monarchy nor state or self-governing socialism, nor whether it was a large or small state, could preserve Yugoslavia as a state.

All of this nevertheless points to a long and diverse Yugoslav heritage among Serbs in the 20th century. It is reflected in social history, private and political life, in art and science or culture in its various forms. Skerlić, as the progenitor of the Yugoslav idea, also made great contributions to that heritage. For a while, literary historian Pavle Popović also followed in his footsteps in literature, testifying to how Serbian thought after World War I acquired visible Yugoslav characteristics. In 1909, he published *Pregled srpske književnosti* (*A Review of Serbian*

[13] Ibid., 323.

Literature), in which he included old (Serbian), folk and Ragusan literature. About ten years later, when the Yugoslav idea gave birth to a common state, he published *Jugoslovenska književnost* (*Yugoslav Literature*) (1918), which included the literary creations of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from their inception (9th–12th centuries) to the modern era. The name of the language in which this literature was written was also changed on similar grounds. For a long time, this language was called Serbo-Croatian, but it was sometimes also referred to as Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian.

The second half of the 20th century, after a lull that lasted until 1967—when the *Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju hrvatskog književnog jezika* (*Declaration on the Name and Position of the Croatian Literary Language*) was adopted – caused great tensions and conflicts on the linguistic and literary scene. But more than that—these conflicts would have an echo in the broader cultural and social field, revealing the weaknesses of the Yugoslav idea and state. By then, in a period longer than half a century, that idea had already created hybrid models in politics and culture. In them, Yugoslavism, sometimes with great friction, was merged or reconciled with the values of the original or native tradition. During all that time, Dobrica Ćosić was a witness and also a subject of ideological and political turmoil that did not cease even when there was no longer a second or greater Yugoslavia.

Serbian culture and its forms were also significantly influenced in the 20th century by epochal scientific discoveries, the European cultural circle, the spirit of the era, its ideas and styles. The beginning of that century was marked by technical progress, the cult of the machine and increased industrialization. The result was an alienated man in modern times. Our neohumanists also wrote critically about this. Miloš N. Đurić wrote particularly well about this in his study *Problemi filosofije culture* (*Problems of the Philosophy of Culture*) (1929). The same phenomena were also expressed in European art—in painting, film and literature, especially among the futurists and expressionists. Micić's *Zenith*, Miloš Crnjanski, Rastko Petrović and Stanislav Krakov testify to how new literary models from Europe were received by the Serbs. Social tensions and frictions, a sense of alienation and imperialist aspirations of the great powers ready for revenge, carried the seeds of a new world war, but also of class rebellions. Expressionism and futurism were the artistic images of such a state. World War II ended with the use of nuclear weapons. Atomic energy thus brought anxiety and hope to the world, and thus opened up its completely uncertain future. The horizons of human knowledge about the world and the cosmos were expanded to unimaginable proportions by the flight to the moon, which was first carried out by a spacecraft in 1959. What was science fiction in Milutin

Milanković's book *Kroz vasionu i vekove* (*Through the Universe and the Ages*) (1928) became scientific reality in thirty years. The end of the 20th century brought new temptations with the increasingly frequent and very difficult to control use of artificial intelligence and digital techniques that produce a three-dimensional world.

This creates models of virtual culture, changing the concept of civilization, which is closely tied to culture. With good or less good, and even bad consequences, Serbian culture cannot remain outside of these trends. Such networking of the world will also mean the "networking" of the Serbian space and cultural goods created by Serbs. In this parallel or digital world, products will appear that serve all kinds of manipulation, as well as the annulment of classical values. Most often, these are global mass media that persistently support mass or popular culture and the entertainment industry. These media deliberately impose quite questionable, but also problematic content. This reflects the face and back of the artificial world in which kitsch and trash prevail. In such a world, there is little room for high culture, that is, valuable artistic or scientific creativity. However, this culture, in its inversion and distortion of values, often serves abuses.

During most of the second half of the 20th century, the national and especially the cultural pattern was neglected at the expense of the political one, since the values of the society of that time, and even its ideals, were sought more in ideology than in morality and the refinement of man. Individuals were required to be obedient subjects rather than thinking, free and noble people. In all of this lies the reverse side of socialist humanism, whose beginnings among the Serbs can be traced to the ideas and activity of Svetozar Marković. The need or at least the possibility for a person to be a noble and meek Christian was generally not even discussed. This was not the case with other peoples in Broz's state, and their spiritual life was much more nurtured and developed. That is why their cultural pattern was different and more complete. Although the renewal of faith and church life is noticeable among the Serbs in the post-communist era, de-Christianization and anti-Christian propaganda are still visible in the public space.[14] Despite this, the situation in this area is much better than in the years after World War II. Thus, spiritual culture in its important segment is increasingly coming to expression.

Open to receiving influences from the world by its nature, Serbian culture, while preserving its original values, became even more open

[14] Slobodan Antonić, *Demontaža kulture. Prilozi za sociologiju srpskog društva* (*The Dismantling of Culture. Contributions to the Sociology of Serbian Society*), Catena mundi, Beograd, 2016, 7-27.

when that world was transformed into a "big village" in the digital era. World geopolitics and the structures of global capital, by imposing a new system of values, and even by using powerful mass media, are influencing the fact that modern civilization is becoming a civilization of profit to a very high degree. Consumer or consumerist culture is also at its service. Commercialization is collapsing high culture by subordinating it to luxury, consumption and economic interest. Under this influence, traditional or classical culture in the world, which follows the great Judeo-Christian code, is increasingly suppressed or dismantled. This transition, especially among small nations, leads to the loss of their national and cultural identity and causes other harmful consequences. The meaning of these changes is to build a new civilization and a new man who is alienated in this project, therefore a "passive state", and not a subject or active co-participant in the modernization of culture and society. In this case, the native culture is no longer just an image of a people and its identity, but is also an expression of externally imposed, global ideas and values. The people do not perceive them as their own, but they nevertheless accept them, even in our country.

This shows that during the 20th century, the national, political and cultural patterns in the Serbian spiritual space changed significantly. These changes are especially visible when comparing the situation at the beginning, middle and end of the century. At the beginning of that century, the Serbian idea, which was also encouraged by the thought of liberating our occupied countries, slowly and increasingly gave way to Yugoslavism, its political ideas and cultural values. That was still the golden age of that culture, open to modernization in a Western European key. After World War II, that is, in the middle of the century, value models were changed by the communist ideology, which curtailed both traditional and civic values cultivated in Yugoslavia between the two wars. Lasting for five decades, this ideology became a thing of the past in the 1990s. The end of the 20th century changed all previous models and values due to dramatic changes in the disappearing state, but also external or global reasons. The fall of Yugoslavia collapsed the models and value system on which that state was based. Until then, suppressed or "preserved" in Yugoslav patterns, Serbian culture began to build its native system, and even its cultural model, again.

This slow and long-term construction was accompanied by the breakdown of culture. Both internal and external reasons had an impact on both. The renewal of national feeling, collective consciousness and spiritual life in a changed social climate made native models and values more pronounced at the end of the 20th century than in previous decades. However, the ideological legacy and influences of the then ruling or hegemonic model made part of the systemic elite become closer to

the so-called secular humanism than to its original tradition, native identity and the virtues of Orthodox culture. The accompanying phenomena of such a state among Serbs are self-denial and autochauvinism as a clear expression of serving transnational interests and a sign of social pathology. A culture with degenerative phenomena is a symptom of this disease. Thus, the national narrative, losing its original values, acquires a semi-colonial status, and slowly moves to the social margins.

From the end of World War II to the end of the 20th century, Serbian culture has repeatedly faced the challenges of changing its mind and losing its authentic character. The first time this happened in the middle of the century under the influence of Sovietization and ideological, or rather agitprop culture that affected very broad spheres of social life. The second time, under the opposite—Western ideology, as a response to the events after the Cominform. This happened in the late fifties, and then in the sixties, under a strong wave of Americanization or, more precisely, American popular culture. The presence of this culture among Serbs could be observed in music and film, in literature and clothing, which is connected by the so-called jeans style. During all that time, in the widest possible scope, as an expression of all this, Yugoslav culture was present as well – in a basically synthetic or hybrid form.

Due to the coincidence of cultural and historical circumstances, Serbian culture at the end of the 20th century had two types of transition—post-Yugoslav and globalist. While the post-Yugoslav transition returned culture to its native streams, the globalist one took that same culture out of its motherland and uprooted it through the imposition of cultural (semi)colonialism and its values. This means that the newly begun renewal began to be accompanied by the dismantling of Serbian culture. The breakdown is visible in the attempt of the hegemonic world, primarily mass culture, and also high culture from the West, to impose its own thought and moral patterns, artistic models and cultural norms. The problem is that this hegemon or Moloch-culture, with the help of transnational capital, seeks to adapt national, and therefore Serbian, models, identities and values with their original differences to its "new", often distorted normality and ideology, and even consumerist nature. The trouble is also that in a technical sense, the world is more one than ever before and that in the digital era, it is easier to manage and manipulate it from the centers of power through the abuse of mass media and social networks, but also mass culture.

In contrast, there are values that lie in differences, rather than in monoculture. Our culture is also in such an order, which finds its origins in its roots and living tradition. Its foundations are found in works and cultural models. These goods are the Serbian canon that has been created from the Middle Ages to the modern era, and is a significant

part of European and world heritage. The canon consists of the Orthodox faith, temples, frescoes, icons, Cyrillic script, literary and musical works, both secular and church or Christian culture, which, like the state, was founded by Rastko—Sava Nemanjić. The new age from the 18th century also brought a new culture. At its foundation was a common-sense view of the world, the founder of which was Dositej Obradović. This is the reason for the claim that the old culture in our country began with the departure of Rastko Nemanjić (1175–1236) to the monastery and that it ended with Dositej's departure from the monastery. And after Dositej, in the 19th century, based on the experiences of the still living Byzantine heritage, secular thought prevailed, which is the watershed between two great epochs.

In his own way, the foundations of the new culture are also represented by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić. Vuk based this culture on oral heritage, dictionaries and grammars, documentary and scientific prose. In this way, he created a vivid encyclopedia of folk life, both in the past and in his own time. By helping the vernacular become a literary language, he opened the door to the new, and closed the door to the old literature that, after Vuk and his language reforms, could only be read in translations. Nikola Tesla provided significant innovation in understanding phenomena in nature, inventions and science, primarily in electrical engineering and mechanical engineering. Living and creating in both the 19th and 20th centuries, Tesla marked the new era and modern times with his discoveries. In science, in geophysics and climatology, a great European name is Milutin Milanković. The first half of the 20th century in literature and humanities was marked by Ivo Andrić, Miloš Crnjanski and Slobodan Jovanović, and the second by the poet Vasko Popa and the prose writers Meša Selimović, Borislav Pekić and Milorad Pavić with works that are both Serbian and world heritage. In music, the composer Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac, in painting Petar Lubarda, and in film, the opuses of Dušan Makavejev, Aleksandar Petrović, Slobodan Šijan and Emir Kusturica belong to this order.

In high culture, these are our greatest values that make up the Serbian canon. What is its measure? The answer to this question was given by Jovan Cvijić. He emphasized that the values (ideas, moral virtues, scientific discoveries, works of art) created in our country should be tested and proven in foreign competition. Dejan Medaković viewed Serbian culture in a somewhat different way within the European framework. For him, Europe is a large mosaic in which each nation has its own piece. The trouble is that this piece is often belatedly incorporated into mosaics made according to someone else's design. In terms of contribution, various nations, regardless of their power and number, have a share in that mosaic, and that is how they are small or

large. The Serbs have also left their marks on it, and this proves their importance on the cultural map of Europe. Unfavorable social circumstances, as Slobodan Jovanović notes, have caused a weaker commitment to inner life in our country and have made it a more developed national and political pattern than a cultural one. The reason for this is the following: without stable socio-cultural conditions in a society, it is not possible to build a stable and comprehensive model. However, the 20th century did not bring stability, since in it, with all its differences, the models of traditional patriarchal and civic culture intersected. They are disrupted by upheavals, political frictions and wars. This is part of our collective and individual destiny, and even cultural history.

In a broader sense, the cultural model and its effect should also have a role in everyday privacy, that is, in the refinement of the community and the individual. Slobodan Jovanović found the model of this value in the humanistic paradigm. His measure in the West has long been a decent and noble, therefore a well-mannered, morally sensitive and cultured man. Jovanović found such a model among Serbs in recent history in the personalities, influence on institutions and in the public activities of Dositej Obradović, Svetozar Marković, Bogdan Popović, Uroš Petrović and Božidar Knežević. It could be said that in modern times Jovan Skerlić, Slobodan Jovanović himself, and even Borislav Pekić belong to this order. Despite their closeness, Jovanović and Pekić still represent two distinct models. Despite the fact that the neohumanist Miloš N. Đurić already in the 1920s reminded us of the "rationalist-technical terrorism" that was causing a spiritual crisis in the West, the first half of the 20th century was not yet dominated by machine civilization in our country. That is why humanism in Jovanović's understanding and interpretation of the world is very noticeable and is in line with the spirit of the time. The second half of the same century is increasingly marked by the dominance of humanism, which is being replaced by antihumanism and posthumanism.

Pekić testifies to this split in values both as a *homo politicus* and as a writer. As a person, he is close to neo-Enlightenment, that is, secular humanism, but also to cultivated national thought. In his literary and philosophical texts, he depicted the humane, and even more inhumane, face of this world, including a dystopian memory of the future: "While in *Vreme čuda* (*The Time of Miracles*)(1965) he used Christianity as an allegory for totalitarianism, in the novel *Kako upokojiti vampire* (*How to Quiet a Vampir*e) (1977) Pekić already showed the impotence of traditional humanism to oppose (Nazi) antihumanism, and in *Besnilo* (*Rabies*) (1983) he symbolically connected traditional humanism and Christianity in the fight against technocratic antihumanism. And then,

before his death, he renounced *Vreme čuda* (*The Time of Miracles*)".[15] In this "evolution", moral reasons, bioengineering, cyborgs, the instrumentalization of truth and cyber culture determine the fate of man, pushed to the edge of history. Hence, Pekić's anthropological history is a diagnosis of a materialistic civilization that is experiencing collapse. The writer, however, does not deprive man of hope in the survival of humane forms of life and the possibility of maintaining an anthropocentric world. Serbian culture also bears the signs of all these hopes and temptations.

IDEOLOGICAL, SYNTHETIC AND NATIONAL CULTURE

Social history and private life, education and science, institutions and religion, Serbian language and literature, art and philosophy, identity and customs, ideas and cultural ideology of a certain era determine the contents or culture of the Serbian people. Culture is understood here as a collection of spiritual and material values of a social or national community in eras and periods. It essentially determines the uniqueness of a people or nation. Philosophers sometimes see it as a spiritual community of dead, living and unborn compatriots. Each generation should preserve old and create new values. In this way, it pays its debt to its ancestors as much as it owes to its descendants—this reflects the continuity, living tradition, and even the permanence of a culture. Understood in this way, the culture of a certain people is not only tied to the contemporary moment or state, since that state is constituted and understood as the outcome of cultural phenomena in the past. Its living matrix becomes a very important part of contemporary life as well. This means that the synchronic cross-section of culture is essentially determined by its diachronic course, but also by the contribution of new values.

In the formation of that course within the national framework, there are factors that influence the patterns of culture in the cultural history of a certain people. The concurrence of various historical circumstances and the intersection of East and West in the areas where the Serbian people lived at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries also point to the connection between Eastern and Western, i.e., European, culture. Since for a long period of time the Serbs lived in two empires – the Turkish and the Austro-Hungarian, suffering the influence of their cultures and value systems, it is difficult to speak of only one, especially not of a completely identical cultural model in the Serbian people. The diversity was also influenced by the fact that the

[15] Slobodan Vladušić, *Zavet i Megalopolis* (*The Covenant and Megalopolis*), Bitije, Novi Sad, 2023, 142.

acquisition of independence and the creation of our modern state in the area previously under the influence of the Turkish Empire and Eastern feudal culture led to the reorganization of society, social and even cultural stratification. Feudal relations in Serbia slowly took on the outlines of a capitalist economy. At the same time, a young bourgeois class was being created, which changed the previous Eastern habits and models among the people. New social circumstances redirected the cultural heritage towards the Western European cultural model, in which, since the second half of the 17th century, gallantry and nobility have been increasingly expressed.

With these changes, a poorly cultivated, but enterprising and vital social class entered the Serbian historical scene. Dealing with everything and anything, this new class very skillfully used historical changes and the era of original accumulation to enrich itself, gain power and social prestige. The nouveau riche suppressed the previously more prominent Serbs who became wealthy and socially recognized in a very different system of values during the Ottoman period. These social upheavals at the turn of eras and newly established state borders also led to friction between cultures within the same people—the old town culture in decline and the self-sufficient and unscrupulous, rural and modern culture that had not yet been sufficiently refined or matured. The breaks at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries are fundamentally historical and civilizational; to some extent also cultural. The new time, as part of the changes that have occurred, opened the beginning of a new century. These epochal changes also meant the arrival of new ideas and the formation of a new picture of the world that necessarily had to be expressed in cultural life. To some extent, this meant the decline of patriarchal and even the birth of modern culture, as well as its models that expressed the somewhat changed spirit and identity of the people.

Serbian culture and art, although at that time still at the cutting edge of European trends, were slowly adapting to the new spirit. Receiving Western influences and changing from within, this culture is no longer just patriarchal nor quite integral. Already existing differences, which were reflected in the contrasts of rural, small-town, old-urban, and urban culture, as well as cultural patterns originally created in the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish Empires, at the turn of the centuries were further increased. This is primarily due to the epochal changes that occur under the influence of cultural patterns of the Western European cultural circle. The consequence is the abandonment of previously stable and closed cultural patterns based on traditional values, and even the creation of the so-called synthetic culture. It would come into expression at the turn of the two centuries, therefore even before the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

The connection between such culture and social life is particularly visible at that time. This type of culture, as Andrew Baruch Wachtel (1959) noted in his polemical book *Stvaranje nacije, razaranje nacije* (*The Creation of a Nation, the Destruction of a Nation*), is an expression of a "new, synthetic understanding of the nation."[16] And Wachtel calls the culture that such circumstances give rise to synthetic. What conditioned or encouraged the emergence of this culture? It was conditioned or encouraged by the spirit of the time, and above all by the idea that the South Slavic peoples could create their own state community. It is precisely these ideas that lead to the weakening of the Serbian idea and its finding its surrogate in Yugoslavism. On that idea was built and to it was suited a cultural model largely different from the previous one. In this regard, Wachtel draws two important conclusions: the emergence of Yugoslavism "almost completely coincides with the beginning of modernism",[17] the origins of which can be found in the first decade of the 20th century, while the outcome of the Yugoslav idea is decisively influenced by the elite, making "decisions that determine nations".[18] It goes without saying that such decisions would not bear fruit without the political apparatus and institutions, without public opinion and producers of consciousness who enabled the synthetic idea and culture to take root in Serbian society. Synthetic culture in its spirit and expression is less autochthonous or original, and more artificial or counterfeit.

Let us recall once again: cultural models can be viewed in a system that includes language and religion, education and science, morality and customs, politics, but also other factors taken care of by cultural institutions preserving the identity of the people. All cultural differences, dynamic historical trends, contradictions and constant changes do not contribute to the preservation of old cultural patterns. This is confirmed by Serbian culture and literature at the turn of the two centuries, achieving a close connection and interpenetration. The crossroads of centuries often bring historical turning points, changes in spiritual and cultural values and new ideas. This was the case in European, and so in Serbian, culture at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Technical and civilizational changes of that era, along with progress, brought unrest and anxiety. Post-romantic and realistic art was then replaced by modern and modernist movements. A new picture of the world, a disrupted aesthetic ideal and the cultural code of an earlier era had to find a response

[16] Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Stvaranje nacije, razaranje nacije. Književnost i kulturna politika u Jugoslaviji* (*The Making of a Nation, The Making of a Nation. Literature and Cultural Policy in Yugoslavia*), translated by Ivan Radosavljević, Stubovi kulture, Beograd, 2001, 15. My translation. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[17] Ibid., 16.

[18] Ibid., 9.

in new ideas and artistic forms. With an understandable delay, all of this had a visible impact on the trends of Serbian science, culture and art in the period from the beginning of the century to the First World War, but also from that war to the middle of the 20th century. After regaining independence and rising in the last quarter of the 19th century, Serbian society and culture entered a "golden age". That time of revival gave birth to great ideas and people to whom history gave the task of solving a difficult task—to unite the people, improve life, strengthen culture and turn Serbia towards modern Europe.

Never before had so many distinguished personalities appeared and worked at the same time. This could be confirmed by a small and incomplete catalog of creators of different generations. They worked during the first two decades of the 20th century and in the interwar period. Thus they laid the foundations of modern Serbian culture and history. In literature, these are Laza Kostić, Branislav Nušić, Jovan Dučić, Milan Rakić, Aleksa Šantić, Borisav Stanković, Petar Kočić, Vladislav Petković Dis, Simo Matavulj, Isidora Sekulić, Sima Pandurović, Miloš Crnjanski, Ivo Andrić, Momčilo Nastasijević, Rastko Petrović and Stanislav Vinaver. Bogdan and Pavle Popović, Ljubomir Nedić and Jovan Skerlić were engaged in the study of literature and aesthetics, essay writing and criticism. Jovan Cvijić, Aleksandar Belić, Stojan Novaković, Slobodan Jovanović, Mihailo Petrović Alas, Sima Lozanić and Milutin Milanković were active in science at that time. In science or in inventions, Nikola Tesla, Mihajlo Pupin and Đorđe Stanojević are famous; in philosophy these are—Božidar Knežević, Branislav Petronijević and Dimitrije Mitrinović; in theology—Nikolaj (Nikola) Velimirović and Justin Popović; in the visual arts—Paja Jovanović, Uroš Predić, Sava Šumanović, Nadežda Petrović, Rista and Beta Vukanović, Petar Ubavkić and Simeon Roksandić; in music Stevan Hristić, Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac and Petar Konjović; in the world of acting – Dobrica Milutinović, Petar Dobrinović and Čiča Ilija Stanojević. The Pleiades also include dozens of the most outstanding personalities in other fields. In the political life of that time, Nikola Pašić stands out. Milovan Đ. Milovanović (1863–1912) also had a great reputation as a statesman, diplomat and author of important works on constitutional law, Lazar Paču (1855–1915) in state finances, and then Radomir Putnik, Stepa Stepanović, Živojin Mišić and Petar Bojović in military arts. In that heroic, revolutionary era, which sought and gave birth to great leaders and minds, culture had the role of ennobling life, and literature, as a part of it, put into words timely thought, a picture of the world and the spirit of the new time.

The year 1900 is remembered as the beginning of a new century for the World Exhibition in Paris, to which artists from Serbia were

invited for the first time. The first years of the new century marked social life with the May Coup, the removal of Obrenović and the accession of Karađorđević to the Serbian throne. The end of the era was marked by the beginning of World War I, and shortly before that, the almost symbolic death of Jovan Skerlić. In his best creative years, modernity began and ended in Serbian literature. The second coup in the first half of the same century occurred on the eve of World War II (March 27, 1941), determining the wartime fate and new suffering of the Serbs. On two occasions, in just thirty years, the Serbian people won two Pyrrhic victories, for which they paid a high price with great loss of life and the destruction of the country.

The cultural life of that period witnessed the final dominance of written culture and the transformation of the old patriarchal world, now increasingly oriented towards civic culture and Western European values. The change was primarily reflected in the circles of the Serbian intelligentsia and in the elite strata, while various forms of living folk culture still persisted among the people. All cultural strata and levels found expression in numerous genres of artistic or high, as well as popular, or trivial literature. In the circle of the new, civic culture, bearers of diverse, even conflicting ideological positions appeared. Thus, this culture was not entirely monolithic. This means that unequal and conflicting ideological and political concepts existed or were proclaimed conservative, distinctly national and liberal. This made civic culture in the broader sense extremely dynamic and branched in its diversity and fullness.

Hence the opinion that at the beginning of the 20th century, "modernist tendencies in our country manifested themselves in Europeanism, aestheticism, individualism", and, together with them, "opposite traditions inherited from the 19th century, traditionalism, social and moral utilitarianism, nationalism".[19] However accurate these observations are, the view that "there are no significant turning points"[20] in the cultural history of the first decade of the 20th century is more difficult to sustain. It was precisely at that time that traditional Serbian culture made a turn towards civic values of the Western liberal type. Thus, at the beginning of the century, the prevailing value system in culture was revalued. In the clash of the traditional and the modern, the foundations were laid for new cultural models. The leaders of Serbian culture at the turning point were helmsmen or leaders without a plan for the structure and relations in the new state entity. Instead of their own home and nation-state, built to the measure of their own power and historical rights, the Serbian cultural and political elite before World

[19] J. Deretić, *Kulturna istorija Srba* (*Cultural History of the Serbs*), ibid., 232.
[20] Ibid.

War I, in the interwar period, and beyond, rather haphazardly designed a common Yugoslav home that was neither solid nor reliable in its foundations.

These processes also meant the doubling of cultural identity and the weakening of the Serbian idea. This can be clearly seen in the example of the cultural ideology and artistic practice of Paja Jovanović—a famous painter, Austro-Hungarian Serb and a convinced Yugoslav ideologist. This artist and preacher of the Yugoslav idea would not mind, as a loyal admirer of the Viennese crown, to portray the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph during the war of 1916, thereby obtaining forgiveness for his ideological "sins" and expressing full loyalty to the sovereign. Jovanović's dual identity is then at work when he paints a portrait of King Aleksandar Karađorđević, and twenty years later, a portrait of the communist leader Josip Broz Tito. The example of the politician, lawyer and historian Slobodan Jovanović is different. The civic "sins" of the interwar period, which, paradoxically, go hand in hand with his Serbianness and, at the same time, Yugoslavness, this Jovanović expiates in exile after World War II as an alleged traitor and a denounced emigrant. There is a great difference between the two famous Jovanovićs. As models, these two "examples" reveal the face and the back of the Serbian cultural elite from the first half of the 20th century. This very elite, growing up and operating even before the Great War, has extremely great merits for the flourishing of Serbian education, science and art. It equally contributed to the strengthening of national consciousness and the idea of unification of Serbian lands. Along with all these merits, the intelligentsia, at that crucial time, gave birth to that Yugoslav idea that would bring much more harm than good to the Serbian cause.

In the unitary concept of the state and culture, the elite mistakenly saw in the future Yugoslav community an expanded Serbia and the preservation of the Serbian cultural and spiritual heritage. The effect was quite the opposite, since the Serbian national pattern was diluted in the Yugoslav matrix. The dissolution of one's own values went hand in hand with their integration into a new and different value system in education and science, in culture and politics. This transformation created both a double identity and a political faith in something that was difficult to achieve. Hence, this faith became a fiction that survived on the ever-fading hope that a strong illusion and self-deception would, despite everything, soon become reality.

This is also a sign of giving up on Serbian thought and national identity, which would, from the end of the third decade of the 20th century, determine cultural trends and become official state policy. Since then, the Serbian idea has generally not been at its home address or in its own house. That house has become a meeting place and forum

for some different ideas, and even values. The meaning of national culture was then sought in the Yugoslav spirit, the new national pattern and in synthetic culture. That culture produced a similar ideology that did not strengthen, but rather destabilized the state community. In such a provisional state and its synthetic culture, Serbia and the Serbian people did not find complete historical meaning. The split in spirit will also have negative consequences for the development of Serbian culture. The effect of such a state is clearly visible when comparing the cultural content and values achieved in culture from the first decades and from the middle of the century.

In those fifty years, one can easily see the paths of cultural evolution, as well as the achieved effect and meaning of spiritual development among Serbs. Almost the entire period shows an upward trend, but this development is accompanied by unfavorable circumstances that slow down progress in various fields of cultural life. Namely, in the first half of the 20th century, the Serbian people were at war for ten years (the Balkan Wars, the First and Second World Wars). This was not only a time when the cannons spoke and the muses were silent, but also a time of suffering and renunciation, and even cultural deprivation. An unfavorable effect on the development of Serbian culture was also the fact that in half a century this culture was changed and separated from its original flow and native heritage in two ways. The first time was in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes / Yugoslavia, by imposing a Yugoslav cultural identity, and the second time, after the Second World War, by replacing the values of Serbian culture of the patriarchal-bourgeois type with surrogates of a dogmatic, or more precisely, agitprop spirit and socialist realism.

Although in unfavorable conditions, Serbian culture reached values worthy of its heritage in the first half of the 20th century. On the eve of World War I, Cvijić wrote in his study *Geografski i kulturni položaj Srbije* (*Geographical and Cultural Position*) of Serbia that Serbia was "significantly Europeanized, but also in a raw cultural state".[21] Cvijić also shows an objective and critical awareness of Serbian contributions to culture when he speaks of the past. He notes that this past is not of a high civilization with which we would "influence the development of humanity".[22] His judgment means that the highest Serbian values have yet to be created and to confirm such a status in the European or world cultural corpus: "When other nations benefit in terms of ideas, in terms of inventions, in terms of artistic sensations from our people,

[21] J. Cvijić, "Geografski i kulturni položaj Srbije (Geographical and Cultural Position of Serbia)", *Govori i članci* (*Speeches and Articles*), Volume I, ibid., 234.

[22] J. Cvijić, "Značaj civilizacije za međunarodna pitanja (The Importance of Civilization for International Issues)", ibid., 367.

whose creations and ideas have withstood world competition, then it will only be recognized that we are equal to other nations."[23] A high set scale of values is actually a criterion or, more precisely, a necessary and sufficient condition that allows one to keep up with everyone else in the world. That is why Cvijić expects new generations to "make the greatest efforts and produce such a series of great people".[24] The first half of the 20th century largely confirmed these expectations.

Radovan Samardžić used to say that at the beginning of the 20th century, great people walked through our little Serbia. Each of them, in their own domain, could measure up to great people from other nations and together with them, as Cvijić says, they could influence the development of humanity. Culture is not only that: "Every virtue is also a cultural value."[25] With a virtue that is also expressed as a culture of resistance, the Serbs survived in a community of free nations during the liberation wars, which they fought in several times in the first half of the 20th century. Another type of culture is based on the condition that says: "The highest civilization alone is useless without a connection with the people, without the upliftment of the broadest layers of the people."[26] The Renaissance era slowly removed century-old traumas that had already left a dark mark on the memory of the people who had long suffered from an excess of history. The consequence of an excess of history is a deficiency in Serbian culture. The situation improved in peaceful and more stable times, which were scarce even in the first half of the 20th century. Cultural life nevertheless began to progress at that time. This means that great people were not the only sign of a revival, and that progress at that time was also reflected in the fact that culture also moved and spread out in breadth. It was not directed only at the individual but also at the cultural renewal of the entire community. The meaning of renewal lies in Cvijić's position that in a revival renewal, one must not forget "the cultivation of that inner organ that makes a better and more perfect person."[27] Such a man and "civilized life" are the meaning of the concept of culture that was nurtured and partly realized in the Serbian corpus in the first half of the 20th century.

It is said that cultural endemism changes in fifty years. Serbian culture in that time had several very unnatural changes. This is best seen when comparing the state of Serbian culture from the beginning and middle of the 20th century. The beginning was in the sign of reaching European achievements, as well as attempts to establish continuity in

[23] Ibid., 368.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 367.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 368.

cultural development. It was also marked by openness, democratization and the building of institutions as guardians of the heritage acquired over a long period of time and the search for new values. In the middle of the 20th century, the old values which were the foundation of Serbian cultural identity were being forgotten. With these changes, a cultural ideology emerged that erased these values from national memory. The roots of this disharmony can be found in the interwar period. Various patterns and models of Yugoslav culture were expressed through language, religion, customs, ethnic and other phenomena. Such identity differences could not become a strong connective factor in the tissue of the new state community—the Kingdom of SCS / Yugoslavia. That is why it was difficult to achieve plural and anational homogenization in the new state. More of an ideological construct, and less consciously and willingly accepted, Yugoslavism proved to be a rather weak identity basis for the newly created ethnic group. That is why this concept did not have much chance of success. Reality itself thus betrayed the idea of unity that was most persistently advocated by the Serbian cultural and political elite, as well as the cultural ideology born in their midst.

National culture, which should be distinguished from ideological and synthetic, concerns, among other things, spirit and customs, beliefs and morals, mentality and standards of life. Unlike Western peoples, where each social stratum builds its own mentality and models, among Serbs there is "at least one vertical: to always freely strive from the bottom up and to find the model of living in that general pattern that has been inherited as common and best".[28] On such a basis, frescoes, monasteries and oral epics have a special value, as do the opuses of Njegoš and Andrić, which, in addition to artistic peculiarities, also contain a common or collective denominator. More than other forms, this culture has a crucially important role in the formation of national identity. Culture with this sign does not necessarily have to deal with national themes. It should enable, as Cvijić said, for Serbs to be equal to other peoples. Culture is by its nature open to the world in which it should be measured by equal measures. That is why Serbian painters have been exhibiting in prestigious world galleries since 1950. At the same time, our art not only received from European styles, but also contributed to European "expressionism, dadaism, surrealism, lyrical abstraction, fantasy and new figuration".[29] Only this framework correctly reveals the true face of Serbian culture in Europe and the world.

[28] Radovan Samardžić, "Aristokratska vertikala u srpskoj istoriji (The Aristocratic Vertical in Serbian History)", in: Grupa autora, *Srbi u evropskoj civilizaciji* (*Serbs in European Civilization*), Nova, Balkanološki institut, SANU, Beograd, 1993, 19.

[29] Miodrag B. Protić, "Srpska umetnost i Evropa: etičke i estetičke perspektive (Serbian Art and Europe: Ethical and Aesthetic Perspectives)", ibid., 140.

It is often said, with good reason, that geography, no less than the history and geopolitics of great powers, determines the fate, and in some way the culture, of small nations. Serbs and Serbia prove the validity of such views. This was the case throughout the 20th century. At its beginning, the Ottoman Empire weakened and oriental culture was suppressed by Austria-Hungary with the support of Germany, encouraged by the idea of penetrating the East. Fourth in this series, the Russian Empire sees in the same area the possibility of reaching the warm seas. All these powers also demonstrate their soft power by trying to impose their cultural models and values on the Serbian corpus. In the second half of the century, this was also demonstrated by the Soviet Union and the United States, which is seen in cultural life through its Sovietization and Americanization. It is clear from everything that Serbian culture suffered from pressure from hegemonic states. This was a great temptation in an attempt to preserve the native cultural identity and the values that confirm it.

In the post-war ideological times, national culture was suppressed or marginalized in the face of strong gusts of other and different values, even when it received the highest recognition in the world. Hence the courteous and restrained reception of Andrić by Broz after receiving the Nobel Prize, about which the writer Dobrica Ćosić testified firsthand. There is no need to speak specifically about the status of "folk religion", more precisely Christian, i.e., Orthodox church culture and its institutions. It should only be said that the synthetic or anational culture could at the same time count on less often hidden, and more often publicly expressed communist atheism. That was the picture of the ruling model of culture that would last until the 1990s. Only the last decade of the 20th century would bring significantly more freedoms into the public space. These, with noticeable "anarchy", but also with occasional concessions to questionable values, would enable true culture to reach its full expression, including a culture that is oriented towards a living and renewed national tradition. When they gave up their delusions in which almost an entire century had been spent, the Serbian state and culture returned to their home.

CULTURAL POLICY AND THE SERBIAN QUESTION

During the 20th century, the Serbian question was viewed from a political and identity, ideological and cultural aspect. When at the beginning of that century the political and cultural elite in Serbia began to give up on the Serbian idea for the sake of the Yugoslav idea, that elite saw in Yugoslavia a way to solve the Serbian question and for all Serbs to live in one state. They also saw in it the possibility of resolving their status.

However, it quickly became clear that that state was dysfunctional, and that outside of Serbia the Serbs were not at home in their own country. This was the reason why Slobodan Jovanović, close to the Yugoslav idea, formed the Serbian Cultural Club in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1937, at a time when the ideology of integral Yugoslavism of King Aleksandar Karađorđević was already largely a state project. The creation of the Banovina of Croatia in 1939 was a clear sign that nothing had come of that project, but even then the Serbs did not give up on it. The contradiction of such a state of affairs is also confirmed by the treatise *U vremenu između dva vremena i Jugoslavija u njemu* (*In the Time Between Two Times and Yugoslavia in It),* which was written in 1936, out of the public eye, by the Yugoslav diplomat Branko Lazarević. That treatise was only published seventy years after its creation. In it, the author discusses Serbia and Yugoslavia, the Serbian and Yugoslav question. That question has been on the agenda of Serbian politics and history since 1804, but also during the next two centuries. During that time, as an expression of state-building and other problems, it was always topical, because it was most often not resolved in a way that was favorable to the Serbs and the Serbian state.

The constantly open question sought answers throughout the 20th century, finding them for a while in the Serbian or Yugoslav idea, as well as in various programs that aimed to turn these ideas into action. In the Balkan Wars, Serbia was expanded to include the Novi Pazar Sandžak, Kosovo and Metohija, and part of Macedonia. During the war, Serbian forces also took control of part of the Adriatic coast near Lješ and Drač (Durres), but under international pressure, especially from Austria-Hungary, they withdrew from there, and in 1912 Albania was proclaimed. Thus, despite all the expansions, access to the sea, as a very important strategic goal of Serbia, was not achieved. In World War I, Serbia's war goals, expressed through the Niš and Corfu Declarations, were the creation of Yugoslavia. It turned out that that state, with its weakly connected Serbian people, did not provide a favorable solution for the Serbs as well. This became even more obvious in 1939, when the Banovina of Croatia was created from the Sava and Drava banovinas as a state within a state in which Serbs were even more separated from their brethren in their native Serbia.

The paradox was also that this decision was made by the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, headed by the Serb Dragiša Cvetković. In this way, the Croatian question was resolved, while the possibility of resolving the Serbian question was reduced. Even after World War II, due to the poor status of Serbia, more precisely, the loss of jurisdiction in the provinces, this question was not resolved, just as it was not after the collapse of Yugoslavia which the Serbs had created. The national idea

can be viewed in several ways. Some theorists emphasize three of its forms: the first relies on historiography, the second on intellectual tradition, and the third on political culture. Simply put, the national idea marks spiritual, cultural, and political identity.[30] It is also related to the mentality that usually denotes the collective consciousness of a people. As a guiding thought, the idea creates a broad consensus "on the fundamental values and future of the community".[31] Given their importance, this idea and the values it carries are determined by national interests, and, in connection with this, by the relationship towards other nations and powerful world powers.

In a word, the national idea arises in the intellectual milieu of a people, trying to answer the question of its position in history, and the projected geopolitical status in the future. In the distant past, i.e., in the Middle Ages, the Serbian people harmonized their position in secular and church life more with the patterns of the Byzantine than the Western world. However, the arrival and dominance of the Turks from the 15th century onwards, including oriental-Islamic civilizational models, brought about a change in which the imposed *otherness* called into question the hitherto spiritual, political and cultural identity of the Serbs. Opposing values were born at the end of the 18th and the entire 19th century when the Serbs, allied with the great powers (Austria and Russia), tried to abolish Turkish rule, and with it the oriental models of culture. The alternative to that rule then lay in the idea of an independent Serbia or its association with other Serbian countries. Such ideas can be found in Dositej Obradović, Vuk Karadžić and Ilija Garašanin (1812–1894). In their discussions, which are dedicated to this topic, the emphasis was placed on national self-awareness and the Serbian idea, but with different projections of the future, including the possibility of establishing a South Slavic community with a cohesive role for the Serbs on the Balkan Peninsula.

Understood in the aforementioned way, the Serbian idea at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries slowly weakened, gaining a replacement in Yugoslav thought. As usual, the predecessor of the changed political idea was culture. Hence, Jovan Skerlić, the preacher of this change, said in 1899: "today, representatives of science, literature, art and politics among the South Slavs are in a very close relationship, and this relationship is becoming increasingly stronger",[32] and then concluded that everything that is most intelligent and best is in Yugoslav waters.

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[30] Milan Subotić, *Tumači ruske ideje* (*Interpreters of the Russian Idea*), Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Beograd, 2001, 15.

[31] Ibid., 20.

[32] Jovan Skerlić, *Srpske teme* (*Serbian Topics*), selected and edited by Milovan Vitezović and Jovan Pejčić, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Beograd, 2000, 331.

He views religion cautiously and with a lot of suspicion, knowing that religion, with its confessional differences, can hardly be a binding factor in the Yugoslav community. However, with this, as with other differences, Skerlić establishes that "Yugoslavism for us South Slavs is not only the most ideal and best, but also the only reasonable and only possible national policy".[33] Thus, Skerlić's early enthusiasm for the Serbian idea began to take a new direction, realizing itself through dedicated service to Yugoslavia.

Jovan Cvijić and Aleksandar Belić think about religion in a way that is close to Skerlić's. Although he says that religion influences the formation of a person and his personal identity, for Cvijić religious identity is not so important, which is why he is too tolerant of the loss of faith. Belić thinks similarly about religion, emphasizing that it sometimes causes the division of the "Serbo-Croatian people" into Serbs and Croats. This is very important when one knows that Belić wrote the study *Srbija i južnoslovensko pitanje* (*Serbia and the South Slav Question*) (1914), and Cvijić (1915) the treatise *Jedinstvo i psihički tipovi dinarskih Južnih Slovena* (*Unity and the Psychic Types of the Dinaric South Slavs*). Both served to a great extent to establish Serbian and Yugoslav goals in the First World War. Both of them, scientists of the highest order, in these works somehow put science in the service not so much of the Serbian as of the Yugoslav political program. It was not only our science that had that role, but also social, and even religious thought, philosophy, art and artistic associations. This created a cultural environment suitable for affirming, but also for formalizing supranational Yugoslavism as a new messianic movement, political and state ideology, in the name of the already limited Serbian idea. Thus it was possible that the exploits of the Kosovo heroes and the eschatological meaning of the Kosovo covenant in Meštrović's invocation and epic thought, i.e., in his Vidovdan Temple, acquired a completely new, almost ideological meaning. In this way, the original code of national Serbian culture was changed and reshaped.

Slobodan Jovanović spoke in his discussions about the existence and intersection of national, political and cultural patterns. While Yugoslavia had not yet been created, he showed by example how the issue of faith of the future subjects of that community would have an impact on political life, and even on interethnic relations. Namely, the Russian tsarist government was not in favor of the creation of a Yugoslav state, because that state, divided by Catholic and Orthodox life, would be less reliable to it than a strengthened Orthodox Serbia. Pašić himself suspected the same thing, until the fall of the tsarist government, and

[33] Ibid., 332.

he only legitimized the Yugoslav idea with his signature in the Corfu Declaration. However, as early as 1918, he had some dilemmas about the structure of Yugoslavia, which would be resolved not by his trust in such a state but by the tangle of international relations at the end of the First World War. In the resolution of the dilemma of whether that state should be Serbian or Yugoslav, England played a decisive role, out of its own interests. It did not suit it that an expanded and strong Serbia would become a Russian "entrance hall" in the Balkans and a corridor to the Adriatic Sea.

Compared to Skerlić, Belić, and Cvijić, Slobodan Jovanović's views on Yugoslav thought are more rational and well-reasoned. While Skerlić maintains that Serbs and Croats are one people, Jovanović emphasized in his late works that their idea of political solidarity "is not the consequence of some special feeling of ethnic unity, but, on the contrary, they aligned that unity all the more strongly the more the political circumstances directed them toward joint work".[34] This means: they were not brought together by excessive closeness, but by interest or, more precisely, the political "thought to unite against the Habsburg monarchy as against a common enemy".[35] The idea of ethnic unity thus became the path to the overthrow of the weakened empire. However, when it was later necessary to build a common state on the basis of the same unity, "that foundation proved neither firm nor secure".[36] This is the essence, but also the problem of the Yugoslav idea. What created a particular problem or obstacle to unity and a common state were "differences in religion, in general culture, in historical traditions".[37] Culture is a factor that, to a certain extent, unites, but also separates related peoples, that is, makes a difference between the Yugoslav, Serbian and Croatian national ideas. This is probably why among the Serbs and Croats who advocated for Yugoslavia, "there is a special national, either Serbian or Croatian consciousness as an inherited feeling, and what they call Yugoslav consciousness is not a true national consciousness, but something that would be more accurately called a political ideology".[38] It was difficult to build unity, a common culture and a state on that. The Yugoslav idea, built on then-modern European standards, followed the models of integration of related communities from which Italy and Germany were created in the 19th century. However, while these states were strengthened by internal unity, Yugoslavia was torn apart from the very beginning by various misunderstandings and conflicts.

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[34] S. Jovanović, *From History and Literature*, II, ibid., 555.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 555-556.
[37] Ibid., 556.
[38] Ibid., 557.

In the interwar history of ideas among Serbs, neohumanists also played an interesting role. Among them, Dimitrije Mitrinović, Vladimir Vujić, Miloš N. Đurić, Vladimir Velmar Janković (1895−1976), Justin (Popović) and Nikolaj (Velimirović) were of great importance. These were influential writers, philosophers and theologians who were dedicated to issues of Serbian spiritual culture, but also to the construction of a very special (supra)national, political and cultural pattern in our country. In their works, they seek and find the essence and meaning of this world primarily in spiritual chastity. Such a fortitude is a spirit that, in a critical attitude towards Westernization and the post-creation of modern man, seeks the right solutions, finding them in the values of the ancient—Balkan soul, universal virtues and ecumenical nationalism. It is interesting that the right-wing thought of Serbian neohumanists appeared and flowed in parallel with the activities of the Serbian elite on the civic left, which was close to rationalism and pragmatism, but not to the church, and that these two opposing schools of thought found a common denominator in Yugoslavism. Some were close to the scientific and educational, and the other to the intuitive, or more precisely, spiritual understanding of the world. For the former, Yugoslavism had its ideological reasons, and for the latter, spiritual identity reasons. There were also attempts to build a great synthesis by reconciling the rational and intuitive. Along with these attempts, the neohumanists focused on Yugoslav messianism as the cultural identity of our man. His mission denoted a collective soul or a particular virtue that led him from Serbianness to Yugoslavism and universal humanity. This spiritual and moral strength is the foundation of the primordial autochthony of the Balkan region. From the position of the *other*, Rebecca West (1892−1983) in her travelogue *Crno jagnje i sivi soko* (*The Black Lamb and the Gray Falcon*) (1941) finds in the original values of the old Balkan culture, including the sacrificial act of Prince Lazar (1329–1389) and the Kosovo Covenant as the highest ethical gesture, a possible alternative to the alienated and materialistic *brave new world*. Miloš Đurić and other Serbian neohumanists, in whom the national idea is integrated into a spiritual value of a higher order, think similarly.

The ideas of the neohumanists are also fully expressed in the works of Vladimir Velmar Janković. In his view, Western European culture is not close to the Serbs as the Byzantine civilization is close to them. He views these two cultural radiations through their differences. On one side are Rome, the Latin language, the Catholic Church, the Renaissance, the Reformation, rationality, positivism, industry and revolutions, and on the other Byzantium, the Greek language, the Orthodox faith, monarchy, administration and judiciary organized in the Byzantine manner, the harmony of heavenly and earthly power, and

art that reveals its Renaissance spirit even before the Western European Renaissance. That is why he emphasizes that the collective mentality of the Serbs is closer to the Byzantine, and since the arrival of the Turks closer to the Oriental than to the Western European world. Starting from Nikolaj Velimirović's idea that the Balkan man is above East and West, Janković puts the new, South Slavic culture and its uniqueness in the foreground. However accurate the assessments are that our culture uncritically takes over the cultural values of Western Europe, his thoughts about our new, South Slavic culture are largely questionable, contradictory and unachievable. Other neohumanists also found in it an answer to the crisis of European culture in the 20th century. In their messianism, the ideas of Orthodoxy, mysticism, theosophy, Slavophilism, but also anti-communism and criticism of parliamentary democracy[39] touch each other "in new, sometimes eclectic, contexts". This eclectic building on the sand of humanistic theories turned out to be a noble illusion of thinkers who tried to refine or even improve our world with a new spirit.

After World War II, thinkers gathered around neohumanistic ideas were no longer together. For various, primarily ideological reasons, most of them were scattered (Dimitrije Mitrinović, Vladimir Vujić, Vladimir Velmar Janković and Nikolaj Velimirović). Justin Popović was exiled, i.e., removed from public life to the Ćelije monastery near Lajkovac. Only Miloš N. Đurić remained in the public eye, working as a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. Although committed to the national idea, their thought was nevertheless primarily dedicated to Yugoslav messianism, just as in the interwar period, education and art, and to a certain extent the entire Serbian culture, were Yugo-centric. In this respect, things did not change even after the Second World War, with the exception that the interwar culture was interpreted as class-based since then, while for the new authorities, the post-war culture was classless or socialist. Yugoslavism as an idea and social phenomenon before and after that war was not the same. However, in both its forms, it was created in a cultural milieu that persisted more in building a new and anational model of culture than in nurturing national values.

The reasons for this could be the fact that ideological, and even philosophical, or general humanistic considerations in some social circles, especially among the elite, were stronger than the Serbian spiritual tradition. In the interwar period, this could also be influenced by a weaker religious life as a part of identity, especially among the intelligentsia, and especially among prominent and influential agnostics.

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[39] Vladimir Dimitrijević, *Jugoslovenski mesijanizam i srpsko stanovište: ogled iz istorije identiteta* (*Yugoslav Messianism and the Serbian Point of View: A Review from the History of Identity*), Institut za književnost i umetnost, Beograd, 2022, 55.

The time after World War II, due to atheistic ideology and the additional collapse of patriarchal ethics, weakened Orthodox spirituality, its values, and morality. Some authors critically viewed this situation, resisting the imposition of patterns of ideological culture. Branko Ćopić was the first to do so with *Jeretička priča* (*A heretical story*) (1950). Later, in their own way, writers Dobrica Ćosić and Borislav Pekić, among others, followed him with their novels, memoir prose, and essays. However, this matter is quite complex and contradictory. This is also vividly illustrated by the paradox that the later so-called father of the nation, Dobrica Ćosić, until the mid-1960s, viewed the Serbian idea with suspicion. He confirmed this attitude with his political activities, work in culture and literature. Until 1965, Ćosić consistently advocated the Yugoslav idea and the strong federal status of the state union in ideology and politics. Along this line, he was an opponent of the weakening of the statehood of Yugoslavia, at a time when attempts to replace federal relations with confederal ones and to loosen the strong ties in the structure of the state mechanism became increasingly obvious. These ideas mainly came from Slovenia and Croatia.

Dobrica Ćosić carefully recorded all these processes in his *Piščevi zapisi* (*Writer's notes*), including his role in the political and cultural life of Yugoslavia and Serbia. It is clear from everything that he notices signs of separatism and nationally colored ideas that initially come from several former republics. Ćosić also mentions specific figures: in Slovenia, these are the politician Edvard Kardelj (1910–1979) and academic Josip Vidmar (1985–1992), from whom he heard as early as 1958 that Slovenia intended to become independent, and in Croatia, a special place was held by the writer Miroslav Krleža, an important "patron and spiritual father of contemporary Greater Croatia",[40] and then Franjo Tuđman, then head of the Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement. Tuđman, from a position of leadership, gives Krleža "exact" data: for example, that "only forty to sixty thousand Serbs"[41] were killed in Jasenovac. Two other political portraits are also picturesque—the Macedonian Lazar Kolishevski (1914–2000), a politician for whom Ćosić emphasizes that his "nation is an obsession",[42] and the Albanian Fadil Hoxha (1916–2001), a "true Albanian communist"[43] who sees Kosovo as the "Piedmont of Greater Albania".[44]

The figure of Josip Broz stands out in this group portrait, towards whom Ćosić has a conflicting attitude: he is a great statesman and

[40] D. Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi* (*Writer's notes*) (1951–1968), ibid., 247.
[41] Ibid., 230.
[42] Ibid., 159.
[43] Ibid., 224.
[44] Ibid.

creator of the new Yugoslavia, he is responsible for the country's international reputation and is aware of the internal problems that are tearing the country apart, but he is also weak to prevent these processes. In addition to all this, Ćosić shows respect and even admiration for the great leader. Defending Aleksandar Ranković, who was removed in the 1966 conspiracy, Ćosić does so in a letter to Josip Broz, saying that, even after everything, he will be loyal to Tito, as he "has always been".[45] Ćosić's contradictory attitude towards Broz, his personality and merits, is not just a matter of the writer's personal perception. This attitude also reveals the state of Yugoslav society at the time, the status that Serbia had in that society, and to some extent the personality of the Serbian writer. It is clear from everything that Ćosić, as the "leader of party cultural policy in Serbia",[46] was close to centralism and a strong state, convinced that decentralization would lead to its ruin. Aleksandar Ranković held the same positions. Like Ćosić, he too was on the hard Yugoslav line, which began to go astray in the 1960s.

This is not just about the inglorious fate of two Serbian, i.e., Yugoslav politicians, one from the very top of the state, and the other, a party cultural bearer, who became victims of a communist conspiracy. It is also about the fact that through their actions it is seen that they, unlike the aforementioned leaders from other republics, do not put national but common social and class interests in the foreground. In such a political and cultural milieu, it was very difficult for the national, or Serbian, idea to find expression. And when it began to come to life among thinking people, it was more a consequence of a reaction to the unequal Serbian position than the need to develop and research national thought. This means that at the Brijuni plenum, Ranković was removed as the only competitor to Broz. However, the reaction to his political liquidation had a different tone since the Serbian people, as Ćosić himself emphasized, saw in him the "incarnation of Serbism"[47] and the "state symbol of Serbia".[48] That is why they forgave him for the "terror of Udba, ransoms, peasant labor cooperatives".[49] Memory was often, and even at that time, not held in high esteem by Serbs.

The political fall of Dobrica Ćosić had similar reasons as his elevation to the "father of the nation". As a kind of paradox, the national idea came to the forefront, as the main issue, although both Ranković and Ćosić were much more Yugoslavs inclined to socialism at the time of their fall than all those who removed them from office. The staged

[45] Ibid., 254.
[46] Ibid., 15.
[47] Ibid., 263.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

trial against Ranković was only intended to justify in public the verdict that had already been passed earlier, which was accepted, without fuss or resistance, by Serbs in high party and state positions. Coming from a cultural and political background, Ćosić did not accept the verdict of the Brijuni coup of 1966. After that, in the shadow of his youthful ideals, in public appearances and in *Piščevi zapisi* (*Writer's notes*), the political course increasingly changed, moving from the Yugoslav to the Serbian idea. This direction would be confirmed by his novels and documentary prose as visible evidence of the insidious importance and role of a biography in literary work. That role shows that Ćosić, even as a Yugoslav communist, in his novels "expressed the historical experience of the Serbian people and the constant positive patriarchal mentality through several generations to the most recent events".[50] This contains the full *truth* and the aforementioned contradiction of Ćosić's prose.

As a socio-political activist, a member of the Central Committee of the Serbian Communist Party and a respected writer, Ćosić persisted in his youthful ideals, which centered on Yugoslavia and democratic socialism, not Serbianness and right-wing ideas. Things were changing in the country, but so were the views of its leading figures. It was becoming increasingly clear, as was clearly evident from the actions of Kardelj, Bakarić, and even Broz, that for some politicians Yugoslavia was a transitional state, and that a way needed to be found to restructure it, which meant confederalizing and decomposing it. Ćosić was on one side of this dispute, and Krleža was on the completely other side. The difference between the cultural and political conditions of Serbs and Croats was also in the fact that the Croats had a common position on national issues and an extremely respected leader—Miroslav Krleža. As an institution, he supported these priorities, while the Serbs did not seriously address the same issues nor did they have a leader of Krleža's importance and influence.

All this is accompanied by two paradoxes. Despite everything he did for the national idea among Croats, citizen Krleža remained unreliable and even "suspicious" to Croats, while the Yugoslav communist Ćosić, *through negligence*, became the "father of the nation". These paradoxes eloquently speak of what was happening to the Serbian idea during the second half of the 20th century. In Serbian politics and culture at that time, there were few who could match Kardelj, Bakarić or Krleža. Although great in his work and reputation, Andrić was not and could not be him, "a Croat by origin, but a Serb by culture and citizenship".[51] A combination of circumstances or political fate took Ćosić into their

[50] Z. Konstantinović, ibid., 116.
[51] D. Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi* (*Writer's notes*) (1951–1968), ibid., 357.

own hands for that role. He was very close to the influential philosophical circle that consisted of the Praxisists. Among them were Lj. Tadić, M. Marković, S. Stojanović, Z. Golubović, V. Korac, G. Petrovic and M. Kangrga. They developed critical thought of a left orientation, and were more interested in social, class and ethical issues than national issues. Thus, in such an environment, Serbian thought was almost left aside. The philosopher Mihailo Djuric was not in that circle. Reacting to the constitutional amendments of 1971, he recognized in them a danger for Yugoslavia and for Serbs living outside Serbia. Partly nationally aware, this concern, expressed in public speeches and in published works, was the reason for Djuric to be prosecuted and sentenced to prison.

The reckoning with Cosic, due to his support for Aleksandar Rankovic, had a different outcome. Ćosić's descent from the political scene lasted from 1966, when Ranković was removed from power at the Brijuni plenum, to 1968, when Ćosić was left without state and party positions. From then on, his political vocabulary changed, that is, his public narrative, in which Serbs, the Serbian nation and Serbian identity are mentioned ever more frequently. The Serbian idea in that narrative was less a sign of old ideological populism, and more of a cultivated and modernized national thought. Therefore already from the Brijuni plenum, and then from his own fall from power, he builds his project of the Serbian future. He says: "if our traditional, folkloric, Orthodox, Kosovo mythical, ideological national consciousness is not modernized and socialized—the Serbian people will be spiritually crippled and deprived of a creative collective goal; they will be incapable of integrating into modern civilization."[52] The people themselves, culture and the cultivation of national consciousness in such an idea are the condition for a new Serbian paradigm. Related to this is the issue of cultural gathering: "People from the other side of the Sava, Zlatibor and Drina should see in Serbia and Belgrade knowledge, progress, culture, generosity, democracy, and not hegemony and love of power".[53] This also reflects the connection between culture and national thought. During that time, until May 1, 1971, when he resigned from membership, Ćosić was a member of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. He said that thought matures over time, as his actions witnessed various paradoxes. How else can we understand that as the "father of the nation" he was still obsessed with Yugoslavism. This contradiction reveals the intellectual weakness of the Serbs. Slobodan Jovanović also discussed it,

[52] Dobrica Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi* (*Writer's notes*) (1969−1980), Volume II, Book 14, edited by Ana Ćosić Vukić, "Filip Višnjić", Beograd, 2001, 10.

[53] Ibid., 12

unsuccessfully trying to rationally resolve the Yugoslav question and complex Serbo-Croatian relations.

This question would be raised in a dramatic manner as early as the 1980s. For all those reasons, especially because of the endangerment of the Serbian people outside the borders of Serbia, but also the separatist intentions of the Albanians in Serbia, at the Assembly of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) in May 1985, academician Ivan Maksimović (1924–2007) proposed that this institution draft a document (*Memorandum*) on the situation in Yugoslavia and make it available to all those who conduct state affairs. The following month, the presidency of this institution established a committee, or rather a commission of sixteen members, with the task of preparing this material. Dušan Kanazir, president (1981–1994), and Antonije Isaković, vice-president of the SANU, were elected to head it. The *Memorandum* was a failed attempt to examine the crisis in the state in all its aspects (society, governance, political system, economy, market, interethnic relations, the position of Serbs in the federation, the dangers of confederalism, the relationship between national and class, the abolition of the post-Broz system or authoritarianism, the introduction of democratic institutions, the survival of the state). In that document, its authors pointed to the need to find compromise solutions in a methodology that would be scientifically based. However, even before that complex task was completed in the envisaged procedure and the document was officially published, it reached the public. The serious critical debate was soon replaced by a pogrom atmosphere in which this document, primarily under the influence of the party leadership, was condemned as a political pamphlet. Two positions prevailed: according to one, the document was interpreted as a national program and negatively evaluated, and according to the other, it was interpreted as an attempt to find a solution to the crisis in the country. The public discussion about the *Memorandum* turned into an affair. Therefore, the commission for its preparation at its last session (1986) decided to stop work on the document, and it never became an official document of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

In the social contradictions of the second half of the 20th century, the Serbian question was neglected until the *Memorandum*. More precisely, it was forgotten until the Croats, in the early 1970s, showed their willingness to leave the Yugoslav community. Finding a basis for all this in political, identity and cultural reasons, the demands for secession of the Croats had a special foothold in the intention to obtain their own state. The previous one served them to prepare and implement their plan, with expanded territories. Everything was done with the visible cooperation of the Croatian political, religious and cultural elite. After

the *Memorandum*, influential Serbs, and dissidents among them, had long discussions about democratization, changes in society and the need to preserve Yugoslavia. At the beginning of the 1990s, when the Slovenes and Croats had completed their state affairs, the Serbs only then put such affairs on the agenda, and without the consent of the political leadership and elite. Instead of being a community in which Serbs, along with other peoples throughout the region, would live normally, Yugoslavia was becoming the "cause of Serbian discontinuity".[54] However, the Serbs only realized this when the common state began to disintegrate.

With all the contradictions and disputes that the *Memorandum* raised at a sensitive social moment, it also raised the question of the activities of the SANU, and other scientific institutions among Serbs. Deviating from the idea that the Academy does not engage in politics, since apoliticality has been one of its basic principles since its founding (1887), this institution nevertheless took up serious national and political work in the mid-1980s. It was only when the one-party system began to collapse, thus shaking the party state and the very foundation of Yugoslavia, that the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Serbia became involved in political life with the *Memorandum*. Considering Belić's views on the Academy between the two world wars, it is easy to see that he advocated for the "purely scientific character"[55] of this institution in which the scientific approach was separated from political and educational work.[56] However, when one examines his speeches written after 1945, one can see in them an emphatically affirmative attitude towards Josip Broz, the social system, and the values on which that system was based. While Belić's scholarly ancestors from Serbian highbrow society were prepared to think critically and write about the then government and rulers, Belić was beyond measure in support of Broz's regime. His successors as president of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, until the end of the 20th century, were completely politically correct towards the ruling regimes. This means that the national question, including the Serbian idea, was on the margin of that institution's interests. The *Memorandum* was an exception. Remaining unfinished and without an official version, whether due to external pressures or internal divisions within the Academy, this document also reveals its contradictory attitude towards important national issues.

When, after all this, the Croats separated from the Serbs and from Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the Serbo-Croat question remained only

[54] Momčilo Subotić, *Srpsko pitanje danas* (*The Serbian Question Today*), Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2008, 179.

[55] A. Belić, *Iz istorije ustanova* (*From the History of Institutions*), ibid., 81.

[56] Ibid., 322.

Serbian. As Ćosić testifies in *Pišćevi zapisi* (*Writer's notes*), it was discussed at *slavas* (patron saint's days), since it had not been on the agenda of Serbian institutions and political forums for decades. The issue would only be discussed sporadically during the time when Ćosić, from June 1992 to June 1993, was the president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Once again in a state position and trying to help the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, he would only then understand the full complexity of the Serbian question. Ćosić also confides this fatal realization in his diary: "According to historical experience, the Serbs are a disunited people. [...] This disunity in historical experience, along with the current differences, can be fatal for the future of the Serbian people as a whole".[57] The fatality that Ćosić speaks of influenced the fate of the Serbs in the 20th century and the attempt to resolve the Serbian issue. Only at the end of that century, with an unfavorable outcome, would it be placed on the agenda of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. If politicians, in their forums, did not want to deal with this issue systematically, their role was taken over by scientists and other reputable creators. The elite in Serbia, with its ideas about the need for the democratization of society, did not find support from the state leadership, because it was still based on old ideological models. The lack of understanding of political leaders for the changes in Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and even in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, would also have an adverse impact on the resolution of the Serbian issue. The fact that the Serbs failed to align their national interests with the interests of powerful, primarily Western, states will also have adverse consequences. This was not easy when you know that these very countries, in their strategies, gathered around them Balkan countries ready to enter Euro-Atlantic integration, and thus, at the expense of the West, potentially clashed with the newly created Russian Federation in the new alliance (1991).

In the meantime the Croats and Slovenes had already completed the affairs of long preparation, and then disassociation and exit from Yugoslavia which continued to be an obsession for certain Serbs. After the *Memorandum*, up until the first parliamentary elections, this was the official opinion of the state and party forums in Serbia. Things would not change significantly in the last decade of the 20th century. This is also demonstrated by the attempt to create a Serbian National Council, whose Initiative Committee prepared a draft *Declaration on Serbian National Unity* at its sessions in 1991. However, due to disagreements between party leaders, the Serbian National Council was

[57] Dobrica Ćosić, *Pišćevi zapisi* (*Writer's notes*) (1992−1993), Volume IV, Book 25, edited by Ana Ćosić Vukić, "Filip Višnjić", Beograd, 2004, 242-243.

not formed, nor was this *Declaration* ever made official. In the draft of that unadopted document, Yugoslavia appeared as a reorganized federal state of equal peoples and free citizens. There was also an intention to institutionalize the work of the National Council to the extent that it would include "representatives of the National Assembly of Serbia, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Matica srpska, the Matica iseljenika, the Serbian National Council in Croatia, the Serbian National Council in Bosnia and HerzegovinaThis means that the attempt to gather representatives of state bodies, then the largest parties (SPS, SPO, DS), scientific-cultural institutions and the Church, as well as prominent independent intellectuals, and make them act in a joint manner, did not yield a result at a turning-point historical moment. The rivalry of individuals and the separate, or particular, interests of the parties were more important than the Serbian question and national unity. With these Serbo-Serbian problems, i.e., discord, along with other, "external" difficulties, the Serbs welcomed the dramatic years of the Yugoslav unraveling.

They were unprepared for those years, so they tried to solve the problems that should have been solved in previous decades. Since the beginning of the 1990s was also the beginning of the renewed multi-party system in Yugoslavia and Serbia, various parties with a national predicate incorporated the Serbian question into their programs. Thus, in 1991, Kosta Čavoški, writing the national program of the Serbian Liberal Party, emphasized that in the newly created circumstances, the Serbian people as a whole or for the most part should live under one national roof. Party programs and the positions of the intellectual elite are one thing, and the will of the people and the state is something else. Without their combined energy, none of these tasks can be done properly. That is why there could be no practical benefit from the two congresses of Serbian intellectuals held in 1992 and 1994. Nevertheless, in considering the national idea and culture, they are worthy of attention. That topic focuses on ideology, ideas and cultural models. From the presentations at the 1994 conference, the statements of Milorad Ekmečić and Mihailo Marković have been of particular importance.

Ekmečić views the Serbian question in a broader, or rather civilizational, framework. He sees Europe as a space divided by a border that divides eastern and western civilizations. This border runs from the southern Montenegrin coast to the confluence of the Drina and Sava rivers, then moves along the Danube, and from the middle of the Romanian border it goes vertically north, separating the western part of Romania, Ukraine and Belarus, and continues towards the eastern parts of Latvia and Estonia, reaching the Baltic Sea. This civilizational

border also largely divides Serbian lands. The trouble is that this border is political and interesting, but also a line of frequent conflicts in the past. When it comes to the Balkans, exactly such a conflict was opened in the early 1990s. It is therefore not surprising, as Milorad Ekmečić states, that the Vatican "was very active in the Yugoslav crisis, even recognizing the independence of the two Catholic republics two days before Europe, on January 15, 1992."[58] In addition to political reasons, the secession of Croatia with Vatican-German support was also a consequence of Western Christian and Eastern Orthodox differences.

When the federal state had already begun to disintegrate, Slovenia would secede from Yugoslavia, then Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then Macedonia at that time. After this happened, and the bloody civil, some say religious, war had begun and ended, the "germ of a long-term split along ideological and political watersheds from the earlier Chetnik and Partisan times"[59] was once again inserted into Serbian territory. The new Serbo-Serbian conflict would make the Serbian question even more complex. Unlike Ekmečić, who reinforces his own views with a cultural and political map of Europe and the thesis of a clash of cultures, Mihailo Marković mainly deals with the principles of Serbian national policy. However, like Ekmečić, he, among other things, emphasized that "maximum engagement in the spiritual and cultural integration of the entire Serbian people"[60] was necessary. After the disappearance of the state community in which they had lived until then, Serbs saw in cultural integration the possibility of preserving their identity and mutual closeness.

Although well-established, Ekmečić's and Marković's ideas on the Serbian question and national unity have not withstood the test of time in some aspects. Therefore, Ekmečić, along with the basic text from the aforementioned 1994 meeting, published an amendment to it that is a year younger and concerns the unfavorable Serbo-Serbian relations that had arisen in the meantime. In that year, 1995, it was very clear that for some time the Serbian question had been closed in an unfavorable way and that in the main matters the spirit of the resolution from the 1994 meeting had not been realized. Everything shows that intentions and national programs are one thing, and real events and intra-Serbian relations, the complex of international circumstances and the political interests of the great powers are something completely different. Unlike

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[58] Milorad Ekmečić, "O jedinstvu srpskog naroda danas (On the Unity of the Serbian People Today)", in: *Srpsko pitanje, danas* (*The Serbian Question, Today*), Zbornik, Drugi kongres srpskih intelektuaalaca (Second Congress of Serbian Intellectuals, Grupa izdavača), Beograd, 1995, 23.

[59] Ibid., 38.

[60] Mihailo Marković, "Načela srpske nacionalne politike (Principles of Serbian National Policy)", ibid., 88.

the Balkan Wars, then the First and Second World Wars, the Serbs in the wars of the 1990s did not have reliable allies, and even less powerful protectors. That is why the outcome could not have been good for the Serbs, as it all adversely affected their position at the beginning of the new century, as well as the future of the Serbian community.

Things become even clearer when viewed in a historical perspective. This approach shows that from the middle of the 19th century until the end of the 20th century, the Serbs' attempt to resolve their national question in the political public of Europe, and even in their surroundings, was given different names. The most frequently mentioned is the "Greater Serbian hegemony". This name was used to designate any "stronger expression of Serbian national individuality, any greater manifestation of Serbian consciousness, culture and political aspirations".[61] Throughout the 20th century, the Serbs showed much greater interest in creating a common, Yugoslav state than in their own national state. But, despite this, this qualification was used or abused even when Serbia "was without a state identity within Yugoslavia, and even today, when it still has no defined state borders, and the Serbian people have not even remotely resolved their national question".[62] This state of affairs with the borders of Serbia at the end of the 20th century convincingly testifies that, regardless of the stories about Greater Serbian hegemony, in that century the Serbs worked more for other peoples in the South Slavic area than for their own benefit.

Literature also plays a great role in creating models of values within a national culture. The models are comprised of the works of Saint Sava, Dositej Obradović, Petar Petrović Njegoš, and even the folk epic poem. This is confirmed by Danko Popović's *Knjiga o Milutinu* (*Book of Milutin*) (1985). It is a model in that, through the story of the main character and narrator, it testifies not only to his experience, but also to the essence of recent Serbian history. Its hero, as Zoran Konstantinović noted, fought for "ideals, which, however, turn out to be illusions".[63] Milutin himself is not to blame for this, but those who led him. Konstantinović draws attention to another character flaw, citing fragments of the book *Kao civilno lice u ratu na Balkanu* (*As a Civilian in the Balkan War*) by the Austrian writer Franz Theodor Csokor (1885–1969), who witnessed some dramatic breakdowns in our country. From this he draws the conclusion that "the peculiarity of the Serbian people is that they feel first and only think later".[64] This is a flaw that Serbs paid

[61] Čedomir Popov, *Velika Srbija. Stvarnost i mit* (*Greater Serbia. Reality and Myth*), Izdavačka knjižarnica Zorana Stojanovića, Sremski Karlovci—Novi Sad, 2007, 9.
[62] Ibid., 10.
[63] Z. Konstantinović, ibid., 169.
[64] See also: ibid., 170.

very dearly for in the 20th century. And it had a negative impact on the attempt to resolve the Serbian question. The clash of different cultures is sometimes reflected through it.

In addition to all that creates possible friction in the aforementioned phenomena, slightly different views say that culture is characterized by a spirit of tolerance. When it comes to Serbs, this also concerns "relations with other peoples. As a European people, Serbs should regulate these relations on the basis of those essential values that constitute European identity, but not on the basis of the desires and interests of the dominant powers of the European continent".[65] The peoples of Europe inherit Judeo-Christian civilization. Its heritage is the European cultural circle to which Serbian culture also belongs. Although it is in that matrix, Serbian culture, as well as the cultures of other Orthodox peoples, reveal certain peculiarities in comparison with the cultural models of Western Europe. These peculiarities and differences constitute the spiritual value that Ekmečić discusses. Marković speaks of the values of the European identity that should not be shaped on the basis of the interests of the dominant powers on our continent. These interests also determine their attitude towards culture. When political or other interests prevail, culture and cultural differences come to them as a reason, incentive or excuse for various types of "subversions" towards those who do not share those same values. Awareness of this, reinforced by historical experiences, affects Serbian culture as well. It is also understood as a guiding thought that allows for the building of one's own values and identity that ensures a more complete integration of Serbs into the European cultural circle. By connecting Western rationality and Eastern Orthodox spirituality, Serbian culture, in its originality, forms a good link between these two cultural entities in Europe. On that particularity, already from Dositej and Vuk in the new age, it grounds a new tradition and modernity throughout the entire 20th century. No matter where the Serbs lived, their spirit, as Stojan Novaković wrote in 1908, found a common denominator "in faith, in books, in language". Calling for the spiritual unity of the people, Novaković believed that it can be achieved, above all, through culture. Thus, the Serbian question is refracted and, in a way, being resolved through culture.

Translated from Serbian by
Vid Kecman

[65] M. Marković, ibid., 91.

JELENA MARIĆEVIĆ BALAĆ

A FLIGHT THROUGH PROSE LANDS OF PAVIĆ'S BYZANTIUM

Abstract: The paper examines Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars* through the symbolic, poetic, and cultural horizon of Byzantium. Rather than treating Byzantine heritage merely as a set of intertextual references, the study argues that Pavić's "revival of the Byzantine novel" should be understood as a deeper poetics of form, time, image, body, and word. Particular attention is devoted to Byzantine encyclopedism, the lexicon form, the motif of eating or drinking the book, the allegorization of the body as parchment, flag, and letter, as well as to the meanings of icons, iconoclasm, birds, and the mysterious fruit *ku*. Through these motifs, Pavić's novel is interpreted as a vessel of lost and reconstructed knowledge, in which poetry, dream, theology, and memory become inseparable. The paper shows that Byzantium in Pavić's work functions as a sign of Serbian literary continuity, European belonging, and universal artistic value. In this sense, Byzantium appears not only as heritage, but as a living bequest: a source of renewal, warning, and imaginative transformation.

Keywords: Milorad Pavić; *Dictionary of the Khazars*; Byzantium; Byzantine poetics; Serbian literature; encyclopedism; iconoclasm; symbolic body; literary memory.

After 1453, many Byzantine scholars, thinkers, and artists fled to Italy and other Mediterranean countries, which partly caused the flourishing of the Renaissance in the West. Thus, through Byzantine émigrés the West discovered Antiquity and underwent a cultural renaissance, whereas Serbian literature, already in contact with Byzantine, and therefore classical, heritage, in a sense had its own 'renaissance' in the Middle Ages.

By declaring himself a Byzantine, the writer simultaneously suggested belonging to both Serbian and European culture in the broadest sense. His work cannot be molded into recognizable or simple patterns. To be Byzantine means to be a living symbol that unites the Balkans and Europe, that does not renounce its values, but integrates them and shapes them into a universal value. It is precisely Pavić's appeal for a "universal story" that was underlined by Jovan Delić in the chapter of *Hazarske prizme (Khazar Prisms)* and with the more than suggestive title "Serbian Neo-Byzantine":

> "we must find a way to, while remaining our own, tell a universal story, so that others can understand us. [...] that [is] the natural need of every literature that does not want to die. [...] What path leads us to the universal, without at the same time abandoning ourselves? One of the answers is belonging to Byzantine civilization, unfortunately, a former, but still 'belonging'" (Delić 1991: 295).[1]

Milorad Pavić's Byzantine perspectives have been written about so far, however, studies entirely dedicated to this topic are surprisingly few, considering the writer's frequent emphasis on the importance of this civilization and culture. Ala Tatarenko (2013: 163–172) and Aleksandar Jerkov (2013: 143–162) often point out in their articles the importance of Byzantine heritage, both for Pavić and for other writers of Serbian postmodernism. The Russian Anna Ivanovna Demina made an interesting contribution to the topic of the Byzantine concept of the sign in Milorad Pavić's *Hazarski rečnik (Dictionary of the Khazars)* (Ivanovna Demina 2007: 38–44), while Marina Kanić (2013) in her doctoral thesis *Byzantium in Serbian Postmodernist Prose: (Borislav Pekić, Milorad Pavić, Goran Petrović and Radoslav Petković)* also covered Pavić's work, emphasizing the sacral meaning of letters and numbers, "the Byzantine principle of construction as the key principle of his poetics", the theme of the apocalypse, iconoclasm, and the renewal of spirituality (cf. Kanić 2013: 33–94; Kanić 2015: 575–592). Finally, Miron Flašar, a distinguished classical philologist, published a very useful and inspiring article, primarily on the function and semantics of late antique motifs in Pavić's novel *Unutrašnja strana vetra ili Roman o Heri i Leandru (The Inner Side of the Wind or the Novel of Hera and Leander)* (1991). Key insights include the main character's dreams, which correspond to the representations, parables, and teachings from the *Fiziolog (Physiologus)*, a template in the form of the late

[1] Delić 1991: 295, my translation. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

antique epic of Musaeus Grammaticus from the 5th century about Hera and Leander, and the striking motif of the severed head, contextualized with antique poetry, the legend of St. John the Baptist, and Eastern tales (cf. Flašar 1995: 83–91).

Based on the research work done so far, it would be worthwhile to expand the field of research and interpretation of Milorad Pavić's Byzantium. By explicitly calling *Hazarski rečnik (Dictionary of the Khazars)* a "revival of the Byzantine novel," the writer suggested that the novel should be viewed precisely within this framework. In this regard, it is probably not so much a question of looking for models and intertextual relations with Byzantine literature, which, of course, exist, but rather that the "revival" was perhaps carried out in a poetic sense. The writer, being a Byzantinist, wrote the novel as a Byzantine writer would have done, guided by his understanding and experience of the world, God, art, philosophy, and history.

BYZANTINE ENCYCLOPEDISM

The subtitle of *Hazarski rečnik (Dictionary of the Khazars)*, "novel-lexicon" and the dictionary form have been interpreted in a variety of ways in previous criticism – from disdain to enthusiasm, and even insistence on an "unambiguous" view of the lexicographic form as a representation of the "essential expression of postmodernist poetics" (Olah 2012: 101). Jovan Delić places the novel in a comparative context, comparing it with Vuk's *Srpski rječnik (Serbian Dictionary)* (1818), but also with Andreas Okopenko's *Leksikon-roman jednog sentimentalnog putovanja na susret eksportera u Dudenu (Lexicon-novel of a sentimental journey to meet an exporter in Duden)* (1970), published in Salzburg (Delić 1991: 270–271).

Petar Pijanović (1998: 146–153) believes that the model of the dictionary has been parodied as an Enlightenment belief that by collecting fragments one can know the whole world, and compares Pavić's "spirit of encyclopedism" with that of Eco and Borges, while Aleksandar Jerkov views Pavić's novel in the light of the ideal Book that Danilo Kiš dreamed of, and the novels of their contemporaries:

> "Grobnica za Borisa Davidoviča' (The Tomb for Boris Davidovich) and' Enciklopedija mrtvih' (Encyclopedia of the Dead) will come one step closer to the prose technique necessary to write such a Book. Kiš, however, will not try to leave his prose to chance, or to alphabetical order. That is why his poetic program will remain open and will be inherited by Serbian prose of the 1970s and 1980s. Borislav Pekić, in 'Kako upokojiti vampira' (How to Put a Vampire to Rest), writes a barely concealed

encyclopedia of Western metaphysics from Plato to Nietzsche, Vidosav Stevanović writes an alphabet in a completely opposite style in 'Nišči', rooted in local images of customs and beliefs, and Bora Ćosić, with modernist experimentation with the text in 'Tutori', creates a kind of genealogical dictionary from a family novel. Ten years after the publication of Kiš's interview, however, a novel appeared in the form of a dictionary to which one part of Kiš's description could refer" (Jerkov 1990: 176).

Ala Tatarenko sees "the choice of the form of the lexicon as a potential hypertext" as the key to the meaning of the form, but she also makes an observation that is very interesting for the Byzantine point of view: "Methodius thinks that Homer and the prophet Elijah were contemporaries. [...] The parallel is not accidental: the 'Iliad' has long been considered an encyclopedia of the life of ancient Greece. [...] The structure of Homer's epic is connected with the alphabet: each of the 24 Greek letters corresponds to a separate chant" (Tatarenko 2013a: 183). The mixing of ancient and Christian concepts is typical, namely, for Byzantine literature. For the Byzantines, Homer meant "a great anthology of verses for educated people" (Beck 1967: 176), and if we add that the verses from the Odyssey are cited in *Hazarski rečnik (Dictionary of the Khazars)*, and that they are read alternately by Petkutin and Kalina (Pavić 2012: 45), we can assume that the semanticization of the lexical form of the novel should perhaps be sought in the heritage of Byzantine culture.

Works of Byzantine literature were preserved, in fact, in the form of lexicons or encyclopaedias, without which "antiquity itself would have remained forgotten" (Beck 1967: 54). Examples include Photius's *Library (Myriovivlon),* Porphyrogenitus's books on peoples and ceremonies, and the Lexicon *Suida* or *Suda*, which allowed for the reconstruction of knowledge, concepts, and lost literary works (Beck 1967: 60–61).[2] Thanks to the collection of texts in lexicons, it was possible to organize their copying and dissemination, so that this practice is considered encyclopaedic as "the first Byzantine humanism" (Rosenquist 2014: 74). Extracts or excerpts from the lexicon had the Latin name *Excerpta*, which would be used to refer to the entire collection (cf. Rosenquist 2014: 94), while a collection of, say, collected poems in the Palatine would be known as *Appendix Planudea* (Beck 1967: 136). In this context, we can also consider Pavić's novel-lexicon *Hazarski rečnik (Dictionary of the Khazars)*, which, perhaps due to the dictates of

[2] Petar Pijanović also mentions that Byzantine writers were polyhistorians and encyclopedists whom Pavić could potentially have emulated. Cf. Pijanović 1998: 147.

the lexical form, represents "a reconstruction of the original Daubmanus edition from 1691." (Pavić 2012: 7). Also, it seems important to note that the novel ends with "Appendix I" and "Appendix II," which could neutrally denote the Latin word for appendix, but, given that the Byzantine *Appendix* was a collection of poems, the question can be raised to what extent poetry is crucial for understanding the novel, as "Appendixes I and II" provide the final epilogue and resolution of the novel.

Princess Ateh is a poet, but, in addition to the verses attributed to her, there are also lyrical fragments by Moqadas al-Safer, then there are verses by Judah Halevi, Homer's verses from the Odyssey read by the in love Petkutin and Kalina, verses by the shaytan Ibn Hadrash who took away Princess Ateh's sex and made her forget all her poems, Cohen's verses sung in the manner of the Dubrovnik Petrarcans and dedicated to Efrosinia Lukarević, and a poem about Efrosinia's death that has been preserved in an Italian translation under the title "The Latin Maiden and the Vlach Voivode Dracula". It is noted that the poetry integrated into the novel relates to love, that lovers communicate with each other through poetry, but that, except in the case of the *Odyssey*, which is actually an epic, and Hadrash's demonic writings, that poetry is given in prose, as if retold or translated, because it could only have been preserved in that form. Also, these parts of the text are mostly highlighted in italics, and since it is noted that they are the only thing left from the original destroyed edition ("Two prayers of Princess Ateh have also been preserved in Greek translation, which were never canonized, but Daubmanus lists them as 'The Lord's Prayer' and 'Hail, Mary!' of the Khazar princess" – cf. Pavić 2012: 32), one gets the impression that the authentic lost *Hazarski rečnik (Dictionary of the Khazars)* was actually an anthology of collected poems:

> "Ateh was the first to compile a dictionary or encyclopedia of the Khazars with extensive information about their history, religion, and dream readers. All of this was written in a cycle of poems arranged in alphabetical order, and the polemics at the court of the Khazar ruler were described in poetic form. [...] Like yeast, the 'the Dictionary of the Khazars' then grew around of the princess's collection, which one source says was called 'On the Ages of Words'. If all of this were true, Princess Ateh would be the first writer of this book, its original creator. [...] Very little has survived from that original dictionary to this day, except for the sadness of one dog, which children transmit by imitating barking, to another dog" (Pavić 2012: 179).

This is why Yusuf Masudi also hunts for dreams with a song, initially accompanied by a lute:

> "He gathered several lute players and singers, like a hunting party, and taught them to sing and play according to his instructions. [...] They sang it in public places, in front of tekkes, in squares and by fountains, and the song became a living bait for those passersby who at night have Masudi's wild animal inside them" (Pavić 2012: 139–140).

In short, primarily love poetry that chases dreams is that (Byzantine) lost *Appendix*, which the lexical form has the task of collecting, preserving and reconstructing. In addition, Milorad Pavić, amazed at the great and diverse reception and theoretical interpretations of his works, uttered the following thought: "call me a testija (jug) if you want, just don't break me" (Pavić 2005: 13).[3] The novel would, therefore, have the (lexical) form of a jug or a pitcher, and if it were to break, the content of the novel-vessel would not be able to be preserved. The jug was mostly used to store wine, and if we consider that the 14th-century Iranian poet, Muhammad Shamsuddin Hafez, sang of wine as an allegory for the knowledge of God or a metaphor for religious ecstasy (Midlin 2017: 39), the poetry of the *Dictionary of the Khazars* could be implicitly understood as a form of the knowledge of God and ecstasy, especially in the context in which the novel is seen as the *Book-God*.[4] The lexicon is only the testija (jug) from which the reader is supposed to drink the wine of the novel.

DRINKING AND EATING A NOVEL

The idea could certainly have come to the writer from Byzantine literature. It is recorded, namely, that Romanos the Hymnographer (Romanos the Melodist) sang his works, but that at first he had no gift for either singing or writing. However, "one night the Most Holy Theotokos appeared to him in a dream, gave him a piece of paper and said: "Take this paper and eat it". As we can see, the order that Romanos received is identical to the orders described in Ezekiel and in the Apocalypse. "And behold, the saint," the hagiographer continues, "decided to open his mouth and drink (!) the paper. It was the feast of the Nativity of Christ" (Averintsev 1982: 225). The reader should therefore come to God precisely through dreams and poetry (i.e., symbolic wine), which he will drink or eat like Roman the Melodist, or which he will partake of, because wine is also the blood of Christ.

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[3] The writer made a similar statement in "My Portrait in the 21st Century", replacing the word "testija" (jug) with the more familiar synonym "bokal" (pitcher) (Pavić 2014: 199).

[4] "The Book is God" is the title of a conversation that Neda Valčić-Lazović conducted with Pavić in the TV show *Ostavština za budućnost*. The conversation was published in the journal *Književnost* (1991: 733–738).

The motif of eating a book is also commented on by Aleksandar Jerkov (1990: 23) when he writes about a segment of the novel *Predeo slikan čajem (Landscape Painted with Tea)* ("occasionally they would stop, take a rice paper book out of their pocket, tear off a page and eat it, skipping the pages that were important to them"), referring to Jesse Gellrich's *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages* (1985), which interprets the section from Apocalypse about book consumption as "the deconstruction of textuality". This is certainly the case when Pavić mentions an old man from the Dorfmer family in the *The Dictionary of the Khazars*, who is the main culprit for the destruction of the "golden copy" of Daubmanus's 1691 edition:

> "Fatty foods did not agree with the old man, so every day, when no one in the household was looking, he would secretly lower a page of the Khazar Dictionary into his bowl of soup to skim off the fat, and then throw away the greasy sheet. With that, before the members of the household even noticed, he had used up the "Lexicon Cosri". The same note says that the book had been decorated with illustrations, which the old man refused to use because they spoiled the taste of the soup. Those illustrated pages of the dictionary were the only ones that remained preserved to this day." (Pavić 2012: 23).

The "deconstruction of textuality" of the Khazars mediates that the images are the only authentic and unchanged thing that reaches the reader as the truth about the book, and that the text is not consumed, but only contributes to better taste.

THE BODY AS PARCHMENT

Also, if we return to the motif of drinking the book as wine or the blood of Christ, we come again to a characteristic Byzantine metaphorization and manifestation of their mentality. For the Byzantines, the blood of Christ is actually "purple ink [...] and his bloodied body, written" from head to toe with scars from whips and wounds from nails and spears, is compared to papyrus paper. [...] However, the tendency towards paradoxical and to that extent "inhuman" symbolism brings Byzantium closer to the Baroque, which, through the Renaissance, renewed the early Byzantine fashion for the hieroglyphics of "wisdom" through philosophical rethinking" (Averintsev 1982: 139). Therefore, the Byzantine emperors were the only ones who had the right to wear purple, "the emperor had to imitate Christ, the subject had to resemble the emperor, the writer followed the pattern of classical texts, and the

liturgy renewed the mystery of Christ's birth, death, and resurrection" (Každan – Konstabl 2009: 191).

On this track, perhaps, one can also see an excerpt from Pavić's novel about the "Great Parchment": "According to this source, an embassy from Khazaria was sent to the Byzantine emperor Theophilus, and one of the ambassadors had Khazar history and topography tattooed on his body, marked in the Khazar language, but in Hebrew letters" (Pavić 2012: 101). The body of the Khazar envoys was, therefore, covered with tattoos similar to a book, but also mottled and tortured like the body of Christ understood as parchment. However, here the emperor, i.e., the Khazar Khagan, does not imitate Christ, but the subject resembles Christ, which confirms that there is a gap between the will of the ruler and the people.[5] Also, the mystery of Christ's birth, death and resurrection is impossible to restore in history, so this deviation suggests that the mystery was violated by the work of historical time.

On the other hand, the tattooed Khazar envoys can also be seen in the light of the *Žitije braće Teodora i Teofana Načertanih*, written at the end of the 13th century by Teodor Raulen (Paleologina Kantakuzina).

> "The Žitije tells of two brothers who, during the iconoclasm of 863, received an unusually sophisticated punishment for their iconoclastic views: their heads were tattooed with verses from iconoclastic propaganda (hence their nickname, the Načertani meaning "The Drawn Ones" (Greek: Γραπτοί / Graptoi), which in this sense means "tattooed"). [...] The Life of the Tattooed Brothers, in Theodora's edited version, becomes a fascinating attempt to actualize the past and to make a hidden contribution, in historical guise, to a sensitive, contemporary conflict" (Rosenqvist 2014: 176).

Just as Pavić, speaking of the long-vanished Khazar people, actualizes contemporary problems, so did the Byzantine writer. The story of the "Great Parchment" sublimated three important aspects of Byzantine culture—philosophical-religious, literary, and historical.

[5] One of the khagans, moreover, "wanted to have as many wives as soldiers he had lost in wars. He had many wives," says one version of this legend published in Venice in 1772 in Serbian, "and wanting to have wives of all faiths, he not only worshipped various idols but, because of his penchant for women and concubines, he himself wanted to profess various faiths. This gave rise to various foreigners (Greeks, Arabs, Jews) to rush with their envoys to the khagan, wanting to convert him to their faith as soon as possible" (Pavić 2012: 107). It was actually about the great Russian prince Vladimir Svyatoslavich, about whom Zaharije Orfelin writes in the section on ancient Russian history in the two-volume *Žitije Petra Velikog* in 1772. The designation of the khagan corresponds to the Red Christian Book, so Pavić also portrayed the khagan according to the Russian prince who hesitated whether to accept Muslim or Jewish law. Cf. Orfelin 1970: 98–99.

THE BODY AS A FLAG

In addition to the body functioning as a book, Averintsev also highlights the Byzantine metaphorization of the body as a flag: "The plastic expressiveness of such a symbol as the Crucifixion is characteristic: the body is completely "shown", developed like a flag, opened like a book—and raised above heads as a flag and a book" (Averintsev 1982: 145). We can recognize this aspect in the Red Book in the entry about Avram Branković, who wore brassieres embroidered with "his coat of arms with a one-eyed eagle and the motto: "Every lord loves his death" (Pavić 2012: 51). The inscription also marked his death: "On the silk bra of Papas Abraham, the coat of arms of Branković with a one-eyed eagle was embroidered. A Turkish soldier struck the embroidered bird with such force that it was heard as the iron pierced the sleeping man's chest and hit the stone beneath him" (Pavić 2012: 59–60). Since flags often featured coats of arms with a specific motto or motto, the fact that Branković had a heraldic symbol embroidered on his body, and that the brassiere is associated with his suffering and death, puts him, like the tattooed Khazar envoys, on the same level of comparison with the book and Christ.

A BODY OF LETTERS

Finally, the above also implies analogies between the body and the letter, so the early Byzantine Neoplatonists distinguished "privileged letters" to which certain parts of the body corresponded: "His head is made up of alpha and omega, his neck—beta and psi, his shoulders and arms—gamma and chi, his chest—delta and phi, his diaphragm—epsilon and upsilon" (Averintsev 1982: 229), and, at the same time, the letters are related to the planets and signs of the Zodiac (cf. Averintsev 1982: 230), which is also illustrated by Adam Kadmon / Ruhani / Jesus' brother on the cover of the first edition of the novel from 1984, along whose body the zodiac signs are arranged.

BYZANTINE CONCEPT OF TIME

"The enormous body of Adam does not lie in space but in time" (Pavić 2012: 270), and time does not actually exist, "everything is one and the same connected eternal day and the world that coiled around you like a snake" (Pavić 2012: 186). This does not actually mean that Adam does not exist, but that his existence is knowable within the framework of timelessness, which was precisely what the Byzantines advocated: "the ultimate result of ancient wisdom consists in relying

not on time and the future, but on space and the present, and so the Olympians could not show their favor to their pet better than by giving him today's day in exchange for tomorrow's" (Averintsev 1982: 106). Adam is therefore possible in the domain of Byzantine-conceived time, which is, among other things, also recognized in the Olympic Hungarian who enables the Christ-like Dr. Isailo Suk to exchange days and thus ultimately save the *Dictionary of the Khazars*, and thus Adam, but at the cost of his life:

> "With my egg in your pocket, you are protected from hardship. When you notice that the coming day is too dark, you crack your egg nicely and you will avoid all inconveniences. In the end, admittedly, you will have one day less of your life, but you will be able to make a nice scrambled egg out of that ugly day. [...] And can your egg – I asked him – deprive or spare a day from an object, say a book? – Of course it can, you just have to crack the egg on the blunt side. But in that case you have missed the opportunity to use the egg yourself" (Pavić 2012: 91).

PAVIC'S "BAROQUE" STYLE IN THE LIGHT OF THE STYLE AND GENRES OF BYZANTINE LITERATURE

The Byzantines were fond of the notarikon, with which they "gladly interpreted the name of the forefather Adam (AΔAM) as a cleverly abbreviated enumeration of the cardinal points ([...] East, West, North, South), drawing from this the conclusion that man is a small universe" (Averintsev 1982: 228). In Pavic's novel, the notarikon is used in the interpretation of the name of Princess Ateh, who is close to Adam in that she is condemned to eternal life and who, in that eternity of existence, advocates for his creation. The meaning of the Hebrew letters of her name *At'h* is given: ""Aleph", the first letter of her name, signifies the Supreme Crown, the wise [...] "Teth" is the ninth letter of the Hebrew alphabet [...] signifies the Sabbath [...] "He" is the fourth letter of the name of God" (Pavić 2012: 177–178). Although the Byzantine notarikon is used to interpret the princess's name according to Hebrew letters, Peter Golden mentions that "the name is reminiscent of the island of Ateh recorded in the work 'De Administrando Imperio' of Constantine Porphyrogenitus" (Golden 1991: 219).

This observation helps us to see the difference between Adam and Ateh—Adam is, namely, the universe, the totality of the world, and Ateh is the island of that universe, the whole or the universe in miniature. The difference between Adam and Ateh can also be seen as the difference between the male and female copies of the book: "I have often been asked where the essence of the difference between the male and female

copies of my book lies. The point is that a man experiences the world outside himself, in the universe, while a woman carries the universe within herself" (Pavić 2012: 15).[6] Given "its female and male gender", Anthony Burgess called the novel "half-animal" (according to: Mihajlović 1994: 21–28), which corresponds precisely to the early Byzantine understanding of the book as non-anthropomorphic, resembling the half-animal ancient Egyptian deities (cf. Averintsev 1982: 217).

In addition to the notarikon, as stylistic characteristics of Byzantine literature, it is worth mentioning ekphrasis, centon, kenning and mashal as expressive means used by the writer in his novel. Milorad Pavić's style, although it seems to resemble Baroque, is conditioned, it seems, by the dictates of the poetics of Byzantine literature: "It is useful for figurative expressions to be unusual, grotesque, ambiguous, so that what is said would strike the imagination and, precisely, be forcibly etched into memory. Early Byzantine writers decided on this practice for pedagogical reasons, as did the authors of the Talmud several centuries before them and the preachers of the Baroque era a thousand years after them" (Averintsev 1982: 202).

Ekphrasis (Greek: ἔκφρασις – description) is most directly related to the literary description of works of art, primarily statues that disappeared during the sack of Constantinople in 1204, which Nicetas Choniates wrote about in the early 13th century in his historical work *On Statues* (Rosenqvist 2014: 165). Pavić (1986: 4) explains in the article "The Baroque layer in "Dictionary of the Khazars" that with this novel he "attempted to approach sculpture. Critics have noticed that in the "Dictionary of the Khazars", which is not a one-way street but can also be read from the end to the beginning, or skipping around, one experiences the phenomenon of looking at a painting or—I would add—perhaps even more sculpture, where it does not matter which part you start looking at". In this context, the description of the book as a sculpture depends solely on the reader and is not directly present in the novel itself. However, since Choniates writes about lost and destroyed statues, this may suggest that the novel, conceived as a sculpture, could itself be one of those vanished Byzantine statues that no longer exist, much like the Khazar people, and which the author seeks to rediscover and reconstruct.

When it comes to the centon (Latin: cento, Greek: κέντρων), a poem "composed of parts taken from other poetic works, in order to create a whole in a completely new context", mostly from Homer's epics (Rosenqvist 2014: 158), Pavić took advantage of the potential of this late

[6] Jasmina Mihajlović (1994: 21–28) wrote about the genders of the *Dictionary of the Khazars* in the essay "Reading and Gender".

antique form on at least one level. He refers to Petkutin's and Kalina's readings of Homer's verses, which are torn from the original epic context and within the novel *Dictionary of the Khazars* create a completely new whole, functioning as part of a love game and an example of the intertwining of life and literature: "At the moment when she comes to the word "shadow", Petkutin notices the shadow cast by the ruined Roman theatre on their path. They have arrived" (Pavić 2012: 45). The verses also find their purpose in that they refer to the realm of the dead, and Avram Branković's goal was precisely to have his stepson Petkutin recognized as a human being by the dead: "the living have tested him, now the dead should test him too. Because, only if the dead are also deceived and think, upon seeing Petkutin, that he is a real man of flesh and blood who first salts and then bites, can the attempt be considered a success. And having reached that conclusion, he found Petkutin's bride" (Pavić 2012: 43). In this sense, Homer's verses seem to represent an anticipation of the upcoming events that will take place in the Roman theatre. They could also be illustrated with a parody (an opening song of the upcoming "drama"), but which is not sung by the chorus, but by the main protagonists. Hence, the verses stop at the moment when the heroes arrive on stage.

Milorad Pavić also took advantage of the potential of the encomium (Greek: ἐγκώμιον), a rhetorical genre of ancient praise, which the Byzantines "zealously developed", dedicating them to the deceased, saints or cities, for example (Rosenqvist 2014: 241). The writer was particularly attached to his native Belgrade and the Danube River, which he often called a river of paradise, as stated in the *Novel of Alexander the Great* ("go, Alexander, to where you came from, go down the four rivers that spring from paradise and return to the world, for you cannot leave here otherwise. Those four rivers are called: Phison, Gihon, Tigris, Euphrates"—R. Marinković 1986: 186), "when Sabljak Pasha's detachment broke out on the Danube, one of the four rivers of paradise—the one that symbolizes the allegorical layer in the 'Bible', Cohen joined him again" (Pavić 2012: 205). However, Pavić gave the entire encomium on the Danube in the form of the entry "Biography of the Danube" (1983), while he rounded off his homage to Belgrade primarily with *New Belgrade Stories* (1981) and *A Brief History of Belgrade* (1990).

The periphrastic process of ingenious and complex giving of other names to an object, phenomenon or being, such as calling the Danube (Fishon) "the river of paradise", is called *kenning* (Old Norse kenning), and Averintsev (1982: 162) brings it into direct connection with the early Byzantine understanding of "the world as a riddle and an answer". As an example, one can cite Photius' nickname "Khazar face" / "Khazar muzzle" (Pavić 2012: 95) or, alternatively, the poetic naming of pollen

allergy as "flower fever", from which both the writer and his hero Petkutin suffered (Pavić 2012: 42). The involvement of the writer's biography in his own work, whether implicitly or explicitly, is an important poetic element that originally appeared precisely within the framework of Byzantine literature: "the writer, until then anonymous, now acquired a face with increasingly clear features, and he could even play a major role in his literary works" (Rosenqvist 2014: 115). The writer did not arbitrarily call the *Dictionary of the Khazars* his autobiography (Šomlo 1990: 5); In stories such as "Bacchus and the Leopard", "Dinner at the Tavern "At the Question Mark"", "Three Magpies Fly Away", "Cavalry", etc., the writer participates as a hero, and, moreover, Milorad Pavić, by name and surname, is the hero of the story "Atlas of the Winds" and the novel *Pozoriste od hartije* (The Paper Theater) (2009).[7]

Abnormalities, such as those mentioned, are deeply rooted in the Byzantine worldview that encouraged the discovery of its secrets. For these purposes, Pavić made extensive use of gnomish statements, which often functioned as enigmatic points or tricks. Jovan Delić (2010: 21–38) provided an outline for a typology of such points, mainly defining them within the framework of riddles and answers ("story as a riddle, the point as an answer", "the point as a numerical riddle and answer", "the point as a lyrical epiphany", etc.). An ingenious combination of words in the form of a maxim, joke or allegory, "for the creation and comprehension of which a fine work of the mind is required", is called a mashal, according to the *Book of Solomon's Tales* (Averintsev 1982: 172). Such are Pavić's "points": "A woman without an ass is like a village without a church" (*Dictionary of the Khazars*); "The hardest thing is to plow someone else's field and your own wife" (*Dictionary of the Khazars*); "Whoever heals himself from himself will perish" ("Blue Mosque"); "Let what has been seen once begin" ("A Novel about Troy"); "The place of the one who moves never remains empty" ("The Icon that Sneezes"); "The secret is not reached by the road, but by a by-road" ("Atlas of the Winds"), which range from aphorisms and jokes to proverbs.

A possible reason for the writer's decision to resort to such a stylistic procedure may be not only for the reader's entertainment, but also an indirect influence on his sensibility, spirit, and the development of versatility in the traditions of different peoples: "time, and at the same time both the historical and biographical time of an individual human life, has meaning if it is the time of pedagogical processing of man. The space of ecumenism is a place for a universal school" (Averintsev 1982: 183). Perhaps that is why the *Dictionary of the Khazars* is a

[7] A more detailed examination of the role of the writer in his works was conducted by Julija Dragojlović (2013: 499–511).

novelistic "universal school" precisely because it represents the space of artistic ecumenism.[8] In this sense, the "Note on the Traveler and the School" from the Green Book would also be crucial, suggesting that school is first and foremost an occasion to embark on the path of one's own improvement and finding the meaning of life, in order to ultimately impose the conclusion that the materially non-existent school represents the act of travel itself.

When it comes to records, anecdotes, stories and narrations, which are inserted in the form of prose microgenres into both the short stories and novels of Milorad Pavić (there are as many as eight of them in the *Dictionary of the Khazars*), the writer aestheticizes, adapts and functionalizes them according to the dictates of the poetics of Byzantine literature and according to the dictates of his own poetics. Stories (from the Greek διήγησις – telling, narration) are called "short, anecdotal sketches from the lives of the holy fathers and hermits", but "also any narration" (Bogdanović 1986: 586). We can therefore bring anecdotes, stories and narrations to the same level of observation, since the equivalent of a story in Greek is narration, and they are defined as "anecdotal sketches".

"The fast and slow mirror", which goes with the entry about Ateh in the Red Book, does not have a genre designation in the title, however, we are familiar with the Byzantine genre "the king's mirror"/"the princes' mirrors", which had "the character of a collection of anecdotes" (Rosenqvist 2014: 244), and it is obvious that it can be called an anecdote about the death of a Khazar princess. Among other things, the unnamed work of Procopius was entitled *Anékdota*, according to the meaning of that word ("unpublished work") and represented a "secret history" (Rosenqvist 2014: 24), so we can perhaps interpret certain stories and narrations as secret or apocryphal parts of the entries. The "Tale of Petkutin and Kalina" is Avram Branković's secret, just as the elder's "Tale of Adam Ruhani", Akšani's "Tale of the Deaths of Children" and Teoktist's "Tale of Adam, Brother of Christ" represent orally entrusted and "unpublished" secrets. The "Tale of the Egg and the Fiddle Bow" is a confession by Dr. Isaijl Suk, while the "Record of the Traveler and the School" and the "Record of Adam Kadmon" are written confessions of a secret: "Ibn Kora translated the record [of the traveler] into Arabic, thinking that the truth was just a trick" (Pavić 2012: 128), while we learn about Adam Kadmon from notes in Cohen's manuscripts, which were found by rabi Papo and Ishaq Nehama (Pavić 2012: 198). The record would refer to

[8] Pavić's concept of communication between religions is significantly referred to in Hans Robert Jaus's significant study "The Conversation of Religions or The Last Things Before the Last" (2014: 61–94).

secrets that are written down, and in accordance with the poetics of the genre, they are in the margins of manuscripts or are recorded incidentally, while histories primarily refer to oral confidential stories. The Byzantines considered the written word to be "true, accurate and ultimate reality" (Averintsev 1982: 209), while the Hellenes associated the oral word with "sincerity and openness", and "solving the fate of man" (Averintsev 1982: 213). However, neither the written nor the oral word necessarily means that the secret is true ("truth is just a trick"), and this is the key difference in relation to the Hellenistic and Byzantine conceptions of the word.[9]

ICONS AND ICONOCRITISM

The possibility that truth can be a trick, that the values of records, i.e., books, can be consumed or relativized, seems to be an interesting problem posed by the *Dictionary of the Khazars*. The question therefore arises whether it can somehow be overcome. Ana Šomlo asked the writer what he thought "about the act of burying the holy books, genizot, among the Jews" (Šomlo 1990: 61),[10] precisely bringing to the forefront the interesting Jewish custom that the Holy Scriptures, as a written form of religious truth, cannot be eternal, but must be constantly renewed. Pavić responded to this with an equivalent custom of the Orthodox and their understanding of icons: "That looks very much like the cult of burying icons among the Orthodox. I have described that act; icons are poured with wine and buried like living family members" (Šomlo 1990: 61).

The analogy between an icon and a living person can also be inspiring for the interpretation of the *Dictionary of the Khazars*, if it is contextualized with the information that "the illustrated pages of the dictionary are the only ones that have survived to this day" (Pavić 2012: 23). In addition, the description of almost every character in the novel mentions either their portrait, painting, representation on an icon or fresco, or some kind of print, while the novel contains visual aids such as the menorah from Čelarevo, Saints Cyril and Methodius, the watermark of the lamb, Satan's fingerprint, and photographs of printed excerpts

[9] The problem of truth in this novel is addressed by Christian Olah (2012: 31–100, 113–285) in the chapters "Textual Truth" and "Metaphysical Truth" in the monograph The Book-God.

[10] Pavić could have learned about Jewish customs from Dušan Glumac's study "Old Jewish Manuscripts from the Coast of the Dead Sea" (1958: 153–170). Copies of the scrolls of the buried books were purchased, by the way, by Dr. Sukenik from the Archaeological Institute of the University of Jerusalem (cf. Glumac 1958: 154), who could potentially have been one of the inspirations for the portrayal of Dr. Isaias Suke from the *Dictionary of the Khazars*.

of texts about the Khazars and the poetry of Judah Halevi. If we assume that the pictorial contributions represent the preserved pages of the destroyed Daumbmannus edition, then the reconstruction of the 1691 edition can only be carried out by transcribing those images in the Khazar manner: "As soon as the Khazars see the wall paintings, they transcribe, read or sing the content of the paintings, icons or anything else that is painted, which shows that the old painters knew this secret and unrecognized skill. Whenever Jewish influence in the Khazar empire increases, the Khazars move away from paintings and forget this skill, but it suffered the most during the fight against icons in Constantinople and never recovered" (Pavić 2012: 168). Therefore, the one who was given the task of reconstructing the *Dictionary of the Khazars* must be either a Khazar or a Byzantine fighting against iconoclasm. Perhaps that is why Pavić declares himself a Byzantine.

However, iconoclasm is an important topic of Byzantine history, which Pavić (1985: 5–21) wrote about while researching the work of Gavril Venclović, primarily referring to the scientific achievements of the Byzantologist Georgij Ostrogorski. Since icons were destroyed during the fighting, and the *Dictionary of the Khazars* as a whole can be viewed as a symbolic icon of a vanished people, a consensus can be established between the icons destroyed in iconoclastic conflicts and the *Dictionary of the Khazars* as an icon destroyed by the friction of historical circumstances, but which can be reconstructed.

In general, the topic of iconoclasm is important for understanding Pavić's work. One of the paradigmatic and most aesthetically successful stories, "Wine and Bread", in "The Story of the Icon Painter Ilya Golog" speaks about the importance of icons:

> "Do you know what icons are? It is known that such a question was asked to Saint Sava of Serbia. [...] Traveling through his country, he constantly baptized forests, rivers, mountains and settlements; when one day he got tired of giving names and when he could no longer invent new ones, he sat down on a stone in front of a village and decided: I will name this place after the name of the bird that first flies over it. At that moment, a dove (golub) flew over the village and the place was named Golubac. A similar thing happened with Vranjin, Kragujevac, Sokolac, Sjenica, Kosovo and other places, by whose names one can still easily recognize the places of St. Sava's final resting place and the places of his toils. 'Do you see – was the ending of the story of St. Sava—it is similar with icons. No one will see a bird of heaven on Mount Sokol, but it, flying over that place, gave it its name, just as the saints gave their name and their image to icons, although no one can blame us that we consider the icons themselves saints..." (Pavić 2012a: 96).

BIRDS

Writing about the *Dictionary of the Khazars*, François Lefebvre (1997: 273) drew attention to the theme of birds in this novel, calling it a "rare theme", which "first appeared with the hagiography of Saint Francis of Assisi who spoke to birds. Its last appearances are found in both Fulcanelli and Prévert" and "in the "Dictionary of the Khazars" with more persistence: one learns, for example, that only albatrosses have an international code or that parrots from the Black Sea transmit remnants of the Khazar language." The French scholar did not go into a more detailed analysis of this topic, but commented from a Western European position of knowledge of the problem.

Also interesting would be the possibilities of potential interpretations of this theme in the context of Aristophanes' *Birds* (4th and 5th centuries BC), Atar's poem *The Speech of Birds* (12th century), and even the Byzantine *Pulologos* (13th century), which would shift the interpretive focus to the East. However, it seems appropriate to ask the question with which part of Serbian literature the *Dictionary of the Khazars* would be comparable, when it comes to birds as heroes and novelistic themes, and what is the function of the bird universe in the novel.

Miloš N. Đurić (1963: 81) pointed out that the comedy *Birds* significantly concerned the national community, and that it represented "a very cheerful travesty of all political, social and religious plans for improving and transforming the world; a testimony to what people dreamed or wanted or considered worthy of wanting, a testimony to the belief that a person can freely shape his life in the community according to the ideas that are valid." The Athenian citizens Piteter and Euelpides went to the hoopoe (the leader of the birds in Atar's poem is also a hoopoe) and proposed the establishment of a "bird state" (Kukunebograda / Land of Nonexistence) in the air, which would be "independent of gods and men", because the birds were once "masters of the world". All Athenians dissatisfied with the politics of their polis would enter this kingdom, becoming birds. The play is also a satire on "the Athenian crazed frenzy for project-making, of the frivolous and gullible construction of air towers" (Đurić 2003: 349–350). Transferred to the level of a novel, in the dissatisfied Athenians we can recognize the disenfranchised Khazar people and Khazar dreamcatchers, obviously dissatisfied with the Khagan's decision to renounce their faith and culture and embrace Christianity, Judaism or Islam. If the Athenians became the birds of Kukunebograd, the dreamcatchers may have become the birds-determinants, who only together create the Simurg,

reconstructing the Khazar novel-state,[11] working on the utopian project of *Adam*, whose body is illustrated by the state and an attempt to create the world again, but in a better way (Pavić 2012: 270). The fruit tree with the enigmatic name Ku, in this sense, would be the code word for the project and realization of Aristophanes' Kukunebograd.

Aristophanes was also highly regarded in Byzantium, although the comedy *Birds* was more highly regarded by Alexandrian critics (Đurić 1963: 87). An important moment in the emergence of Byzantine civilization is considered to be the mixing or merging of the culture of the Middle East, "especially Sufi maxims and mystical texts, and the Bible and the culture of the Greeks and Romans" (Každan – Konstamble 2009: 146; Beck 1967: 194), so Pavić's cross-pollination of Aristophanes (4th and 5th centuries BC) and Atar (12th century) could also be considered necessary for the "renewal of the Byzantine novel". Finally, Byzantine literature also inherits the satire *Pulologist* (*Book of Birds*) from the 13th century, which has as its subject a quarrel at a bird wedding as a mirror of "the discord and conflicts that existed at the Byzantine court" (Radić 2014: 44).[12] Unlike the Athenians and Khazars, who became birds in order to save their civic dignity, faith and the truth about themselves, the Byzantine bird state represented an allegory of "Byzantine everyday life—social relations, morality, everyday worries and interests" (Radić 2014: 44).

On the other hand, by associating and collaborating with Božo Vukadinović,[13] Pavić could have had an important interlocutor on the work of Đorđe Marković Koder. Namely, birds, "as a sign of spirituality" because "a spark of heaven is implanted in their breasts," became the main characters of Koder's poetry, thereby "emphasizing not only the ornithocentric perspective of the world, but also the general spirituality of the cosmos, pantheism as one of the characteristics of Koder's time" (Ivanić 2014: 282–284).

The Dream of the Serbian Mother is considered Koder's most significant manuscript, and "Romoranka", printed in 1862, is only a part of this great poem. [...] Alka is the soul of dreams. [...] The poem begins with the strange philosophical and mystical rapture of the Mother, who tells us her lineage. She appears at the same time as a bird and as a plant. She first emerges, only to soon soar through the air. [...] Alka was left without her friend, "the gentle Zaperko", at an early age. [...] Her further totem is, in any case, the bird, which has lost its gentle friend" (Vukadi-

[11] Pavić wrote about the novel as a state in his essay "The Novel as a State" (2005: 9–13). However, it is worth highlighting the implied concept of this state. Namely, it would be about the ancient city-state, i.e., the polis.

[12] Birds are also frequent symbols in Byzantine dream books. Cf. Radić 2014: 298.

[13] Božo Vukadinović is one of the main characters in Pavić's story "The Tavern "At the Question Mark".

nović 1979: 20). If we examine *The Dream of the Serbian Mother* in the context of the *Dictionary of the Khazars*, we can see Princess Ateh as Alka, and Moqadas al-Safer in Zaperko, the best dreamcatcher, from whom she was separated by a jealous khagan: "Al-Safer was punished by being imprisoned in an iron cage hung from a tree. Princess Ateh sent him the key to her bedroom every year through her dreams, and she could only ease his torment by bribing demons to briefly replace one of the humans and put him in the cage instead of Al-Safer" (Pavić 2012: 215). Unlike Moqadas, in Koder's work a young Canary is imprisoned, who, "not listening to her mother's advice, is imprisoned in a cage, where she calls for happy moments in the bird world" (Ivanić 2014: 280). She also represents a deceased soul to whom a fairy once gave "lights", but who has lost them and mourns them (cf. Damjanov 2011: 249). Thus, the motif of separated lovers and solace in the bird world seems to be a common backbone of Koder's song and Pavić's novel, with the addition that both Kanarička and Mokadaša are punished by the loss of "lights", i.e., spiritual values and love.

The Dream of the Serbian Mother "is that continuous, centuries-old dream, to which human dreams are only remnants limited in time. What do we dream of if not that nature that permeated us with sleep. Sleep is only a remnant of a dream that knows no time, no day or night. [...] It is a dream that could be the parent of Koder's Alka, and which she tries to capture with a dream book and a clearing" (Vukadinović 1979: 6). This *Dream* could be equivalent to the *Dream* that the Khazar dream hunters strive to fulfill, trying to revive Adam, the brother of Jesus: "Not only individual lives, all future and past times, all the sleeves of eternity are already there, torn into tiny pieces and divided among people and their dreams. The huge body of the primeval man Adam moves and breathes in his sleep. [...] The first angel was named Adam, and the second Eve. Eve had a net instead of a gaze, a rope instead of a tongue. She was in the form of a Great claw or a shackle. Adam immediately began to age, because his soul was a migratory bird in other times" (Pavić 2012: 267–269). An interesting correspondence between the *Dream of the Serbian Mother* and the Khazar dream hunters who create Adam reveals another analogy to us. Eve, as in Venclović, is compared to a clasp or a shackle (Venclović 1966: 97), which synonymously corresponds to Koder's Alka in the meaning of a buckle or a clasp. Princess Ateh is devoid of death, i.e., she is eternal, like Adam who is identified with a migratory bird, but also with the *Dream of the Serbian Mother*.

Romoranka, as part of the *Dream of the Serbian Mother*, contains the name of a mythical bird in the title itself. Although the "Clarification" states that the title means "Anka whispers ("Romori Anka"). Who died

young and green, her wound has spilled" (Koder 2014: 63), in the Anka whispering one can also see the unspoken speech of the Anka bird: "The Anka is a mythical bird that resembles both a griffin and a phoenix. [...] The Anka received final confirmation with Islam in the tradition transmitted by Ibn Abaz. [...] "In the beginning of the world, God created a bird of extraordinary beauty and gave it all perfections. [...] God also created a female in the image of the male and gave the pair the name ankâ. [...] The Anka is, under various names, a symbol of that part of the human being that would have to mystically unite with the divinity" (Gerbran – Ševalije 2013: 20–21). If Pavić's Adam is the androgynous one with whom the Khazar dreamcatchers attempt to communicate, Koder's Anka is his complete equivalent, since according to Islamic tradition, the Anka represents the union of the male and female perfect ancestors, created by God. The whispering of Anka is a form of mystical communication that represents a pledge of union with the divine principle, just as dreamcatchers seek to establish contact with God, for "at the bottom of every dream lies God" (Pavić 2012: 63).

Hence, the whispering is interpreted in the context of the creation of a poetic "language-universe", linguistic "synonymy" and "magic codes" (cf. Vukadinović 1979: 14), only potentially knowable through the encyclopedic systems "Razjasnica", "Slovnik" and "Tolkovnik" (Bošković 2014: 12). In Pavić, Adam is reached by compiling "Khazar dictionaries", the original of which represent the poetry of Princess Ateh: "Ateh was the first to compile a dictionary or encyclopedia of the Khazars with extensive information about their history, religion, dream readers. All of this was written in a cycle of poems arranged in alphabetical order, and here the polemics at the court of the Khazar ruler were described in poetic form" (Pavić 2012: 179). What is left of her poetry and the forgotten Khazar language is "whispered" only by the Black Sea parrots: "When the Khazar faith was abandoned, the Khazar language began to disappear suddenly, and Ateh then released all the parrots familiar with the Khazar vocabulary. She said: – Go and teach other birds your songs, because soon no one here will know them... The birds scattered throughout the forests of the Black Sea coast. There, other parrots taught their songs, those others taught the rest, and so at one point only parrots knew these songs and spoke the Khazar language" (Pavić 2012: 179). Parrots have a privileged role in preserving the forgotten language and poetry, although they are only intermediaries and conservators, who learned it through imitation.

The *Dictionary of the Khazars* explicitly mentions 29 species of birds: the wagtail, swallow, albatross, pigeon, eagle, falcon, partridge, goose, hen, plover, ostrich, owl, snipe, finch, hawk, sparrowhawk, heron, jackdaw, woodpecker, tit, cuckoo, turtle dove, parrot, swift, jay, starling,

duck, swan, and crow. In the 12th century, the Persian poet Fariduddin Muhammad Attar published the poem *The Speech of Birds*, which tells of the birds' attempt to set out on a journey to find God. By the end of the journey, a total of 30 birds had arrived and discovered that God was actually the bird Simurgh, which was one great mirror of them all (cf. Vafaei 2005: 6). If a bird is missing from Pavić's novel, the question arises whether it is hidden or whether its absence implies that God is impossible to reach and that the dictionary of the Khazars is impossible to reconstruct. In a certain sense, the Ku fruit can be considered a bird, because it can fly and represents the only memory of Princess Ateh's poetry (cf. Pavić, 2012: 130–131), and thus there would still be hope for the knowledge of God. By not recognizing the Ku fruit offered to him by Ateh, the dreamcatcher Yusuf Masudi lost the opportunity to see the Simurgh bird and know God.

In addition to parrots that are able to imitate sounds, and thus preserve the Khazar language by repeating the poems of Princess Ateh, the woodpecker bird also has a similar property and is mentioned in "Appendix I" in the context of the incredible memory of Teoktist Nikolsky, thanks to whom the Daubmanus's edition of the Khazar dictionary from 1691 was published: "On Saint Cyriacus the Hermit, three winds of Midsummer blew, each full of its own birds – one of the woodpecker, the second of the last swallows, and the third of sparrows" (Pavić 2012: 259). Also, swallows, brought by the Midsummer wind, have an interesting property: "the singing of swallows is associated with speaking in various languages and learning" (in riddles, the chirping of swallows represents speaking in a foreign language, their singing—the ability to master speech, which is understood as the skill of understanding, and in Bulgarian songs swallows are grammarians, scholars and writers) (cf. Gura 2005: 471). However, in another place, swallows metaphorize exactly the opposite—misunderstanding: "the swallow from Strumica and the swallow from the Nile do not understand [each other] and that only albatrosses everywhere in the world speak the same language" (Pavić 2012: 67). Perhaps the answer to the question of why Pavić changes their symbolic nature is that just a few pages before that passage he mentions how the swallows, contrary to their custom, began to fly on its back (cf. Pavić 2012: 58), and thus their ability was reversed. On the other hand, in one of his first versions when writing the novel, the writer decided that gulls, not albatrosses, speak the same language everywhere in the world:

Excerpt from the typescript of the *Dictionary of the Khazars*
(draft versions: 1977–1984),
which is kept in the Milorad Pavić Legacy collection

The choice of the albatross would be based on the symbolic nature that Baudelaire assigned to it in the famous poem "Albatross" from the collection *The Flowers of Evil*, which briefly consists in the fact that the albatross is actually a metaphor for the poet. According to this analogy, all the great poets in the world are the only ones who can understand each other because they speak the same language or "whisper".

Unlike swallows that fly on their backs and therefore lose the ability to understand each other, the way of reading the *Dictionary of the Khazars* is compared to the inward flight of the jay bird, but the symbolism of the bird had not changed: the dictionary "moved like a crab, and was read like a jay bird flying backwards" (Pavić 2012: 265). It, therefore, had not lost its particularity, given in the Old Russian "Tale of the Birds of Heaven": "I know seventy languages: I will be your interpreter, because you cannot do without an interpreter, and you have no other like it" (Gura 2005: 555). Also, the positive property of the jay bird is contained in the information according to which Efrosinija Lukarević kept "a cage with a jay because its presence in the house is healing" (Pavić 2012: 211).

One of the ways of reading the dictionary about the Khazars is also connected with the quail bird: "The second time it will be read as a quail bird, which flies only on Thursdays" (Pavić 2012: 27). If we bear in mind that in the novel, the devil Akshani died in 1699 on a Thursday (Pavić 2012: 115), Masudi saw a dreamcatcher who healed on a Thursday (Pavić 2012: 141), and the egg, the breaking of which saved the *Dictionary of the Khazars*, had a Thursday instead of a yolk (Pavić 2012: 90), then this way of reading could also be linked to overcoming the devil, healing, and, ultimately, salvation. The second strand of meaning can be read in the context of Venclović's proverb: "His treasure lies gathered in a heap and he languishes over it, like a trembling woodpecker bird in the air in spring" (Venclović 1966: 397). In this light, the reader should deprive the treasure (the book) of its gloom precisely by reading it and in this way overcome the devil, heal and be saved.

When it comes to understanding spiritual values, the semanticization of doves is interesting, especially in light of the representation of God as a dove "before the separation of water from land", the belief that Allah "gave the dove human speech" (Gura 2005: 459) or the dove as a manifestation of the soul (Gura 2005: 461). The novel states that "7 numbers were loaded into Noah's ark, in the form of a dove, because a dove can count to 7" (Pavić 2012: 210), and how burning doves showed naked Serbs the way to the battlefield (cf. Pavić 2012: 58). The dove, as a biblical symbol of peace, salvation and justice, winds through the quote related to Noah's Ark, and the number seven is important because Teoktist Nikolsky dictated the entire dictionary about the Khazars in

seven days and thus saved the book from oblivion (cf. Pavić 2012: 185). The doves that the naked Serbs set on fire to light their way suggest that the Serbs go into battle with burning souls, even when they have nothing on, or that this is a spiritual battlefield, where they need nothing but their souls.

In this light, it would be worth examining the heron and the eagle with doves. Namely, the heron is compared to Princess Ateh, who looked like this bird "who dreams of being a woman" (Pavić 2012: 142). The heron symbolizes "warrior gestures" and "divine knowledge" (Gerbran – Ševalije 2013: 120), but also "the soul of a sinner" (Gura 2005: 398). The male warrior fighting spirit is not primarily inherent to women, and since Ateh was punished by losing her gender, forgetting all her poems except for the word "ku" and eternal life, her cry for the lost woman within her is a cry for love that she can only have in a dream (Pavić 2012: 121). The evil spirit Ibn Hadrash carried out this judgment of Iblis by taking the form of an ostrich (Pavić 2012: 121), which is also not an insignificant marker, since the ostrich symbolizes justice and truth (Gerbran – Ševalije 2013: 610). Princess Ateh's sin was that the defeated participants in the polemic envied her knowledge and rhetorical skills, so Hadrash, in the form of an ostrich, emphasizes that nothing was taken away from the princess, because "ku" represents the supreme soul, the Absolute, i.e., the synecdoche of her entire poetry.

Papas Avram Branković, who led the naked Serbs into battle, had a one-eyed eagle embroidered on his coat of arms (Pavić 2012: 60). Since the eagle is the "chief bird" (Gura 2005: 456), and in psychoanalysis, the "collective original symbol of the father, masculinity and power", which is compared to the "all-seeing eye" (Gerbran – Ševalije 2013: 643–644), his nickname "papas" (Greek: πάπας), which means "father" in Greek, becomes clearer. The Scandinavian god Odin, who is considered the father and creator of humans, had the one-eyed attribute, which Avram Branković is trying to be by creating the artificial man Petkutin. Odin sacrificed his eye in order to gain knowledge, so perhaps we can interpret the one-eyed eagle on the coat of arms as Branković's commitment to acquiring mystical knowledge.

The all-seeing eye is also associated with the falcon's eye (cf. Gerbran – Ševalije 2013: 858), with the falcon representing the soul of the deceased (Gura 2005: 512), so the way an old man prayed, who did so by "taking a fish out of the mud and letting it fly from his palm like a hunting falcon" (Pavić 2012: 67), can be understood as a prayer for the soul of the deceased, and, at the same time, a prayerful insight into the world of the dead.

Birds whose symbolism is primarily linked to death are the hawk, the sparrowhawk (Gura 2005: 407), the cuckoo (Gura 2005: 530), the

titmouse (Gura 2005: 557) and the woodpecker (Gura 2005: 537). Hawks ate "ku" thinking it was a fish (Pavić 2012: 130), and a Khazar proverb says: "The Arabs will eat us, thinking like a sparrowhawk that we are a fish, and we are a ku" (Pavić 2012: 131). It is visible that in Pavić, the hawk and the sparrowhawk are practically equated, in accordance with Slavic tradition, and Aleksandar Gura (2005: 405) also discusses them in the same chapter, emphasizing their interchangeability. According to Slavic tradition, the cuckoo has the ability to transform into a hawk or a crow (Gura 2005: 409), so, potentially, in the crying princess Ateh, constantly uttering "ku-ku" (Pavić 2012: 131), we can recognize the cuckoo bird. The cuckoo bird is known for not having a mate (it mates with the nightingale, crow, crow, nightingale and rooster) (Gura 2005: 512) and symbolizes a woman who calls out to her lost husband (Gura 2005: 513), and the keeper of keys (Gura 2005: 525). The lonely princess Ateh was punished by eternally calling for the lost Mokadasa and losing her sex,[14] precisely because she sent her lover the key to her bedroom (Pavić 2012: 155), but she sent him the same key through her dreams and released him from his cage while he was asleep, replacing him with a mortal (Pavić 2012: 215). The same key with a gold coin instead of a handle, which foreshadows death, was found by Dr. Isajlo Suk in his mouth (Pavić 2012: 83), which means that it replaced Mokadasa in the cage, which is perhaps why the egg was used to save the dictionary, and Dr. Suk was sacrificed (it seems, against his will). The death of Dr. Abu Kabir Muawiya is marked by the titmouse, since his wounds smelled of the droppings of this bird (Pavić 2012: 156), which symbolizes the imminent arrival of death and illness (Gura 2005: 557). The death of Avram Branković and Efrosinija Lukarević was marked by the woodpecker bird, which usually "presages the deceased" (Gura 2005: 537): "Like a woodpecker – a bird that can fly backwards, from head to tail, Avram Efendi left Constantinople on the last day of Ramadan in the month of Shawwal" and arrived in Kladovo, where he was met with death (Pavić 2012: 152), and Mrs. Lukarević washed her hair with a starling egg, which was followed by her farewell to Cohen and her imminent death, also in the vicinity of Kladovo (Pavić 2012: 194).

Adam's death is overshadowed by the fable "of the crow and borrowed feathers", when Earth, Stone, Water, Dew, Wind, Cloud and Angel take theirs from him and dissolve him (Pavić 2012: 270). A completely unexpected comparison with the fable may also imply Adam's

[14] Telling Yusuf Masudi that she had lost her gender, Ateh said that she was no longer a woman and that she had no "black jackdaw" under her cloak (Pavić 2012: 143). Jackdaws are known as devilish birds (Gura 2005: 397), so the princess is possibly ironically alluding to the biblical damnation of the female gender due to her expulsion from paradise and the devil's temptation.

divine and demonic nature—he is "the elder brother of Christ and the younger brother of Satan" (Pavić 2012: 269). The soul of an evil man, the devilish principle and chthonic spaces are emblematized by the crow (Gura 2005: 397–398), so this may indicate the demonic aspect of Adam's soul, just as "borrowed feathers" are the angelic in him, which gives him life.

The action of demons and temptations is in the domain of the partridge and the snipe. Nikon Sevast's disastrous decision to transfer his brushes from his right to his unclean left hand and continue painting in this way is marked by the feast of "the venerable Andrew Stratilatos, just when partridges are beginning to be eaten" (Pavić 2012: 73). Eating partridges is considered to signify temptation, ruin, and a hint of the incarnation of demons (Gerbran – Ševalije 2013: 315). "The Record of a Traveler and a School" ends with a lyrical epilogue about the only precious scene from memory, which is marked by a table set with the meat of a caught snipe (Pavić 2012: 130). The enigmatic scene somewhat explains the nature of this bird, known for misleading hunters with its screeching (Gura 2005: 538). The caught snipe suggests that the traveler reached her true goal at some point, "in the first half of the journey, which she would never have thought if the journey had not been in vain" (Pavić 2012: 130), because the bird that distracts from the true trail was caught.

The finch bird would have a more positive connotation. The fruit tree "ku" made the sound of a finch (Pavić 2012: 130), a sick girl who was supposed to be cured by one of the dream catchers held two finches in her hands (Pavić 2012: 141), and Count Dracula tied a finch to his manhood (Pavić 2012: 213). The leaf of the fruit tree "ku" has the ability to heal a wound or patch up a tear (Pavić 2012: 168), so this can be linked to the process of healing the girl. On the other hand, Dracula's unusual gesture may also represent an attempt to heal sexual potency, as he ties a finch to his genitals, but it could also be a humorous effect, since the finch is associated with playfulness and laughter (Gura 2005: 560).

The goose and the hen are also positively connoted and associated with salvation. Anastasia Suk "had beautiful blue eyes like a goose" (Pavić 2012: 81). The goose symbolizes the soul (cf. Gerbran – Ševalije 2013: 258) and it is believed that geese flying in the shape of a key can be disturbed if counted (cf. Gura 2005: 504). The fact that her son, Dr. Suk, managed to find the key with a gold coin instead of a handle that Ateh had sent him, and that over time it turned more and more into his mother (cf. Pavić 2012: 81), suggests that the path was not disturbed, and that the key traveled unhindered through the blue of his eyes and sleep, i.e., soul. In addition to the motif of the goose, Dr. Suk is also associated with the "Tale of the Egg and the Fiddle Bow" and the motif of the hen

that does not lay ordinary eggs, but days. The ability of the egg to save a person or a book if it is cracked from the blunt side (cf. Pavić 2012: 91), indicates resurrection, and thus the final salvation of the dictionary about the Khazars. The appearance of the owl bird, which "opens sources of drinking water with its cries" (Pavić 2012: 124), is associated with revival, renewal, and reconciliation. This is precisely what is characteristic of beliefs about certain species of owls that can find living water (Gura 2005: 431). Namely, the khagan's co-rulers gave it to their enemies after defeating them, so they decided to live with them.

The remaining five birds—the plover, the duck, the swan, the turtle dove and the swift do not have symbolic properties, but rather have a function within certain phrases or established expressions with a humorous or ironic effect. The Hungarian, for example, tells Dr. Suk that the plover sits on the water, and he does not know where he would sit even on dry land (Pavić 2012: 88); "What is not of this world cannot be remembered, it remains in memory as much as a swallowed weatherfish in a duck" (Pavić 2012: 260); Skopljak-pasha ate and desecrated at the same time, like the turtle dove (Pavić 2012: 162); For Cohen, the writings against him are worth "as many poems as a swift vomits in flight" (Pavić 2012: 203), while the monk Longinus, ready for asceticism, felt "like a swan waiting with outstretched wings for the wind to blow, so that it can sail across the water" (Pavić 2012: 261), but the wind from Theoctist's pen drove him to his death, because Longinus fasted for 50 days instead of 5, believing in the truth of what was written (Pavić 2012: 262). The common denominator of all examples would be, finally, reduction to nothingness and meaninglessness: Dr. Suk has nowhere to sit, what is not of this world cannot be remembered at all, nothing of food remains in the body of Skopljak-pasha, for Cohen, the accusations have no value, and Longinus' asceticism is in vain.

If we summarize the analysis of all types of birds in the *Dictionary of the Khazars*, we can come to the conclusion that birds can be divided into two basic groups, which include birds with positive and negative connotations. Birds with positive meanings could include: a) those whose memory, reproduction, and knowledge of the language preserve the poetry of the original Khazar dictionary from oblivion (parrot, woodpecker, swallow, albatross); b) birds that, like interpreters, help in the ways of reading a book or that symbolize divine or mystical knowledge (jay, woodpecker, dove, heron, eagle); c) symbols of spiritual values, healing, salvation, and resurrection ("ku", dove, ostrich, falcon, finch, goose, hen, owl). On the other hand, there are birds that are: a) symbols of death (hawk, sparrowhawk, cuckoo, tit, woodpecker, crow); b) the underworld, demonic and devilish (crow, jackdaw, partridge, snipe); c) signs of nothingness (float, duck, swan, turtle dove, swift).

Taken as a whole, the angelic and demonic nature of Adam Kadmon / Ruhani / Christ's brother corresponds to and divides the birds into positive (white) and negative (black) birds: "all the deaths of Adam's descendants migrate and return to Adam's death, thus building, like particles, one, great death commensurate with Adam's body and life. It is as if white birds migrate, and black birds return from migration" (Pavić 2012: 270) and, also, white and black birds unite the meaning of the word Khazar in Arabic: "Hence their name of white and black Khazars can be understood in another way: since 'khazar' in Arabic means white and black bird, it can be assumed that the white Khazars represent the days, and the black Khazars the nights" (Pavić, 2012: 166). Therefore, if the goal of the dream hunters is to revive Adam, they must count on birds of both the upper and lower spheres. Also, with the above analogy, Adam and Khazar become synonymous because they represent a combination of both white and black birds.

In the aestheticization of the Romanesque bird universe, Milorad Pavić used the symbolism of individual birds, but he also took into account to a significant extent the symbolism of birds in the tradition of all Slavic peoples. To the extent that it relies on Eastern tradition, it comes precisely from Đorđe Marković Koder, who was guided by occult and Sufi texts in creating his ornithological world, and his concept is somewhat close to Pavić's: "In choosing birds as the main characters of the poem, Koder opted for the upper, celestial spheres, opposite to the chthonic spaces, which are embodied, for example, by the snake. But the bird is also a messenger of death, since it is connected to the soul [...] here it is placed in the framework of a dream, a state on the border of life and death. And it is precisely this state, this proximity to the lower world, that enables the penetration of the messages of the non-verbal language" (Ivanić, 2014: 284).

The *Rigveda* states that reason is the fastest bird (cf. Gerbran – Ševalije 2013: 755), and hence the bird-like Adam was considered the "third reason of the world", until he got carried away, and "the seven heavenly Cherubim found themselves on the angelic ladder above him in the meantime" (Pavić, 2012: 135). Adam's goal is to climb the ladder again and become the "fastest bird", and he is helped in this by the dreamcatchers, characters in the novel, whose characterization is carried out precisely through ornithological portraiture. And, finally, the poetry written by Princess Ateh, the first creator of a dictionary about the Khazars, is largely inspired by birds; As Saint John Peirce says, "the birds preserve for us something of the song of creation" (Gerbran – Ševalije 2013: 755), and the Khazar dreamcatchers and the reader are supposed to "recreate the world" (Pavić 2012: 25).

RECOGNIZING THE FRUIT KU

> "The true word is always like an apple with a snake around the tree, with its root in the ground and its crown in the sky."
>
> (M. Pavić, *Dictionary of the Khazars*)

If an apple with a snake around the tree is a clear association with the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and if it is an apple tree with its root in the ground and its crown in the sky, which clearly points us to the Axis mundi, i.e., the axis of the world (cf. Eliade 2003: 87), the "true word" is clearly manifested as a word of knowledge, but also as a central word to which all other words are subordinate, and in addition, it is a word that would be able to encompass and delimit the totality of reality—the underworld ("with its root in the ground") and the divine expanses ("with its crown in the sky").

The next step would be to ask what the "true word" could be, the guiding word through some of the corridors of the "labyrinth" (Pijanović 1998: 148) of the *Dictionary of the Khazars*. The answer could fit into the word – *ku*, the name of a bird-fish-like fruit, cold, slightly salty, which "the only one the devil left in the memory of the Khazar princess Ateh after she forgot her language" (Pavić 1994: 248). Of primary importance would be a reference to the *Great Egyptian Book of the Dead*[15], from which it is learned that man is made of seven parts:[16] *kat* (body), *ka* (astral double), *ren* (name), *sahu* (light envelope), *ab* (conscience), *ba* (individual soul), *ku* (supreme soul)—(cf. Krmpotić 1976: 163). This underlining leads to an analogy between the name Pavić gave to the Khazar fruit tree and the name for the supreme soul of the ancient Egyptians. Pavić certainly had this concept in mind, which he most likely first encountered in the text "The Egyptian School of Death" by Vesna Krmpotić (1973: 49–61), printed in the same issue of the journal *Književnost*, which published a selection of French baroque poets, a translated study of a German baroque novel, and an article on Ubavkić's sculptural works by his first wife, Branka Basta.

According to the ancient Egyptians' belief, *ku* is, namely, a synecdoche for the supreme soul, i.e., a part of the divine supreme soul in man, which strives to unite with the divine principle. "In a burial chamber

[15] According to Vesna Krmpotić (1976: 150), the *Great Egyptian Book of the Dead* bears this title unfoundedly, which is only a reflection of a superficial understanding of its philosophy of life and death; so it would be more correct to say the *Book of Entry into the New Day.*

[16] The body of Adam, the brother of Christ, according to Avram Branković's writings, is also made up of seven parts: Earth, Stone, Water, Dew, Wind, Cloud, Angel (Pavić 1994: 538), so one gets the impression that Adam's body is attributed with the same designation as the "true word", the totality from Earth to Angel.

opposite the great city of Memphis, in the Saqqara cemetery, there is an inscription, carved long ago, back during the Third Dynasty: Atum is a god who is completed by every man (...) God is an unfinished whole; the whole is the process of including parts; the parts are individual people. The name for this concept is Atum" (Krmpotić 1976: 105). The seventh part of man—*ku*, is a pledge of this completion.

Seen through the lens of the *Dictionary of the Khazars*, the ancient Egyptian Atum concept is to some extent recognizable in the attempts to create Adam Ruhani (*Green Book*) / Adam Kadmon (*Yellow Book*) / Adam, brother of Christ (*Appendix I*). Leaving only the word *ku* in memory of the Khazar princess Ateh, Satan did not take anything away from her, because *ku* means the essence of man, the Absolute. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Masoud, the dreamcatcher and compiler of Adam Rouhani, had his own camel turn its head and spit in his eyes when, not recognizing the *ku*, he did not accept Princess Ateh's offer to taste it, but rather settled for a much smaller offer. (cf. Pavić 1994: 275–276).

The fruit of the *ku* is fish-like and has the ability to fly like a bird. Namely, the god Tehuti / Thoth, the father of Egyptian writing, "teacher of medicine, the science of sounds; father of geography, literature, history and legislation, magic, alchemy, calendar and astronomy (...)" (Krmpotić 1976: 22) was represented zoomorphically, in the form of an ibis bird, or was attributed as a "fish-like newcomer". In addition, the soul (*ba*) flies out after death in the form of a bird (cf. Matje 2004: 124), while as far as fish-likeness is concerned, the *Book of the Dead* may be of importance, more specifically the representation of fishing, which symbolizes the union of the male and female principles (*Book of the Dead* 1982: 98–101). In this way, the Absolute of knowledge that this fruit synthesizes is once again mediated, but also its role as a link between life and death. Masudi's failure of non-recognition, finally, gains importance because, at the same time, he did not reach the essence of man and his goal in this world.

The next step would be to consider the significance of *ka* (astral double) for *ku* (supreme soul) in the context of the *Dictionary of the Khazars*. *Ka* should "observe the quality of life, dreaminess and delusion, until it understands where the origin and root of that dream is" (Krmpotić 1976: 179). If we also emphasize once again that *ka* is a designation for an astral double, it can be observed that Avram Branković and Samuel Cohen could be each other's astral doubles, since the event of one is projected as the dream of the other and vice versa. In this context, it is worth noting that "the Egyptians were the only ones in the Mediterranean circle of civilizations who explored the realm of dreams and fantasy with a ruler and compass. For dreams are lawful,

mathematics is dreamlike" (Krmpotić 1976: 95), while, also, "placed in correct relationships and stretches, the circle, triangle and quadrilateral form the archetype of the total reality—the pyramid" (Krmpotić 1976: 91). The above can help us to precisely profile the relationship between Avram Branković and Samuel Cohen, and to shed light on the role of Yusuf Masudi in this relationship.

The author is "a creator who critically thinks about the lost dictionary and builds the Khazar pyramid of his time on its determinants" (Pijanović 1998: 144), and an hourglass is built into the *Dictionary of the Khazars*, a copy of the Daubmanus lexicon. Therefore, the relationship between dreamers and dream chasers can be illustrated precisely with the help of a combination of two pyramids, which are placed so that their tops touch, and would resemble an hourglass. The upper pyramid would be Avram Branković's waking reality, i.e., Cohen's dream, and the lower one would be Cohen's waking reality, i.e., Branković's dream. As time goes by ("Dr. Suk says that time comes from the south and crosses the Danube at the site of Trajan's Bridge", Pavić 1994: 494) and as the meeting between them approaches, we approach the tops of the pyramids, which would have a common peak. Egyptologists believe that the tops of the pyramids were once golden, had the so-called *golden pyramidion*, and it enabled contact with the universe and the principle of healing with Atum (Krmpotić 1976: 106). However, how do we position Masudi? Masudi follows the events and witnesses the collision, but one gets the impression that regardless of the fact that he had insight into the death of Avram Branković, i.e., Cohen's dream, his catch did not contribute to the creation of Adam Ruhani. Perhaps the reason is that he did not recognize the fruit woman, and so, not knowing the "password" for healing, he is ultimately killed or disfigured, and not enlightened. Otherwise, according to the Egyptians (or Tibetans in the Bardo state) in the state of Duat, when the soul travels after death to the New Day, a failure to recognize either a demon, a name, or a philosophical principle also means the fate of that soul on the path to salvation. That much greater is Masudi's tragedy.

When the waking reality of Abraham B. = the dream of Samuel K. was to become the waking reality of Samuel K. = the dream of Abraham B. (the reality of Abraham B. is also the reality of Masudi, the dream of Samuel K. is the only thing that a non-dreamer has insight into), the hourglass would turn once a day and time would continue to flow. The meeting of these two is an interruption of time, which means a potential contact with eternity (and "eternity is timelessness", Krmpotić 1976: 17). Translated to the level of the *Dictionary of the Khazars*, Adam Ruhani is seven steps behind himself on the scale, and thus time was born, "because time is only that part of eternity that is late" (Pavić

1994: 258). The meeting of the two dreamers would, through the medium of the dream catcher, abolish time, i.e. it would connect with Adam, and thus with eternity.

Dictionary of the Khazars includes the *Red, Green, Yellow Books, Appendix I* and *Appendix II. The Red Book* has twelve entries, the *Green Book* has sixteen, the *Yellow Book* has twelve, and there are also two *Appendixes*. When all is added up, we arrive at the number forty-two (although one can also speak of 45 entries depending on the edition, so the *Red Book* would have fourteen, the *Green Book* sixteen, and the *Yellow Book* fifteen entries). In addition to the fact that "the forty-two await the court in the courtroom, which [...] is called the Hall of the Two Truths" (Krmpotić 1976: 79; *Book of the Dead* 1982: 65), "all the knowledge available to man was collected and arranged by Tehuti in forty-two books" (Krmpotić 1976: 79). One would say that this number is not accidental. It represents the "realization of the soul as a whole" (Krmpotić 1976: 79), and this is precisely what resembles the Atum concept and the fruit *ku*. "Forty-two is a multiple of seven, which is the number of a rounded and perfect system" (kat, ka, ren, sahu, ab, ba, ku), whose "multiplier is the number six, the signifier of the individual soul (*ba*), because it is the unity of two triangles (fire and water)" (Krmpotić 1976: 79). The numbers seven and six are often apostrophized in the *Dictionary of the Khazars*.

When it comes to the Book, the *Dictionary of the Khazars*, and Tehuti's Book, it would be worth pointing out Milorad Pavić's *Second Body*. This novel corresponds on a deeper, even metaphysical level with the *Dictionary of the Khazars* and ancient Egyptian philosophy, especially in the chapters "The Clay Army" and "The Tale of the Clay Army."

In short, the Chinese

> "ruler was not naive and knew that a book was a perishable thing. And it was out of the question for him to order his enumerators to entrust this endless inventory to words and paper, to something that has echo and ashes [...] So, the enumerators of the powerful ruler created their inventory in clay [...] Something like a second body of the army was made [...] just as the Creator of man made it from the dust of the earth [...] In short, each soldier was a letter, and the clay army was a book from whose letters, by rearranging them, any epic poem could be made at will [...] They are a book. I send that book into the hands of Someone who is outside of time and space, so they too must move along a path that runs outside of time and space, which means underground [...] It was something like an endless dictionary of the ruler's life and life on earth in general. From so many letters, any thing could be made" (Pavić 2006: 163–164).

This clay army or book has its correlate in the story of Adam Kadmon: "The Khazars saw letters in people's dreams and searched for the primeval man, the pre-eternal Adam Kadmon, who was both man and woman. They believed that each person had one of the letters of the alphabet and that each of these letters represented a part of Adam Kadmon's body on earth and that in people's dreams these letters combined and came to life in Adam's body" (Pavić 1994: 390).

Lydia and Lisa's conversation about the clay army was overheard by a Chinese maid/cook, a possible equivalent of Virginia Ateh, a waitress at the Kingston Hotel, a witness in the case of Dr. Dorothea Schultz, who testified orally in court about the "truthfulness" of the events that took place in the hotel garden, and who added words in her written report in Chinese that the aforementioned Lydia and Lisa did not say:

> "It is ridiculous to think that souls move from one body to another here and now, as taught by Buddha, the Orphists, the Pythagoreans, or Plato. Our second body never remains in the same temporal plane as our first, earthly body. It always moves to some other "now". Perhaps these other bodies of ours remain right next to us, but in some other temporal dimension and no longer have our present.
>
> The clay soldiers are Ku. Something that guarantees that out of nothingness a being will be created here or somewhere in the universe, where they come across the well of life. That's where our emperor's clay soldiers go... They move, we can say, from one "ku" of Buddhist teaching to another, from one celestial chakra to another. They are looking for their second body. They are looking for life" (Pavić 2006: 168).

The ancient Egyptian *ku*, which is the supreme soul, initiated first into the fruit *ku* through Pavić, may have become the highest instance in the clay soldiers. *Ku* became a word that we could call a *name-seed* (Krmpotić 1976: 168), a possible synecdoche for the Absolute, from which flow all other words and auras of meaning, a pledge for the emergence of the Book and its duration outside of time and space.

However, it is dangerous to play with some words. "The word became flesh" (*Verbum caro factum est*) is a sentence from the ninth page of Daubmanus's poisonous copy of the *Dictionary of the Khazars*, after which the reader would die (Pavić 1994: 19). The danger of words becoming flesh is also testified to in the confession of Teoktist Nikolsky: "Little by little, I felt the terrible power that I hold in my inkwell and release into the world at will. And then I concluded: every writer can easily kill his hero in two lines. In order to kill the reader, that is, a creature of flesh and blood, it is enough to turn him for a moment

into a character from a book (that is, into a word), into a hero of life. After that it is easy..." (Pavić 1994: 520). If a person can be replaced by a name, i.e., a word, by crossing out his name, he can also be harmed. This is the basis of secret Egyptian magic (cf. Budge 1988). That is why it was risky to tell another person their true name. Whoever knows the name knows the essence of a person and can harm him. Going through the Duat, the deceased is safe from demons if he knows the names of all snakes and crocodiles: "The sacred act by which "the Word became flesh" is the foundation of poetic utterances [...] proof of "suggestive power"" (Krmpotić 1976: 166).

The existence of conscience enables conversation with one's own soul. In the *Dictionary of the Khazars*, "the archangel brought Nikon his soul as a gift. So Nikon hunted and caught his own soul that morning and began a conversation with it" (Pavić 1994: 125). For ancient Egyptian philosophy, "the heart [seat of conscience] (*ab*) is a nest for the bird of consciousness and conscience (*ba*) [...] To make the heart speak meant to open the way to prophetic inspiration, a clairvoyant lament" (Krmpotić 1976: 54), which can be best read from the famous *Discourse with One's Own Soul* (Krmpotić 1976: 58–61).

Words also have a soul, since flesh and speech are equated: "He believed, according to Halevi, that vowels are the soul of the letter and that accordingly, for each of the 22 consonants, three vowels come" (Pavić 1994: 415) and "Vowels are the soul in the body of consonants" (Pavić 1994: 461). "The ancient Egyptian script does not contain vowels. Therefore, its pronunciation is mostly unknown to us, except in those rare words that have been unearthed from Coptic, the ancient language of the first Christians, which is the last offshoot of a noble language that 'thought for those who speak it'" (Krmpotić 1976: 61). Consonants are, therefore, the body of the word and are visible, and vowels—the soul, it is assumed that they exist, but they are not seen.

In addition to superficial ancient Egyptian references, the aforementioned Ramses III (Pavić 1994: 179), then the more significant Averkij Skyla of Coptic origin, and the Egyptian-Israeli war of 1967, we can, for example, touch upon one significant coincidence, according to which, in addition to Cain and Abel, Adam also had a son, Seth. Seth is the name of the Egyptian god of darkness, who dismembered Osiris, and thus denotes the principle of disunity. In Pavić's work, the matter is re-semantized: "There is a huge difference—said Isaac Sangari to the Khagan—between Adam, who was created by Jehovah, and his son Seth, who was created by Adam. Therefore, Seth and all the people after him are God's intention, but the work of man" (Pavić 1994: 431). So, Seth is perhaps for Adam what Petkutin is for Avram Branković or the Khagan's double is for the Khagan himself. Finally, the *Book of the Dead*,

through the deceased's renunciations of sins, declares that it is a sin to imitate the demiurge: "I have not done any divine deed" (*Book of the Dead* 1982: 67), and thus Seth, Petkutin, and the Khagan's double are acts displeasing to God.

Pavić also somewhat altered the semantic aura of the tripartite deities (guardians of cities) embodied in the *yantra*-like trinity of father-mother-son (cf. Krmpotić 1976: 115), transforming it into the Van der Spak family, "father, mother, and son. Dr. Suk calls them "the holy family" (Pavić 1994: 494). It is clear that the father, mother and son are actually demons of Islamic, Christian and Hebrew hell, i.e., reincarnated Ibn Akshani, Nikon Sevast and Efrosinija Lukarević from the baroque layer of the book, who are responsible for creating discord and preventing the integration of Adam.

The ancient Egyptian aspects of the *Dictionary of the Khazars* and the *Second Body* build a pyramid of layers. The most obvious would be the parts of the base of the pyramid (the quadrangle, "the symbol of the world of embodied ideas", Krmpotić 1976: 91), while climbing to the top we would have increasingly abstract (narrower) aspects, less material, and even almost invisible, such as the soul of the word, the golden pyramidion or the "supreme soul".

CONCLUSION

The theme of Pavić's Byzantium as a Serbian Renaissance is, of course, broader than this study and should be expanded to include the writer's entire oeuvre. However, since the *Dictionary of the Khazars* can be considered a synecdoche of that oeuvre, it was perhaps not superfluous to provide an answer to the question of what Byzantium as a symbol means for the writer and his work, and in what directions reflection on these answers can move. In terms of Serbian culture and literature, the connection with Byzantium is valuable as a form of nurturing universal value and contextualizing it with European heritage. Also, the connection with Byzantine culture marks the beginnings of our literature and the continuity that has lasted for almost ten centuries. Byzantium is, therefore, a symbol for the integrity and duration of Serbian literature. It is both our Renaissance and our pledge of "revival", an inexhaustible source of artistic inspiration and the source of the Serbian Baroque, but also a historical warning that teaches about the causes and consequences of the downfall of a people. That is why it is connected with the topic of the Khazars. From a strictly literary point of view, Milorad Pavić functionalized and aestheticized his work in dialogue with the poetics of Byzantine literature, in terms of the semanticization of form and content, the allegorization of the body (as

parchment, flag, letter), styles and genres, the concept of time, the thematization of icons and iconoclasm, birds in a Sufi (Atar) and sophistic (Aristophanes) key and a specific relationship to the religion of the ancient Egyptians. In this way, he presented Byzantium to us as a bequest, as an Andrić "cup" that should be passed down from generation to generation.

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Translated from Serbian by
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MIODRAG RAIČEVIĆ

WITH ZMAJ AT MATICA SRPSKA

Honourable Father, esteemed presidency of the Matica srpska, respected members of the jury for the Zmaj Award, ladies and gentlemen...

Today, in this solemn moment, I receive with deep gratitude the award named after Jovan Jovanović Zmaj. The Matica srpska is celebrating its 197th anniversary, and I feel immense joy and pride. The Matica is impressing its centuries-old seal on this moment by selecting my book and bestowing this award, the most significant among the Serbian people. It is a privilege to be here with you, brothers and sisters. I appreciated the journey to Novi Sad, and I am honoured to stand before you. A writer who knows where the Matica is knows where his heart and soul reside.

Zmaj's work is so significant that anyone who attended school likely knows at least one of his poems by heart. I heard my first poem, and my first from Zmaj, from my father, Veliša. It was "The Little Horseman." Who doesn't know it! My father learned it in elementary school in Sotonići, Crmnica. Njegoš calls this place "the Serbian pride and joy" in *The Tower of Đurišić*. I still hear my father recite it to my brother Slavko and me before bed. At "gee-gee," he gently rocked us. We'd fall asleep.

Later, I encountered the sadder, more serious side of Zmaj. The contrast between his playful verses and the deep sorrow caused by unparalleled family tragedy in Serbian literature unsettled me. Despite this grief, he continued to follow his calling. Such endurance is both inspiring and humbling, and though much has been said of this perseverance, it bears repeating here.

2

Nikola Tesla's regard for Jovan Jovanović Zmaj deeply impressed me. The two great Serbs recognised each other. Tesla called him the greatest Serbian poet. In 1897, they met in Belgrade. Zmaj wrote verses for Tesla's arrival. Tesla was moved to tears and kissed Zmaj's hand. Back in the United States, Tesla translated several of Zmaj's poems. These were the first Serbian poems translated in America.

A GREETING TO NIKOLA TESLA BEFORE HIS ARRIVAL IN BELGRADE

Belgrade is happy today,
shaking hands with Serbia's pride,
and revealing its heart
before a great son of the Serbian people.
But you must return—
Our meeting is short.
Yet it carries the warmth
of a brotherly embrace.
A fresh leaf will understand
each vein of its tree;
electricity will bind us—
(the electricity of our hearts)—
even without a wire or cable.

* * *

"The greatest effect in poetry comes when the poet surprises with the familiar. A poet hopes to be like a provincial cheese—local, yet valued everywhere," W. H. Auden said. Now, late in life, mistakes aside, I understand I was right in all things.

The poems in *About the Things Homer Missed* reflect my past and some present preoccupations. They are sensations that shaped me as a poet—a child of my time.

At the end of this "Homer" are poems I, a sinner, dedicated to my mother. In a mother's heart lies the root of poetry. One should always remember that. Often, we do not even perceive how that great heart shines above us like a halo. Regrettably, this truth is often learned too late. A mother's heart always understands—and forgives, forgives, forgives...

I will never forgive myself for not kissing my mother's hand upon each return. This was once a custom, though it is rare today. One can never fully grasp what that kiss evokes within a mother's heart, nor that what it evokes is meant for her child.

When my mother died, I wept as I had long wished to weep.

*"*The role of the eyes is not to see, but to weep,*"* says Emil Cioran.

A man spends his life waiting. When what he waited for finally arrives, he freezes. Then he realises it is not what he hoped for. He understands it has come for him.

Dear friends, distinguished connoisseurs and lovers of art, brothers and sisters—I have no great wishes. Great wishes require great flights. I no longer possess such wings. The only thing I desire today is to dream and to write of those dreams, until I awaken.

In closing, I thank my noble friends, some of whom are here today. Without their kindness, neither this book nor I could stand before you.

I thank once more Matica srpska, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, the esteemed jury, and you, dear friends.

I thank God for taking idle time from me. He returned me to what remains my life: books and writing.

(Speech held on the occasion of the presentation of the Zmaj Award, delivered at the ceremonial session of the Matica srpska, February 16, 2023)

Translated from the Serbian by
Ljubica Jankov

JOVAN DELIĆ

"SNOW COVERS EVERYTHING EXCEPT MEMORIES"

Marked by numerous quotations and mottos, along with occasional dedications, the book *About the Things Homer Missed* by Miodrag Raičević is distinctly dialogic. This dialogue with the poetry and culture of the world begins even before one starts reading the poems themselves—already in the book's preface. First, we encounter a brief autopoetic quotation by Czesław Miłosz ("Ars poetica"):

> "I have always yearned for a more encompassing form,
> one that would be neither overly poetic nor overly prosaic."

Raičević adopts Miłosz's principle, applying it to the majority of poems in this book. Admittedly, there are also very short poems, composed in brief, sometimes neatly rhymed and carefully structured verse.

Serbian avant-garde poets—Miloš Crnjanski and Rastko Petrović, more than anyone else—had already, much earlier and independently of Czesław Miłosz, blurred the boundaries between poetry and prose. This led to the prosaisation of verse, particularly in Rastko Petrović, and the poetisation of prose, especially in Miloš Crnjanski, but also in Momčilo Nastasijević. Raičević's prosaisation of verse, therefore, has a very long and esteemed tradition in Serbian literature, although Czesław Miłosz, was its encouragement and direct stimulus. The first—Miłosz's—quote in the book pertains to the relationship between poetry and prose, that is, the issue of verse and rhythm, as well as the presence of a lyrical plot. A significant number of Raičević's poems possess a pronounced lyrical essence, sometimes even forming an entire short crypto-story, which aligns with this relationship between verse and prose.

Crnjanski is mentioned here for a reason. It is possible that Ithaca came to Raičević's poetry through Homer, or rather Cavafy and Ricos, but Miloš Crnjanski—and Raičević knows this well—published his *Lyrics of Ithaca* in 1919. It is from that work that the metaphor of *a mouse gnawing at* (...) *the heart,* which we find in Raičević's poem about his mother's death—"There are no other angels". Without diminishing the significant inspiration of the dialogue with Greek poets—Cavafy above all—we must not overlook Miloš Crnjanski either, especially since he is a poet of deep melancholy, and Raičević alludes to him both with a toponym (Ithaca), and a lyrical hero (Odysseus), and a metaphor (a mouse gnawing at the heart). Everything in the book is well thought out and arranged so that, through the poems, one can hear the humming of different poetic voices in a dialogue.

Miłosz's "more comprehensive form" calls to mind T. S. Eliot, who saw the future of modern poetry in the long form, and whose one poetic principle Raičević likewise quotes and 'makes his own':

> *Simplicity and deep feeling make good poetry.*

It sounds so primordial and archaic, yet it comes from a poet who has for decades been the very personification of modernity. This book is composed under the sign of that principle, especially its final cycle of poems, which thematises the mother's death. Another introductory note concerns the title of the book, *About the Things Homer Missed*:

> *Isaac Porphyrogenitus (...), probably Emperor Isaac I Komnenos, who is believed to have ruled from 1057 to 1059 before abdicating the throne and retiring to a monastery, wrote a prose treatise About the Things Homer Missed (...), with the intention of supplementing and completing Homer's work. We have no such ambitions.*

Our poet, therefore, has no ambitions to "complete and round off Homer's work," thereby establishing an ironic-parodic relationship towards both Porphyrogenitus and Homer. Still, he completes and rounds off that work by re-actualising both the *Odyssey* and Ithaca, as in Crnjanski, making them part of his world and his time, while paying deep respect to Greece, its classical and contemporary poetry, and its beauty. It may be that for Raičević, as once for Crnjanski, the *Odyssey* is the greatest work of world literature, and Ulysses is its greatest tragic hero and archetype, which marked Serbian lyric poetry of the 20th century, and the 20th century of world literature in prose, and has now emerged in the 21st century.

The first poem, "On Death and Early Rising," already hints at one of the main themes of this book—the theme of death—and demonstrates Raičević's mastery in combining this theme with irony and poetic humour. Humour is one of the enduring features of Raičević's poetry, but in this book, he has combined humour with a dense melancholy; through this fusion of humour and the theme of death, the poem gains in depth, originality, and universality.

The lyrical plot—seemingly borrowed from Gogol, whom Raičević is fond of—is built on anecdotes:

> Sherwood Anderson got drunk on a ship on excellent martinis, drinking them with olives on a toothpick, but Anderson managed to do what many have not: he swallowed the martini, the olive, and the toothpick together. That, brothers and sisters, cost him his life.

Sophocles was not so fortunate: he choked to death on a grape.

By rendering these two bizarre deaths humorous, Raičević universalises them as "anecdotes" about death, making death omnipresent and always ready to spring a playful surprise on a human being, no matter how famous or renowned he may be. The humour is further intensified by the onomatopoeic "plop-plop."

> (...) Death, it should be noted,
> Always surprises us with a grape, with a martini in which—
> Plop-plop—a toothpick floats. And even when you do not think of it,
> Death thinks of you. (...)

In the poem "The Surrounding of Ghana," the focus is on laughter.

> Love, I leave you my clogs:
> they would make too much noise while
> I walk on the clouds. (...)

The contemplation of death, sparked by old photographs, drives the lyrical heroine to profound anthropological insights. She realises that just as weeds grow near the human heart, we humans, in our relentless pursuit of grand achievements, often overlook the beauty of small things and moments that are essential to a fulfilling life:

> We persistently forget small, sweet moments,
> waiting for something big and important to happen.
> And we forget. We forget!
> And then death surprises us. Come on!

It is still a significant discovery that

> The earth does its job better than we
> ever could. (...)

The conversational tone and rhythm of speech give charm to many of Raičević's poems, making them more lively and witty.

The poems dedicated to deceased friends: the painter Milan Tucović and the poets Novica Tadić and Miodrag Miša Tripković, concretise the close presence of death among the closest comrades and peers: death is here, among us; it chooses and takes the best among us one by one.

The suggestive and somewhat mysterious poem "Lights in the Hills" is dedicated to Milan Tucović. Its mystery is announced by the questions in the first stanza: what do they announce to us, and whose lives do those tiny and persistent lights in the hills hide "in their fiery hearts"?

The lyrical subject is in the plural—*we*—and includes both the one who writes the poem and the one to whom it is dedicated. At one time, this lyrical *we* identified itself with those small lights, but they remained, persistently shining even after that lyrical *we* had left them behind and gone to the city.

The relationship toward those small lights is ambivalent: they are both near and distant, like a memory; they are, nevertheless, something that the lyrical *we* has lost forever, and thus seeks them in the distance, in the hills.

Night will not extinguish those lights in the memory of the lyrical *we*. But now those small lights are "only the shadow of something / that was promised to us, yet never truly given." An illusion that attains fullness only in memory. Yet it is a persistent illusion—tiny, luminous, and indestructible.

The poem dedicated to Novica Tadić is excellently titled with the demonstrative pronoun This: *this* is *that* unnamed and undefined presence that follows and surrounds us. We are convinced that we are looking at it, while it is looking at us; all our lives, we think about it, without considering that someone had already thought it before us; we search for it in fallen leaves, while someone has already found it or will find it. The point is entirely Tadić-like, with his laughter, with a toothy danger and undisguised hostility. This and that is close enough for us to point to, yet remains foreign, alien, unnamed, and dangerous, no matter how much it hides behind laughter and cordiality:

> This which you laugh at all your life,
> And that looks at you, and laughs at you,
> Warmly, as if it knows you from somewhere,
> Showing teeth that are counting on you.

That smiling, toothy *this* lurks nearby. Raičević has shown closeness to Tadić's poetics and grotesque.

Raičević dedicated the ballad "On Narayama" to Miodrag Miša Tripković. It bears a motto by Robinson Jeffers about the death of a deer: a wounded deer goes to die in a designated place, where deer die and where their bones lie mingled "beneath the leaves by a glimmering spring in the forest." The old woman—originally a film character, which makes this poem intermedial—is led by her son to a cave to die. In front of the cave, she will spread out a blanket, sit down, and, beneath the falling snow, await death:

> The heart of peace and sorrow is one.

The point lies in the summary of the poem. The old woman addresses her son from a distance, somehow sensing Rilke and his poetic vision of the juxtaposition of the *beautiful* and the *terrifying*.

> Here, *beautiful* and *terrifying* are the same word.
> What you see in your dream, my son, is the light of a day
> that is fading. I will stay here.
> I have dreamed of this day for years. Now it is mine.
> There is no other day but the one on which we die.

The old woman reduces her entire life to the day of death—especially if that day has been dreamed of and attained; consciously chosen. Has she joined the deer? Has she made her soul deer-like? Some stories and many archetypes are universal by nature. Mount Narayama receives the dying elderly and the deer.

This is predominantly a book about death—about the dead and about memory, which is the only thing that remains when snow covers everything else. That is why this is a book of deep nostalgia for a vanished world, for beloved people who are gone, and of even deeper melancholy. After so much death and a love that has fled forever, a person is "alone and desolate," as the lyrical subject felt before his dead mother in the morgue. As the book progresses, the sorrow intensifies until, at the very end, it reaches its peak, when the poet confronts and writes about his mother's death.

Throughout the entire book, the motif of lovers forever separated runs quietly beneath the surface, along with a constant, futile longing for the reunion of their lips and shoulders. The short poem "On the Stars" talks about the absence of love even in the astral spaces, among the stars:

So many stars abide,
side by side,
through all eternity—
Yet never do they meet.
Their bodies burn with fire,
their hearts are cold as void,
and love, when it finds its way to them,
comes only to die.

This poetry lives on memory and remembrance; they are both its source and its central theme. In the poem *On Withered Leaves*, the motto, taken from Henry Rider Haggard, states: "The food that memories provide is bitter in taste." This poem draws its life from the comparison between days that pass in a flash and withered leaves:

The days that leave us far too swiftly
remind me more and more of withered leaves—
(ah, it serves me right for being a poet).

Raičević realises that the comparison used in the poem belongs to the poetic tradition and may evoke associations with Branko Radičević; he therefore introduces an ironic distance in parentheses: "(ah, it serves me right for being a poet)."

In the poem *Lights in the Hills*, the lights are described as both "near and yet distant, like memory." Memory, by its nature, is paradoxical, as it is simultaneously close and distant.

A cupboard, frequently varnished by the father, also emerges from memory and corresponds to the verse by Milosav Tešić cited in the motto: "(...) thus, though decayed, it endures—dear in memory." Melancholy is associated with objects that are both cherished and lost, while the sustenance offered by memory is characterised as bitter. The insights to which memory leads are likewise not more comforting:

> His mind draws him back to his childhood, and he remembers it. He remembers his father and mother, the little house...Then he sees his small room—clean, whitewashed, a table spread with paper. He gazes at that white sheet, covered in tiny script, and above it, a young man, whose first shadow of a moustache had only just begun to darken...Only then does he realise that he has learned nothing (...).

An entire country, serving as a metonymy for two great civilisations—Ancient Greece and Byzantium—Raičević's beloved Greece, has been transformed into memory, as it is perceived and felt by Cavafy:

a heart of world culture and civilisation, especially in the realm of art. Ancient Greece and Byzantium embody this legacy; for Raičević, so too does modern Greece at the height of its poetic expression:

> As radiant as every day that holds the sun,
> so does my heart, when I utter your name,
> flare and fall blind in the selfsame instant:
> *Hellas! Hellas! Hellas!*
> and you, the poet says, have wholly turned
> into memory—here, where all is ancient
> as the brow of Zeus (...).

Hence, Odysseus emerges as our contemporary and our double; hence, Ithaca is reclaimed as our true home.

Ultimately, the memory of one's mother is described as a 'votive candle in the soul—one that burns, yet glows.' Meanwhile, the cold ash in a stove—a haunting reminder of former warmth in a house where no one remains to kindle the flame—is all that summons the 'good old days,' while simultaneously evoking a chilling void.

Memory, then, serves as both a poetic strategy and the leitmotif of this collection; through expansive variations, it constructs a profound associative wealth and defines a thematic-semantic field, enriching this exquisite volume of poetry with both intellectual depth and emotional resonance.

However much he ironises solitude as a poetic cliché, and literature that counts on lonely female readers, Raičević, despite all the irony, portrays its danger and its devastating presence:

> ...(Ah, solitude, solitude always brings sorrow,
> like a postman. And when you are alone, there's no one to take it away.)

Gogol is one of Raičević's greatest literary fascinations; Gogol in dialogue with his literary heroes; Gogol in whose prose "souls flutter"; the brilliant creator of laughter and a writer who burned the second part of *Dead Souls*. Perhaps in that act of burning his work lies yet another point of connection between Raičević and Gogol. In the poem *Without Comfort*, Raičević sings of burning the poems of his youth, in a garden he never returned to, not even to light a cigarette. In terms of humour, satire, the tendency toward grotesque and fantastic, the masterful use of anecdote, and even the burning of one's own works, Raičević is very close to Gogol.

Greece is Raičević's great love—the poverty of the land and the richness of its spirit; the hearth of world culture from which we received writing and literature, the land that clothed us in Christ and history; a

land that is a tear in the poet's eye, as expressed in the verses where Raičević addresses the Greek poet Cavafy at the beginning of his cycle on Greece and Ithaca:

> Greece is a tear in the eye that forever glimmers, Cavafy!
> I weep when I leave it, for I must go away;
> I weep when I go to it, for I know I will depart.

At the opening of the poem *Ithaca*, the poet's heart "blazes and goes blind at once," like a sunlit day, simply at the sound of the name Greece. The poem unfolds as a dialogue with Odysseus, whom the poet gently warns not to grieve over a fate that has betrayed him. Penelope waits "for your heart to be an anchor among the other / anchors on the shore." She longs for her husband's presence, not for a wandering hero.

Thus, the poem about Ithaca transforms into a meditation on the human heart itself:

> For when you leave, Greece takes from your heart only what you cannot carry—the light burden when you have it,
> and a heavy one when you do not.

The ending and the point of the poem lie in the connection between the heart and Ithaca:

> And should it happen, anywhere on this earthly globe,
> that you lose your heart, return to Ithaca—
> there you will find it.

Outside Ithaca, Odysseus cannot find his lost heart.

A precious rarity is the comparison of the heart with bread. Raičević writes about a risky and centuries-old theme, one that can lead a poet into stereotypes and banality. He has successfully avoided that risk through exceptionally fresh, new, and very concrete poetic images.

> The heart does not beat across distances—it must always be
> with you, cradled beneath your arm like a loaf of bread, so you may hear it
> and it may hear you; without that cooperative relationship, neither it nor you can live.

Years squandered without Ithaca come at a high cost, dearly and bitterly paid; it remains a profound question whether, after all his wanderings and exile,

Odysseus belongs to Ithaca at all.

> ...you will pay for that which you have longed for
> all these years—those you have squandered returning
> to Ithaca, believing, alas, that you still belong to it.

It takes real skill to write from someone else's point of view, to speak in another person's voice—especially when that voice is Seneca addressing Nero, giving him advice on how to write great poetry. What makes it even more impressive is that the whole address is filled with irony. Seneca knows that Nero is not a great poet, but he is also aware of Nero's power, so he uses grand titles like *classic, heavenly harp,* and *the greatest among the immortals*—phrases that sound like praise but actually carry an ironic meaning. The poem suggests that a verse is like a grave in which the poet will one day lie. Because of that, Seneca advises Nero not to write lines that will feel too narrow in eternity, and not to "seek comfort in words that will not last." Nero has, in a way, remained in history—but not because of his poetry or any truly great achievements.

The final group of poems is the most emotional and powerful. It reflects the poetic ideal of T. S. Eliot—a combination of simplicity and deep feeling. These poems are about the poet's mother, especially her death, and they are introduced by a short three-line motto written by Raičević himself.

> The memory of you is
> a candle in my soul,
> mother—it burns, yet gives light.

The striking image of a *candle in the soul* suggests not only the sacredness of the mother and motherhood, but also an inner illumination—an awakening of the spirit—alongside pain, a kind of burn that endures and does not fade after the mother's death. This "simplicity" and conciseness deserve the highest praise, creating one of the most beautiful images of motherhood, where holiness, pain, and inner light are brought together. It is hard to imagine anything said more briefly, yet more powerfully.

Raičević hopes to "recall some beautiful, / simple words" he lacks to finish a discarded poem about his mother, written on an already crumpled sheet of paper. That crumpled paper must be lifted, placed on the knee, and smoothed out with the palm until it becomes flat enough to write on—just as Christ, in a small church, passed his hand over his dead mother's forehead and smoothed away her wrinkles. And so the poetic voice speaks to himself—to his own heart:

(...) Never crumple
and cast aside a poem about your mother,
no matter how awkward it may seem in the moment.
And if you do, lift the paper,
press it flat upon your knee,
add something you remember with joy,
something that might bring you back
to the days when she was still alive. (...)
(...) You will see—it will not be bad.
You will see, my grieving heart,
it will not be bad at all.

What he will add will be simple, beautiful words about the small moments of life: how a mother brings her son a cup of tea with a trembling hand, or dozes while waiting for him to return from somewhere.

These simple, beautiful words allow the poet to evoke the feeling of safety in a home where the mother prepares lunch, murmuring an indistinct song. They awaken nostalgia—a longing for that home, for the sense of security, and for the mother who created that feeling.

Returning home is impossible, and even more so is the embrace of those who made that house a home—those who filled it with warmth, safety, and a mysterious, unspoken song. The longing for the former warmth of the house and familial security turns into a dense, heavy melancholy, a deep sense of emptiness.

The former warmth of the house—the fire heated with wood brought and stacked in the yard so the lyrical hero could roast chestnuts in the hot stove—has now been reduced to the memory of cold ashes: "in a house where no one tends the fire." What remains are the stove, ashes that remember the wood, objects, the cold, and the emptiness. The house, without its inhabitants, and especially without the mother who gave it warmth and security, is empty, soulless, a space reduced to the memory of cold ashes—a metaphor for the cold void.

This book is sealed with a mother's prayer and the stamp of silence: it concludes and finds its point in a short poem made up of a motto and four brief lines. The motto is written by Raičević himself:

God is silence.

The mother's prayer is reduced to a nearly imperceptible movement of her lips, without voice, and to an intimate communication in tranquility with God—silence. With that silence and the gentle movement of her lips in prayerful quiet, the mother whispers to herself and her son in memory:

She used to say that prayer
is a long silence
and the barely noticeable
movement of the lips.
“Snow covers everything, except memory.”

(Speech at the presentation of the Zmaj Award to Miodrag Raičević at the Ceremonial Session of the Matica srpska, February 16, 2023)

Translated from the Serbian by
Ljubica Jankov

MARKO PAOVICA

ON THE SKEPTICISM AND STOICISM OF THE SENSITIVE

POETIC VOICE

(On Miodrag Raičević's *About the Things Homer Missed*)

After a long break, poet and novelist Miodrag Raičević (1955) returns with a new book of poems: *About the Things Homer Missed.* (Since his literary debut until the end of the first decade of this century, Raičević published several poetry collections—*Emotional Poems and One Horse Poem (1984), Socks in the Grass (1987), Fat Girls (1990), Head up, Snowdrop (1993), Muse's Winds (1995), Palm & Spade (2009)*—as well as five novels under the pseudonym T. H. Raič.) When considering today's Serbian poetry, it is worth noting that among these works, *Head up, Snowdrop* and *Palm & Spade* stand out as poetically representative and valuable.

The title of Raičević's new book, as we learn from its epigraph, is taken from a prose treatise of the same name by Isaac Porphyrogenitus, an eleventh-century Roman emperor and monk. This historical figure aimed "to supplement and complete Homer's work," a goal from which the poet ironically distances himself. Nevertheless, by appropriating this title, Raičević establishes a thematic crossroads, positioning his collection at the intersection of lyrical Homericism in both historical and contemporary Serbian poetry. Through this, he highlights the continuing Homeric influence within modern lyricism while drawing upon introspective, contemplative experiences and everyday realities, thus bridging past and present poetic traditions.

The creative interplay of revived experience and literary culture in Raičević's book explores all the neuralgic points of human existence—

unrequited love, transience, illness, death—always from an unsuspected experiential angle. There is a constant, Andrić-esque stoicism of an exceptionally sensitive poetic voice. To support this interplay, Raičević uses extensive intertextuality throughout the new collection. The book is divided into three units of unequal scope and diverse content. Across numerous poems, he quotes, crypto-quotes, or alludes to a wide range of names. These include literary and philosophical classics (Hesiod, Homer, Heraclitus, Sophocles, Aristotle, Seneca, I. Porphyrogenitus, Gogol, S. Butler, S. Fukuzawa, H. R. Haggard, A. Dumas), figures from literary modernity and postmodernity (S. Anderson, H. Broch, R. Jeffers, J. Veselinović, Rilke, Cavafy, T. S. Eliot, Beckett, Sartre, Crnjanski, Cz. Miłosz, S. Shepard, J. Ricos, A. Boske, B. Petrović, M. Tešić, M. Tripković, N. Tadić, V. Pavković), and even stars of *new age* culture (E. Warhol, J.-M. Basquiat, J. Joplin, J. Hendrix, M. Tucović, Sonja Savić). Guided by the irony of fate, coinciding sensibilities, or affinity of poetic motifs—and sometimes by revived insights—Raičević meets the challenge of kinship with spirits who face each moment's uniqueness unblinking. This process animates the ongoing experience of "playing out the death" and underpins the book's diverse perspectives.

As previously noted, death, transience and love are the dominant themes of this book, often indistinguishable except for the semantic focus of some individual works. Immediately evident is the poet's stoic firmness, spiritual preparedness and openness to the thanatological principle. He explores this principle through several modalities—from fateful irony to the grotesque and a kind of parody to epiphanic revelation—in the poetic experience of death. For example, one variation appears in the poem "On Death and Early Rising", which opens by thematizing the trivial deaths of three world-famous artists, then offers a description of how death constantly keeps an eye on us, and finally ends with a premonition of one's own death, embodied in the fantastic image of a mirror without reflection in which "someone without a name" will soon appear. In "A Blessing in Disguise", Sartre, the lyrical hero, makes a grotesque wish for his own death, while "On the Soft Heart" parodically elaborates on Hermann Broch's paradox that it is only in the longing for death that we also long for life. Similarly, the identical paradox of Branislav Petrović (*"The little you have thought about death is what you have lived"*) serves as the motto for "On Death", a poem in which the poet's awareness of mortality makes him experience the "world around him" as alien. This centrality of death is further echoed in "O Narayami", based on a filmed Japanese ballad, which, in Rilke's terms, merges the *beautiful and the terrible* and concludes that "there is no other day than the one on which we die". Together,

these poems set the tone for the collection's lyrical heroism and its engagement with death.

The theme of transience appears directly in only two, yet unique, poems, while a few others hint at love or thanatological motifs. For instance, the Heraclitian-intoned elegy "On Old Photographs" carries a strong sense of disillusionment, and the lyrical-metaphysical lament "On Withered Leaves" notes that "the days slide faster and faster through the Garmisch-Partenkirchen of time." Beyond these, the book comprises seven distinct love poems: "O how come you won't come," "On Unparalleled Tenderness," "O Two, of Whom Only One Remembers Paradise," "On the End of All That is Beautiful," "Spring Waters," "Love," and "On Cadmus and Harmony." Notably, with at least two or three of these, Miodrag Raičević makes a lasting contribution to Serbian love poetry. Specifically, in the third poem, the lyrical voice verifies the Edenic intensity of his emotional attachment to his companion, transcending the triviality of everyday life and a decade-long time distance almost mythopoetically. In "Spring Waters," a memory of love surfaces in the melancholic tone of a precise lyrical narrative about the loss of an ingrained ritual of intimacy. The song "About Cadmus and Harmony" preserves the archetypal experience in the dramatic measure of the Mediterranean ambience, bringing to life the legendary story of Budva's mythical founders.

None of the three evocative advertisements—"Lights in the Hills," "About Swallows," or "About Blind Track"—leaves Raičević's reader indifferent. The interest and symbolism of the motif, and the skill of its articulation, are evident in each. Likewise, several poems about the mother, her death, and her character from the shorter, final poetic cycle also capture the reader's attention.

Further reinforcing the collection's cohesive thematic landscape, the poetic circle "Ελλας! Ελλας! Ελλας!" draws on classical, lyrical Homericism and reveals ambivalence toward Ithaca. The poem "Ithaca" opens with Cavafy's verse, *"And may Ithaca always be on your mind."* Its final stanzas, addressed to Odysseus, read: "And if you happen to lose your heart anywhere on earth, / return to Ithaca – / there you will find it!" Conversely, in the poem honouring the famous Montenegrin folk-singer, Odysseus receives the opposite advice: "Therefore, do whatever you want / do not return to Ithaca, because there, except for / a few dead people who look on from yellowed / photographs, you will find no one" ("Where she lay..."). This poetic circle also includes an autopoetic work addressing mythical lovers and the final poem, "On the Sardonic Smile." The last lyrical work's title phrase aptly captures the poet's emotional stance toward the collection's thematic world, further unifying its conceptual threads.

In a itemized review of its titles and several autopoietic advertisements, let us focus on the poem "On Heaven." The poem starts from an Aristotelian perspective, ironically questioning man's "right to eternity" above other creatures such as the hare, raven, hoopoe, thrush, nightingale, and parrot. It then parodies the image of paradise as "God's supermarket." In its third part, the poem turns more rational: "Rarely does a man ask himself / whether the one who conceived paradise / has ever seen paradise—there are many ambiguities. / The story simply does not drink water. / But if God so commanded, / then there is no fault in that work. / Ha, brother! And what if he hasn't?" The poet then asks more pointed questions: "And what is death if there is no meaning? / What is paradise if life has meaning?" In the end, the series of ironic questions becomes an expression of the poet's own voice. He rebels against his emotional and existential deprivation: "Why all this, damn it, / if you and I are not together?" This rebellion shows the need for love and harmony. Paradoxically, it equates rationalist and religious positions. The poem "On Heaven" sums up Raičević's new collection on a humanistic plane. When faced with the major traumatic questions of existence, death, transience, loss, or the absence of love, the poet does not yield to religious consolations. Nor does he surrender to despair. He stands firm, facing his skeptical insights with stoic strength and philosophical attitude.

Finally, it would be worth offering an acceptable answer to the question: Where and how should Raičević's collection, with its obviously ironic title, be contextualised in the current moment of Serbian poetry? In this regard, it aligns with two aspects of lyrical Homerism on our latest poetry scene. First, it aligns with the thematically classical yet almost inverted, value-wise aspect promoted in Mirko Magarašević's book *The Siren's Singing* (2018), which is somewhat mirrored in the ambivalent experience of Ithaca in the penultimate poetic circle of Raičević's collection. And secondly, it aligns with that contemporary, thematically diverse real-everyday singing, culturally ironically equated with Homer's voice, and presented in the book *Homer of the Suburbs* by Dragan Jovanović Danilov (2003), with which, conditionally, the two other, thematically contemporary poetic circles of the book *About the Things Homer Missed* coincide. Because the things that Raičević's Homer missed, Danilov's Homer hit, and so the indicated books by the two poets are culturally, in principle, coincident.

Translated from the Serbian by
Ljubica Jankov

NARRATIVE RHAPSODY ON MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

Aleksandar Gatalica, *The Second Violin and Other Stories*, Akademska Knjiga, Novi Sad, 2024.

Serbian literature has received an extremely interesting publishing novelty: *The Second Violin and Other Stories* (Akademska Knjiga, Novi Sad, 2024) by Aleksandar Gatalica, a book dedicated to music and musicians, as well as the secrets they carry. Building on the valuable experiences of modern European literature, from Romain Rolland (*The Life of Beethoven*, 1903; *Jean Christophe*, 1904-1912, etc.), Marcel Proust (*In Search of Lost Time*, 1913-1927), André Gide (*The Counterfeiters,* 1925), Aldous Huxley (*Counterpoint of Life*, 1928), to Thomas Mann (*Doctor Faustus,* 1947), Vladan Desnica (*The Springs of Ivan Galeb*, 1957), etc., Gatalica, through his treatment of the subject, storytelling skill, and stylistic nuances, achieves not only the strong effects of fabulation, but, much more importantly, an in-depth look at the creative whirlwinds and enthusiastic states that make the creative act necessary as the only possible response to the aforementioned challenges. The musicological, aesthetic and psychological insights of Gatalica's narrative prose do not delve into the depths where the linguistic transparency of the artist's inner reality, i.e., the musician's, is lost, but all of this is realized in a clear, Cartesian logic-illuminated insight and within the framework of the syntactically transparent, so-called Belgrade style of the Serbian language. The expressiveness and persuasiveness of the aesthetic insights, and the sensitive yet clear language and style that avoid delving into Joycean linguistic-associative abysses, have created texts that seem classically modernist and quite balanced in meaning, and, in a cognitive sense, extremely rich, lucid, and revealing. The extensive Serbian and Yugoslav musicological literature (Petar Konjović, Stana Đurić Klajn, Pavle Stefanović, Dušan Trbojević, etc.), which also includes essays and the aesthetics of music (Isidora Sekulić, Stanislav Vinaver, Vojislav Vučković, Ivan Foht, Dragutin Gostuški, etc.), along with everything that the author himself, Aleksandar Gatalica, has done in this domain, represents a very good and fundamental basis on which the reading of this book, *The Second Violin*

and Other Stories, can be made even richer and more substantial in terms of intermediality, more fact-based, and more fictionally playful.

There is something serious and sublime in Gatalica's clear testimony to the depths of artistic and musical ecstasy. He reveals the expressiveness arising from the Dionysian passion of those who dedicate their lives to interpreting significant musical works. These Dionysian ecstasies must be balanced with an Apollonian dimension in the creative act. In facing the Nietzschean challenge of balancing these poles, the performer must find a measure set by the music itself. The dedicated artist, through interpreting others' works, discovers methods of performance. These discoveries become not only a private, spiritual experience for the performer, but also enrich public musical life and the experiences of listeners and music lovers.

There are no narrative works in Serbian literature that, with such reliable historical insight and sensitivity to emotional nuances, successfully unveil the often-hidden, difficult-to-access world of piano and string performance art. This narrative opens a series of human destinies that grapple with specific, obsessive questions and challenges artists must confront to achieve a higher level of creative skill and engage meaningfully with the composers whose works they are meant to interpret. To interpret these works convincingly and distinctively, reproductive artists must master them technically, interpretively, and aesthetically, ensuring that their performances are respected and remembered. Responding to these challenges requires overcoming personal shortcomings and achieving a significant technical and interpretative advantage in a competitive environment filled with musicians who share similar ambitions. Gatalica arranges the various issues these stories address into narrative units that collectively provide rich, meaningful insight. This perspective often goes unconsidered until we experience the great performances of significant musical works by renowned composers, either at concerts or through various recordings, highlighting the depth of European and world classical music history.

In the story "The Great Black and White Evolutionary Circle," the narrator maintains equal distance from the four pianists he describes. He highlights the moment when a pianist realizes he has missed an interpretive approach—one he never considered, yet which makes another pianist's performance brilliant. The narrative starts with Russian pianist Marek Horsovsky, who loved dramatic performances. He "ran to meet the audience as if they were the most beautiful girl waiting for him by the fence of the local Jewish cemetery." He "tortured and whipped the pianos he played." For him, "if a piano string didn't break during the concert, the performance wasn't good." He also felt, "if after every explosive point someone wasn't taken out of the hall, Marek thought his performance wasn't going in the right direction" (pp. 18, 19). Horsovsky faces a self-esteem crisis after hearing György Szekler's performance. Szekler's style created "a fine weaving of some supramusic," with "octave and

quick-fingered chromatic passages, jumps—oh, jumps like an antelope on the keyboard." All of this "fit into music that seemed to come from the sky, dictated by the roar of crystalline celestial spheres" (pp. 19-20). This shift marks the move from Horsovsky's era to Szekler's era.

But that era did not last long. The maestro himself changed when, during a stay in his homeland, in Bačka, in Novi Sad, he attended a concert by the young hope Melanija Branovački. This girl "played like him for a moment: sweetly, but menacingly singing melodies, only to turn into a devil who, with her left hand, wildly beats the bass keys, while her right hand plays soprano tones innocently, like a lamb waiting to be eaten by a wolf's gait from the darkness of the piano's deep tones." (p. 25) Later, this pianist continued to change the apparent forms of piano sound and expressiveness. Szekler concluded she played as if she were a witch. Yet even such a witch does not last long. The decisive moment leading to her downfall came when she heard Franz, or Ferenc Liszt, who, in 1878, after a long break from public performances as a Franciscan monk, returned to the stage. Liszt demonstrated a power Melanija had not expected. She concluded, "There was no point in continuing to play music, because everything she had done, the old man did far better. Everything she aspired to, he had already achieved; and everything she couldn't even imagine doing on the piano's eighty-eight keys, Liszt had already turned into everyday solo practice." (p.30)

But this energetic, creative play, which manifests as a serious series of frustrated gestures, does not end only with such shifts in which the one who dominates the European public pianistic scene stands out. The author's narrator felt the need to take the narrative back to the very beginning, and says that the aged Liszt also had a period of his own formation, and that one of the decisive acts was precisely the moment when "Franz Liszt heard Marek Horsovsky's 'Star from the East' in Prague at one moment, for just a second or two, lower octaves with such speed and accuracy that he thought that he himself could never do it." (p.31) The greatest masters, therefore, exchange creative energies, often competing in a barely visible way, but they preserve within themselves that impeccable feeling on the basis of which, regardless of market measures and meteorological barometers, they know what is what and who is who. When creative energy appears that inhibits the pianist, he ceases to be productive in the full sense of the word, a serious crisis arises, and only the strongest and greatest can fight to return to the stage.

In the short story "Misophonia", Aleksandar Gatalica describes how Alfred Conrad undertook a similar undertaking, but with a very special motivation. Given that the short story is dedicated to Alfred Brendel, a pianist in his tenth decade, it is reasonable to assume that the aforementioned motivational interest arises at the intersection of real and fictional facts. In the character of Alfred Conrad, Gatalica depicts misophonia as a distinct illness: the pianist suffered from it in childhood, but practicing the piano helped him

cope with the severe irritation caused by certain sounds, most often human voices. The illness only manifested itself when he stopped actively working and playing the piano, and from then on, under the influence of certain challenges, he began to feel "pain, tightness in (...) his chest, the rapid beating of his heart" (p. 102), etc. It is interesting that the manifestations of such physical and physiological reactions closely resembled those of successful pianists in the face of competing creative energies that may seem more successful and stronger. Due to the state of activated misophonia, Conrad was practically motivated to reactivate himself on the public, pianistic stage after deciding to retire. He returned to the stage at the age of seventy-six, which is not unknown in the art of the piano; the narrator mentions the cases of Vladimir Horowitz, Arthur Rubinstein, and Alfred Brendel, to whom the story is dedicated, who speak of activity in their later years.

Many cases of this and a similar kind have been described by Aleksandar Gatalica in his valuable narrative book *The Second Violin and Other Stories*, and the narrative persuasiveness he achieves is truly brilliant. Certain problems of these narrative structures appear primarily at a sensitive poetic point, where fiction collides with real facts, without a proper narrative explanation following. It should be emphasized that the value of this book lies not only in its successful presentation of one segment of European and world musical life, but also, to a lesser extent, in its presentation of Serbian musical life. The success of this book is largely based on the fact that the entire testimony about the lives and trials of piano, string, or conducting masters cannot, and should not even dare, be exclusively associated with this professional group. All these stories should be experienced and interpreted within a comprehensively understood human life, life in its creative dimension, in the constant need to discover something new, to have the success of that discovery proven and confirmed in a certain, relatively limited period of time, and then, like everything else in life, to be replaced by something that appears as a higher or simply different form of creative solution for which the audience and public musical life express a need. Everything changes, everything moves, and a person—to use Heraclitus' words—can never bathe in the same river twice! By acting as a classical modernist and a writer with an obvious postmodernist sensibility, Gatalica has shown how, even in these turbulent times, lasting, stable literary and aesthetic values can be created. In this respect, he joins the best that Serbian narrative prose has offered in times of cultural transition, and which we find above all in the works of Radoslav Petković and Goran Petrović. Completely in the spirit of his surname, Gatalica narratively divined and cast spells, creating a seductive linguistic creation and aesthetic reality that cannot be established without a quiet, intimate wonder and without a sublime, angelic overture. The book of stories, *The Second Violin and Other Stories*, is a work that I unhesitatingly predict will have lasting validity and constant interest among readers: without excessive enthusiasm regarding the

large number of readers, but with the reliability and trust of those select, demanding readers who do not easily give their confessions, but even more difficult to give up such judgments.

Ivan NEGRIŠORAC

Translated from the Serbian by
Ljubica Jankov

THROUGH BIOGRAPHY INTO FICTION, THROUGH FICTION INTO BIOGRAPHY

Book review by Robert Hodel, *Vulnerable and Yearning: Borisav Stanković – Life and Work*, Belgrade, Laguna, 2024

Over the past three decades, the creative biography has emerged as a genre that has experienced a remarkable surge in publishing in Serbian literature. This unique biographical form relies on the integration of two types of data: ficto-citations and facto-citations. For a long time, it was marginalized by formalist and structuralist criticism, further sidelined by Barthes's declaration of the "death of the author." However, with the rise of New Historicism and the growing interest in the histories of private life, creative biography has seen a significant revival. This resurgence is evidenced by the creative biographies of Ivo Andrić by Žaneta Đukić Perišić, Miloš Crnjanski by Gorana Raičević, and Dragoslav Mihailović by Robert Hodel. The publisher Laguna signalled the continuation of this trajectory with the note "By the same author: *Words of Marble – Dragoslav Mihailović, Life and Work,*" announcing "a new life-story of the celebrated author of *Koštana* and *Bad Blood*." Considering the authors who previously occupied Robert Hodel's scholarly attention, Bora Stanković appears as a kind of synthesis of two distinct lines of interests: one anchored in lyrical, linguistically challenging texts (Hodel's studies and translations of Momčilo Nastasijević), and the other—in mimetic, existentially charged prose (his monograph on Dragoslav Mihailović).

The book was edited and translated from German by Mina Đurić, yet had this introductory note not been included alongside the author's name, the reader would hardly suspect that the monograph is a translation or that its author is a foreign scholar. Such a degree of intimacy with the material would sooner mislead one into assuming it was written by a well-informed regional researcher.[17]

[17] Only a few sentences point to the perspectivisation characteristic of a foreign comparatist, such as the one in which Stanković is compared to Jean Paul Friedrich Richter

The translation thus reads as though it were an original text, and the study of a foreign Slavist comes across as the work of a scholar native to Bora Stanković's own milieu.

In the *Preface to the Serbian Edition*, the author lays out the principal guidelines for reading: Stanković's entry into the Serbian literary pantheon, the creation of an original emotional prose "rooted in a personality that scarcely heeded convention," and the biography of a man who "could not keep his own life under control." (Hodel will later describe him as a *genius of an inaccessible temperament*, thereby further underscoring the provocatively challenging yet inspiring position of the interpreter.) From the preface we also learn that the Serbian monograph was preceded, the previous year, by a shorter study in German, intended to introduce and accompany German readers to Hodel's translations of selected Stanković short stories.

The title of the study, *"Vulnerable and Yearning,"* reveals its empirical dimension—an intellectual mode of reading that moves through the "bloodstream," through the lived experience of reading. At its core lies an intense emotion provoked by encountering Stanković's prose: a sensing of the world through vulnerability and the unattainability of desire. This emotion constitutes the study's greatest merit, for Hodel's reading becomes a kind of resonant chamber that "amplifies" and accentuates the authenticity of both Stanković's real and fictional worlds. The interweaving between fiction and factuality is visible already in the chapter titles. Some are "bibliographical," following the titles of novels, collections, and dramas (*The Cockerels, From the Old Gospel, Koštana, Master Mladen, Old Days, and God's People; From My Region, Bad Blood, Tašana, Memories, Notes, Belgrade Walks, The Shirkers*). Others are biographical (*Grandmother and Grandfather, Parents, Schooling, First Loves, Early Student Years, Completion of Studies, Earning a Living, Family, Home, Hospitality, Stay in Paris; After Returning from Paris*). Certain titles reveal a broader historical context (*Vranje in the Last Third of the 19th Century; The First World War; After the War – Remarks on Collaboration*), while others trace the genesis and poetics of Stanković's oeuvre (*early poems, style and discipline, working methods, enthusiastic creation, literary achievements after the war*).

Creative biographies always presuppose a dense network of highly dispersed texts: on one side stands the writer's oeuvre and its literary-historical context; on another, the documents that testify to the socio-historical environment; and on yet another, the works of those who, before the author, engaged with the same or similar questions. The monograph is therefore bursting with quotations, and at its end one finds a section titled "Frequently Cited Literature" (which includes authors such as Rista Simonović, Predrag Kostić, Petar Milenković, Dragoljub Vlatković, Siniša Paunović...). The list is much longer and encompasses authors concerned with the writer's entire oeuvre as well as those who explored ethnography (Tatomir Vukanović, Sanja Zlatanović),

literary historiography (Bojan Đorđević, Gordana Ilić Marković), musicology (Jelena Kovačević), and literary geography (Tomislav Simonović, Jovan Hadži Vasiljević). Hodel's monograph is thus also a kind of homage to all who have approached Stanković's work from various angles, or who, like Vera Cenić,[1] contributed to the institutionalisation of its study. And yet, although the voices of others on Bora Stanković can be heard on every page, the most cited voice remains that of the writer himself. What unfolds before the reader is a mosaic of autopoetic statements through which an explicit poetics is reconstructed, prototype relations revealed (tracing, on the one hand, the destinies of real persons and, on the other, those of fictional characters—even the influence of *characters* on the destinies of persons).[2] Stanković also profiles his ideal reader—an emotional type whom he "moves to tears," for whom what he writes is both "convincing" and "close to the soul." In Hodel's case, this sense of "connectedness" with the work, and through the work with its author, does *not*, it should be emphasized, come at the expense of intellectual distance or an objective assessment of the material. Hodel's monograph on Bora Stanković thus becomes a kind of "guided reading," a journey through other texts accompanied by a guide who follows a clear itinerary and precisely marked thematic "stations." One such station, for example, concerns the question of Stanković's collaboration with the occupiers during the war, along with the contradictory, more accusatory than excusing attitudes of his contemporaries, are noteworthy. When it comes to making judgments, Hodel shows himself as a dedicated reader, but one who does not treat the research subject as an object of admiration. For instance, his refined analysis of the story *Shirkers* highlights, on the one hand, a literary critique of those who profited from the occupying power, and on the other, an objective portrayal of Stanković's attitude towards it.[3]

The monograph also contains several appendices: *Chronology of the Life and Work of Borisav Stanković*, a list of film adaptations (a valuable resource for intermedial studies of the author), and the aforementioned selective bibliography of works cited multiple times. From the study itself one can further extract a selective bibliography of works devoted to the analysis of

[1] Vera Cenić was the first curator of the Bora Stanković House Museum in Vranje, a founder of the *Borisav Stanković Literary Society*, and one of the initiators of *Bora's Week*.

[2] Stanković defended himself against accusations of creating the fictional double Koštana by allegedly "stealing the life" of a Roma woman and not compensating her for that theft (Hodel 2024: 98-102).

[3] Hodel discusses Stanković's acquisition of a vineyard in Grocka and his sale of wine at preferential prices to Austrian officers. This raises the question of whether the story was written before or after the purchase. Hodel outlines his collaboration with the occupier by summarising four reasons provided by Vladimir Jovicic: poverty, the desire to avoid internment and separation from his family, the reprinting of his work, feelings of abandonment by the Serbian elite, and the need to assist those seeking information about their relatives during the war through advertisements (2024: 258).

musical compositions. This form of interdisciplinary examination is of exceptional importance for understanding Stanković's prose, given that song and music profoundly mark and permeate the expressive world of both the author and his characters.

The monograph abounds in details that create Barthes's "reality effect" and are crucial for understanding the semiotics of everyday life. Some of these details help in visualizing the environment (the monograph also includes several illustrations of this milieu, photographs of the author at different stages of his life, as well as images of his children, friends, fellow writers, etc.); others contribute to the evocation of atmosphere (his school days in Vranje and Niš, Belgrade bohemian circles); while yet others carefully register shifts in values brought about by the arrival of the occupying forces. Particularly illustrative, for example, are the data Hodel provides concerning the publication of the *Belgrade Newspapers* in Latin script and in *ijekavaski*.

The biography can also be read as a template for a film, where the scenes would vary: some would depict how Stanković faced poverty in his youth, the disappointment of having his early writings rejected, unrequited loves, and his anticipation while waiting for the letter carrier to deliver news of his published story in Sarajevo's *Nada*. It would illustrate his reactions to censorship,[4] his marriage, and even the occasion when he locked his friends inside to prevent them from interrupting the celebration by leaving. Hodel also provided answers to questions about the places Stanković lived, who his children's godfather was, his relationship with Queen Draga, Branislav Nušić, and Radoje Domanović. There were inquiries about his diligence as a government official, how he separated from his family during the war, and his role as the head of the Ministry of Religion, where he accompanied the relics of Stefan the First-Crowned to the Peć Patriarchate. Additionally, it covered his internment and transfer from Derventa to Belgrade, as well as how he dealt with drunkenness and condemnation from contemporaries for publishing in the occupation-era *Belgrade Newspapers*.[5]

By visualising the ambience and atmosphere of Stanković's upbringing, much like in a well-crafted psychoanalytic study, we lay the groundwork for understanding the distinct "feminine" and lyrical poetics in Stanković's prose,

[4] Writing about the censorship surrounding *Bad Blood*, Hodel notes: "In 1933 and 1934, the Serbian Orthodox Church attempted to completely ban the novel *Bad Blood* because of its "pornography". Although the Church did not completely succeed in this effort, it nonetheless influenced the removal of certain passages from the editions published by Srpska Književna Zadruga during those years" (2024: 89).

[5] The film "Nobel Prize Winner," dedicated to Ivo Andrić, will explore the themes of contempt and Andrić's defensive stance. Hodel analyzes Andrić's self-image, which simultaneously reveals Borisav Stanković's perception of him: "I, for example, am a very sensitive person, to the point of tears, but I know how to control my feelings. However, he experienced various moods and was not always able to control himself. I mentioned how he was able to cry..." (Hodel 2024: 309).

as well as the erotic tension inherent in the reading experience.[6] Seemingly minor details, such as children's visits to hammams or women's gatherings, as well as the first "erotic" compositions by students, become significant for grasping the overall poetics of this writer. The author himself, in tracing the love life of the protagonist, employs a verb that conveys fluidity—referring to the flow of water or "pouring"—thereby connecting real heroines with their fictional counterparts. At times, readers may feel confused about whether the unanswered questions left by Hodel are examples of self-censorship, ambivalence, or merely rhetorical questions. These moments, such as the inquiry into whether Stanković interrupts *The Cockerels* due to the taboo subject of male homosexuality, further dramatise the act of reading itself and activate the reader to fill in the gaps in the text.

Hodel's study emphasises two key themes related to the exploration of Stanković's work: eros and the Orient. The title of the German edition, "Stories from the Balkans," reflects the perspective of a German scholar who sees the Balkans as a provocative otherness. Stanković's interpretation of the Orient is not merely an ethnographic account of his homeland; it also serves as a literary toponym that evokes a specific, sensory, and anthropomorphised space. In this context, cities and palanquins are compared to gardens, while houses are depicted as extensions of the human body, symbolising the heroes themselves. Additionally, the Orient represents a unique modus vivendi characterised by concepts such as *sevdah*, *dert*, and *karasevdah*, along with specific semiotics of daily life—these include literary interiors, costumes, and menus. Hodel builds on previous interpretations of the oriental in Stanković's work, highlighting Skerlić's reception of "Koštana." This analysis is vital for understanding the emergence of a new kind of literary relationship; it presents an interpretation of the oriental that transcends epic narratives, sensual melodrama, or humour and instead explores themes that are deeply existential and tragic.[7]

For imagologists and erotologists, this study is intriguing as it delves into both oriental and Balkan eros, as well as reconstructing a specific oriental bohemia. According to Hodel, Bora's move to Belgrade and his subsequent involvement in the Belgrade bohemia—shaped by Parisian students—represents a clash between two contrasting cultural models. On one side, there is the influence of Parisian culture on Serbian modernists; on the other, there is Stanković's unique and anarchic creative spirit.[8]

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[6] Skerlić wrote about the collection *The Old Days* that the reader experiences it with "almost sick irritation, something that intoxicates him, making him whisper the old *sevdah* song 'A rose smells, a rose has bloomed'" (Hodel 2024: 135).

[7] This change is evident in Skerlić's indirect criticism of the reader's automatic response to plays featuring singing and the innovations that Stanković brought to the genre's transformations.

[8] Hodel also notes the views of Stanković's contemporaries, Skerlić and Nušić, regarding the influence of Zola and Maupassant on his work.

Hodel discusses the innovations in Stanković's erotology, highlighting how he transformed the traditional sentimental or humorous treatment of eros. He examines how Stanković broke boundaries, addressing concepts like "deviant normality and normal deviance" (A. Jerkov). Hodel presents a thesis about a hypothetical history of literature, suggesting that if Stanković had been translated at the time of his writing, "he would have undoubtedly emerged as one of the pioneers of European modernism due to his presentation of unabashed sensuality and eroticism." (2024: 87).

Hodel is especially drawn to contrasts; one might even say he actively seeks them out. This inclination is why, in both his understanding of the writer—who is "beloved and hated at the same time"—and in his interpretation of the writer's work, contrast emerges as the key element.

The more (auto)erotic Stanković's characters become, the less self-reflexive they are. Hodel observes, "In general, the more self-reflexive a quality is, the more it remains largely foreign to Stanković's figures" (2024: 138). His insights into the style that emerges from the emotionality of Stanković's language—where "the emotionality of his prose cannot be separated from his style and speech"—highlight the constant shifts in narrative perspective. This includes the carving of characters' dialogue into the narrator's voice (experienced speech) and the powerful, soulful eruptions of creativity that characterise Stanković's work.

Hodel's monograph is also significant as a textual study because it allows us to trace the genesis of Stanković's works, including variant differences between monographic and magazine editions, correspondence, deletions, regrouping of narrative material, novel announcements, and reports on premieres.

If we examine the Serbian authors discussed by Hodel, we can identify a common feature in their linguistic distinctiveness. This can be seen as a form of "emergence or deviation" in language—a new melody in Nastasijević's work, the dialectical nuances in Dragoslav Mihailović's writing, and the unique agrammatical style present in Stanković's prose. This characteristic makes the selection of writers for translation even more intriguing, as it involves conveying agrammatical and complex structures into a foreign language while maintaining their readability.

We conclude this presentation with an associative reading that both inspires and moves beyond what has been read. We imagine a virtual future monograph in which we read about specific oriental and Balkan erotological literature, in which, as Skerlić lucidly observes, "restrained and hidden emotion (...) that comes from our soft feminine, sensitive Slavic race" is mixed with something "sensual, timid that has been left from the Turks" (Hodel 2024: 93). In the second virtual monograph, inspired by Hodel's book, we would read about the collision of two bohemias – one created by the *Sevdahlia* students (men in love) from Niš and Vranje, and the other transferred from Parisian bistros

to the streets of Belgrade. We would add another visitor to the tavern—the one who comes from the village inn. This type of research points to an unexplored field of Serbian culture that is waiting for its Bataille[9] and its Bourdieu, and for which Hodel's study will be the beginning, the text from which one starts, but also goes past and beyond it.

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Translated from Serbian by
Ljubica Jankov

THROUGH SERBIAN CITIES AND REGIONS

Goran Maksimović, *Cities of Serbian Realism*, Centar za srpske studije, Banja Luka, 2023.

The two decades of independent research conducted by Goran Maksimović, PhD on the poetics of the city in Serbian Realism and Modernism—carried out within scholarly projects between 2002 and 2022, and originally published as conference papers or as afterwards to editions of selected authors—have now been analytically and interpretatively expanded, deepened, supplemented with new unpublished work, and shaped into the monograph *Cities of Serbian Realism (On the Epoch and the Writers of Serbian Realism and Their Cities)*. It should also be emphasised that the previously published studies on Jakov Ignjatović, Simo Matavulj, and Stevan Sremac, included in the volume *The Testimony of the City and Other Essays* (2014), have now been substantially revised, critically re-examined, and enriched with new insights.

The book *Cities of Serbian Realism* is divided into three sections. The first one provides a methodological and interpretive framework within literary-historical studies: *Serbian Realism—The Boundaries of the Epoch: Introductory Perspectives* and *Cities in the Literature of Serbian Realism: Analytical Frameworks*. The central, that is, the main part of the book consists of chapters in which Goran Maksimović expertly examines representative writers of the realist era, taking into consideration their entire bodies of work related to urban culture: *The Cities of Jakov Ignjatović*, *Jakov Ignjatović and Belgrade*, *The Cities of Milovan Glišić*, *The Cities of Simo Matavulj*, *The Cities of Stevan Sremac*, *The Cities of Branislav Nušić*, *The Cities of Radoje*

[9] Hodel quotes Velibor Gligorić, who recognises in *God's People* something Oriental that is against work and which, we add, is very close to Bataille's interpretation of work and Eros, social and physical.

Domanović, *Mostar of Svetozar Ćorović*, *The Cities of Petar Kočić*, *Petar Kočić and Skopje*, *Petar Kočić and Sarajevo*, *Vranje and Belgrade of Bora Stanković*, and *The Cities of Milutin Uskoković*. The third part provides an analytical overview of the key poetic themes explored in the book *Through the Epoch and through the Cities: a Final Framework*.

The book is enriched with information about the edition, a section *About the Book*, and detailed *Notes on the Texts*. It also includes an Index of Names and—rare for a monograph of this kind—an Index of Cities and other related geographical terms, as well as a concluding note *About the Author*.

In the introductory chapter, *Serbian Realism—The Boundaries of the Epoch: Introductory Perspectives*, Maksimović outlines the various models of periodising the era of Serbian Realism. He begins with the philological concept of periodisation (Stojan Novaković, Jovan Grčić, Andra Gavrilović), then turns to the literary-historical approach (Jovan Skerlić, Velibor Grigorić, Dragiša Živković, Dimitrije Vučenkov, Jovan Deretić, and others), and finally to the stylistic-formational model (Dušan Ivanić and Milorad Jevrić). Maksimović identifies the literary-historical and the stylistic-formational criteria as scientifically most relevant, pointing to certain differences, divergences, and inconsistencies among literary historians—particularly regarding the closing boundary of the epoch, illustrated through writers whose poetics oscillate between Realism and Modernism (Ćorović, Kočić, Stanković, Uskoković). Unlike Skerlić, who identified the beginning of the 20th century as the end of the realism era, later literary historians such as Gligorić, Bogdanović, Protić, Najdanović, and Deretić extended this boundary into the first and even the second decades of the century. They classified authors like Stanković, Kočić, Ćorović, Ćipiko, and Uskoković as realists. Maksimović largely agrees with D. Ivanić's research but has reservations about Ivanić's upper age limit for this period. He considers realism to encompass three phases: "early realism, high or developed realism, and late or disintegrated realism." These phases fall within the second half of the 19th century and the very start of the 20th century. Moreover, within the internal division of these phases—particularly within disintegrated realism—he distinguishes the following types: "neonaturalistic realism, impressionistic realism, and neoromantic realism." This classification justifies including works by Kočić, Stanković, Ćorović, and Uskoković in his research corpus. In the following chapter, he further explains that this relates to the mimetic and poetic features of these writers' works, where realistic tendencies continue to influence the artistic depiction of the city as a metareality. The motif of realistic poetics is especially emphasised in the plot-driven portrayal of the urban environment.

Maksimović insightfully observes and emphasises that the epoch of Realism began, developed, and concluded with the topos of the city—from early Realism in Jakov Ignjatović's novel *Milan Narančić*, through high Realism in

the works of Simo Matavulj, Stevan Sremac, and Branislav Nušić, and finally to modern realism in the novel *Bad Blood* by Bora Stanković (p. 26).

In the following chapter, *Cities in the Literature of Serbian Realism: Analytical Frameworks*, Maksimović expands the methodological and interpretative foundations for examining the artistic image of the city. Building on the research of earlier scholars (Radoslav Eraković, Zorica Nestorović) and pointing to the broader phenomenon of the development of urban prose in modern Serbian literature, beginning with Dositej, Maksimović draws attention to the Enlightenment era, then to documentary-artistic prose, as well as to the works of the Romantics, in which the topos of the city appears within an ethical spectrum ranging from a "temple of knowledge" to a "place of temptation." Maksimović argues that only in the epoch of Realism does the city emerge with a new meaning—*as an urban centre where significant aspects of private and public life intersect and unfold*—thereby acquiring, on a symbolic level, the status of a hero.

Maksimović presents a scientifically supported thesis of significant importance, challenging the common belief that the era of Serbian Realism is thematically unambiguous, particularly in its predominant focus on rural life. Contrary to this prevailing view in Serbian literary history, Maksimović highlights a notable group of creators from the Realism era who emphasised urban life and themes. He argues that urban themes are at least as prominent as folklore in the context of Serbian Realism.

As dominant artistic toposes that define the chronotope of the city in Serbian realism, he highlights: special city heroes, taverns and squares, the periphery, city families, stories, etc. (p. 36). In doing so, he pays greater attention to the wide range of city heroes, culturally and not only socially, different from heroes from rural environments, such as Milan Narandžić, Branko Orlić, Kalča, Kurjak, Ivko, Ibiš-aga, Frau Gabriele, Kir Geras, through Đuro Kokot, Đukan Skakavac, Hajji Diša, Jevrem Prokić, Živka the Minister's Wife, all the way to Mitke, Effendi Mita, Čedomir Ilić, Miloš Kremić, and others.

By analysing representative, unusual, and above all culturally and characterologically distinctive characters, as well as the topos of streets, inns, and squares, their significant sociological influence, and especially their reception effect, Maksimović convincingly demonstrates that the artistic image of the city "can be viewed from three perspectives: prototypical (realistic), textual (artistic), and metatextual (psychological)" (p. 46).

In his analysis of the narrative and novelistic works of representative authors, Maksimović highlights the breadth of the Serbian cultural and geographical space, which is today divided and separated from Serbia by state borders (Novi Sad, Belgrade, Šabac, Užice, Vranje, Niš, Priština). Drawing on the artistic representations found in these works, he also evokes cities such as Szentendre, Šibenik, Mostar, Sarajevo, Cetinje, Herceg Novi, the Bay of Kotor, Ohrid, Bitola, Skopje, and others. Moreover, Maksimović aims to underscore

the reciprocal influence exerted by the city, the town, and the provincial milieu on the storytellers themselves—on their intellectual formation and on the development of their respective poetics.

The central part of the book, *Cities of Serbian Realism*, systematically illuminates the poetic specificities of the selected canonical writers and offers new interpretations of the artistic representations of cities. Each chapter begins with introductory sections that, very much in the spirit of New Historicism, provide biographical and literary-historical information, thereby contextualising the literary works and clarifying the various influences exerted upon the authors.

Starting from the paradigmatic study devoted to the work of Jakov Ignjatović, in which Maksimović particularly disputes the thesis about the dominance of rural life as a theme in Serbian realism, the analysis of the phenomenon of the urban worldview systematically focuses on the types of Ignjatović's leading protagonists, on depictions of families, and on urban toposes such as inns, squares, streets, and private spaces (houses, salons). It also examines their attitudes toward the material signs of culture, traditional patriarchy, Christian morality, sexuality, as well as toward the markers of denationalization, pretentious affectation, and various forms of leisure.

In analyzing Ignjatović's oeuvre, Maksimović reveals the layered and diverse nature of urban life, as well as a certain level of civilizational modernity, which distinguishes the worlds of his protagonists from those depicted by storytellers of the then Principality and later Kingdom of Serbia.

By charting the map of the Serbian spiritual and cultural sphere in the works of Sremac, Matavulj, Domanović, Nušić, Ćorović, and others, he examines character types, urban environments, systems of communication, and distinctive cultural markers. In doing so, he highlights not only the richness of the differences among them, but also the deeper roots of traditional patriarchy—above all, the Christian foundations of the culture characteristic of the southern regions (particularly evident in the works of Ćorović and Stanković).

Depending on the works of the interpretation—their thematic-motive scope, stylistic and rhetorical registers, as well as the distinctive poetics of the authors—Maksimović devotes varying degrees of attention to the predominant characteristics of the urban image in the writings of Glišić, Matavulj, Nušić, Domanović, Ćorović, Stanković, and others. Aiming, quite justifiably, to preserve a certain degree of autonomy in each chapter devoted to the individual authors' oeuvres, certain repetitions proved necessary, including brief reminders of the methodological and theoretical premises. This was further required by the chosen structure of the study: following the introductory literary-historical and biographical frames, the interpretation was directed toward the key topoi of the artistic representation of the city—motifs that recur from Ignjatović all the way to Stanković and Uskoković.

The depiction of Belgrade stands as one of the central—and arguably most prominent—images within Serbian realist literature. Maksimović focuses on interpreting the fluid artistic representation of the capital in the works of Ignjatović, Sremac, Nušić, Domanović, Uskoković, and Stanković. He also emphasizes that, in the works of M. Glišić, the theme of urban and town life occupies a significant position, particularly through characters originating from urban backgrounds or distinguished by education—such as captains, wealthy officials, merchants, writers, and school inspectors. These characters, serving as metonymies of urban life, are consistently depicted in contrast to the village and rural culture. In his analysis of the negative portrayal of the city, Maksimović examines both Glišić's comedies and his early satirical stories. He rightly observes that Glišić—an aspect that has hitherto received insufficient attention—"to a significant extent established the thematic, social, ideological, and psychological frameworks for the later shaping of the artistic image of the city in Serbian literature" (p. 97).

Maksimović correctly analyses the artistic depiction of the city in various literary forms such as short stories, novels, dramas, and documentary-memoir prose. He begins with the contrast between urban and patriarchal cultures, exploring the crises that arise in the plot development and the actions of the characters. These crises reveal the breakdown of traditional patriarchy and established Christian norms, the emergence of anarchistic behaviours, and the disintegration of families. This theme is prominently illustrated in the ongoing conflict between the old and the young, as well as between fathers and sons.

In *The Cities of Serbian Realism*, Maksimović proceeds to trace, in an analytically nuanced and methodologically accessible manner, the formation and transformation of the artistic image of the city, particularly in cultural terms: from a space of constraint and negative values to a city that becomes a symbolic protagonist, a locus of sin, moral and patriarchal decline, and destruction—a trajectory especially pronounced in the novels of M. Uskoković. At the same time, he examines the influence of urban culture on the writers' personal and creative trajectories, especially those positioned at the borders between Romanticism and Realism, and between Realism and Modernism.

The book *The Cities of Serbian Realism* by Goran Maksimović is the first work of its kind to offer a comprehensive examination of the development of urban culture in the history of Serbian Realism, extending into the period of Modernism. It represents an exceptional contribution to the interpretation of the poetics of the city and to approaches in analysing the phenomenon of urban culture, and therefore undoubtedly constitutes a foundation for all future research on this subject. Not only will it benefit readers less familiar with the field, but for all of us engaged in interpreting the poetics of urban prose and urban culture, this monograph will serve as an indispensable literary-his-

torical, as well as theoretical and methodological, point of departure and a reliable support for further individual and synthetic studies of the epochs of Serbian Realism and Modernism.

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Translated from Serbian by
Ljubica Jankov

BRIDGE OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN AND SOUTHERN EUROPEAN CULTURE

Jelena Maričević Balać, *Towards the Smile of Europe: Contemporary Serbian, Polish, and Czech Poetry in a Comparative Key*, Akademska Knjiga, Novi Sad, 2023, 296 pp.

The monographic study *Towards the Smile of Europe: Contemporary Serbian, Polish, and Czech Poetry in a Comparative Key* by Jelena Maričević Balać is, above all, an exemplary demonstration of extensive philological research. The book brings together literary criticism, literary history, poetics, theoretical analysis, and cultural studies to examine poetic texts from three contemporary Slavic literatures. The title itself signals a significant contribution to Serbian literary scholarship, as it clarifies the landscape of contemporary poetry in dialogue with Polish and Czech literature. This approach yields a nuanced understanding of contemporary Serbian verse, viewed through intricate intertextual, intercultural, and geopoetic perspectives. To accomplish this, Jelena Maričević Balać demonstrates the qualities of a dedicated literary scholar, interpreting individual poetics with finesse, possessing comprehensive knowledge of cultural poetic traditions, and contextualizing these within a broad system of poetic parallels that reveal deep familiarity with other literatures. The study poses a methodological challenge to readers, branching out in ways that encourage further exploration of unexamined areas. Consequently, the monograph enriches not only Serbian literary studies but also Polonistics and Bohemian studies. As a model of comparative interpretation, it advances Slavic studies as a whole. The work is also culturally significant: its hermeneutic scope builds a bridge between Central and Southern European cultures, offering a vision of a shared European literary and cultural poetics.

The monograph, *Towards the Smile of Europe: Contemporary Serbian, Polish, and Czech Poetry in a Comparative Key*, is organized into nine sections:

"Poetry and Transition: Introduction," "The Niké of Samothrace: Culture," "Bonsai and Gioconda: Nature and Culture," "Era of the Cow and the Bull: Ecopoetics," "Cubist Hexagon," "Appendix," "Toward the Smile of Europe: Conclusion," "Literature," "Note: Światło and szelest," and "Biographical Note." Of these, four sections are especially important for the comparative research presented. In the introductory chapter, the author outlines the comparative framework between Serbian, Polish, and Czech poetry, identifies the poets to be analysed, discusses their interconnections in terms of poetic concepts, themes, and techniques, and highlights the essential role of translators in enabling communication among these poetic cultures. "The Niké of Samothrace: Culture" is divided into several subsections. Here, Jelena Marićević Balać brings together poets who have significantly shaped the identity of contemporary Serbian, Polish, and Czech poetry, focusing on cultural articulation. Notable comparisons include the works of Czesław Miłosz and Miodrag Pavlović, relationships between Zbigniew Herbert and Miodrag Pavlović, and connections involving Jovan Hristić and Branko Miljković. She also compares the poetry of Vasko Popa with Zbigniew Herbert and Tadeusz Różewicz. The chapter ends with a comparative interpretation of contemporary poetry, linking the verses of Adam Borzič and Ivan Negrišorac, and analysing the works of Jan Skácel, Bojana Stojanović Pantović, and Mirko Magarašević.

The problem of catastrophism as a poetic phenomenon in Polish literature during the first half of the 20th century serves as a foundation for the poetic identity of Czesław Miłosz. This perspective also includes the catastrophic themes found in Miodrag Pavlović's work. The poetic fascination with culture in Zbigniew Herbert's verses is viewed through the lens of the neoclassical erudition of both Pavlović and Jovan Hristić. Additionally, the angelological dimension of Herbert's poetry is compared to the figurative representations of angels in Branko Miljković's work. The exploration of objects connects and intertwines the creative perspectives of Vasko Popa and Zbigniew Herbert. While it is possible that these poets influenced one another, it is more accurate to describe their relationship as an intense creative dialogue. Furthermore, the author points to intriguing moments in the relationship between Tadeusz Różewicz and Vasko Popa, particularly regarding Różewicz's translations of Popa's poems into Polish. This raises questions about the extent to which an intercultural dialogue is established within the works of both poets and whether this dialogue inspires the creation of new poems. Jelena Marićević Balać carefully analyses how the poetic and cultural concepts of the Czech poet Adam Borzič and the Serbian poet Ivan Negrišorac reflect one another. Lastly, Greek and Roman elements form the basis for a comparative reading of the poems by Jan Skácel, Bojana Stojanović Pantović, and Mirko Magarašević.

While the primary comparative resonance of the previous chapter was culture, in the following chapter, the author examines the relationship between

nature and culture, and she unpacks this delicate relationalism by presenting the shared values that connect the poetry of Tomislav Marinković with that of Jan Skácel, Adam Zagajewski, and Wisława Szymborska; she contextualises Bojana Stojanović Pantović's book *The Damage of Whiteness* through the poetry of Saint-John Perse and Szymborska; she links Ewa Sonnenberg with Ana Ristović, and Roman Honet with Milunika Mitrović. In the final two studies of the chapter, the comparative horizon is further deepened diachronically through conversational parallels between Mažana Bogumiła Kielar, Sappho, and Anica Savić Rebac, and between Jadwiga Malina, Anica Savić Rebac, and Zlata Kocić. The already noted relations between Tomislav Marinković's poetry and contemporary Czech and Polish verse are sharpened by Marićević Balać as she foregrounds the poetry of Jan Skácel, Adam Zagajewski, and Wisława Szymborska, showing how, in all three cases, a dialogue emerges with Marinković—through poems about small and ordinary things, about music, birds, silence, contemplation, and memory. The figure of the archaic lyrical subject, the symbolism of sky and water, and the problems of remembering and forgetting form the backbone of the comparative perspective in which the lines of Bojana Stojanović Pantović, Saint-John Perse, and Wisława Szymborska converge. A comparatist lens illuminates the affinities between the poetry of the Polish poet Ewa Sonnenberg and the Serbian poet Ana Ristović, and Marićević Balać's analysis focuses on the motifs of the bonsai tree and Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, activated in both oeuvres. The phenomenon of sacred conversation makes possible a diachronic line in this study, in which Sappho, Anica Savić Rebac, and Mažana Bogumiła Kielar reflect their words in one another's—though they never knew of each other, their poems nonetheless "correspond, revealing themselves mystically as *conversazioni sulla bellezza*." When the verses of Jadwiga Malina, Anica Savić Rebac, and Zlata Kocić are compared, it becomes evident how the poetic register can revive the idealism of Renaissance art and the humanistic spirit.

The reflection on the dualism of nature and culture is elevated to the level of the cultural affirmation of nature itself in the chapter on ecopoetic aspects of literature. Here, the "laboratory findings" of Julia Fiedorczuk and Gerardo Beltrán are examined, as well as the relationship between poetry and the natural sciences in the work of Wisława Szymborska and Miroljub Todorović, the verses devoted to the earth in the oeuvre of Małgorzata Lebda, and the figures of "large livestock" in the poetry of Dobrica Erić. The possibility that "ecopoetics may be realised in practice, as a synthesis of art and science" is explored in the review of the monograph *Ecopoetics: An Ecological Defence of Poetry*, written by Julia Fiedorczuk and Gerardo Beltrán, with poetic examples found in the work of Miroljub Todorović, Adam Dickinson, and Alphonse Daquin. It is precisely the poetry of Todorović and Szymborska (and, to a lesser extent, Tanja Kragujević) that enables a comparative ecopoetic reading within resonances shaped by Darwin, Newton, microbiology, palaeontology,

and herpetology. An ecopoetic worldview requires a holistic perspective: "The human position in such a view is neither dehumanised nor subordinated to the world of nature; rather, it is interrogated, illuminated, and mirrored in the struggle for survival." How the earth speaks poetically is shown in the subsection devoted to the Polish poet Małgorzata Lebda, who, by singing of the dreams of animals, also poses fundamental questions about poetry itself. In the context of ecopoetics, it is particularly intriguing how the poetry of Dobrica Erić is read, in which the bull and the cow become powerful symbolic figures—manifestations of solar and lunar cults—while other elements of the natural world acquire the qualities of these two animals. Thus, milkiness is "present in vineyards, plums, wheat, grain, corn, rivers, and in the human being itself, as a manifestation of mutual and all-pervading love."

The chapter "The Cubist Hexagon" outlines a certain poetic-artistic-geometric dimension in which the works of Jakub Kornhauser, Miroljub Todorović, Julian Przyboś, Debora Vogel, Ivan Blatný, Jáchym Topol, and Dragan Bošković are examined. The verses of Jakub Kornhauser reveal how the objects upon which the lyrical subject gazes most delicately reflect the order and depths of his being. In the context of Serbian–Polish literary connections, especially in resonance with the poetry of Ewa Lipska, Miroljub Todorović's manifest book of Serbian Signalism, *Pig Is an Excellent Swimmer*, is highlighted. The technique of the "after-image," understood as an internal, virtual image, in the poetry of Julian Przyboś makes it possible to recognise in poetry the highest expression of human feeling: "To be a poem would mean to feel within oneself all the transformations of the world, its conflicts and cataclysms, which also lead to intra-subjective revolutions." The impression that Debora Vogel's poems resemble hieroglyphs provides the author of the monograph with an exciting methodological impulse to interpret the imagination of this poet and the nature of her poetic expression through the lens of a poetics of hieroglyphs. Building on this valorisation of poetic hieroglyphics, the poetry of the Czech poet Ivan Blatný is interpreted through the optics of ornament and arabesque. Elements of rock music, avant-garde poetics, and an orientation toward the future form the basis on which Jelena Marićević Balać compares the poems of the Czech poet Jáchym Topol and the Serbian poet Dragan Bošković.

In the chapter titled "Appendix," the creative figures of Biserka Rajčić, Wisława Szymborska, and Gojko Božović are presented. Biserka Rajčić's *Faktomontaže* constitutes a distinctive encyclopaedia of Polish and Slavic culture, art, and literature; in the portraits, interviews, letters and reflections, memories, and biographical sketches that make up this book, the author of the monograph identifies both a synthesis and a point of departure for new comparative readings. The portrait of Wisława Szymborska is enriched by Michał Rusinek's book about her, whose review Jelena Marićević Balać writes as an invitation to approach the personalities of great authors with due attentiveness. By also discussing Gojko Božović's *As We Sink into Darkness* (2021),

the author of the monograph presents an example of contemporary poetic experience in Serbian literature, one in which the isolation of modern humanity becomes manifest. Symbolically, it is precisely this sense of the isolated, obscured, and suppressed human being that provides one of the impulses for a book such as the one written by Jelena Marićević Balać—revealing the dramatic aspects of the contemporary subject in the poetry of three Slavic nations—to show, and to do, something in the world.

The list of sources in the monograph *Toward the Smile of Europe: Contemporary Serbian, Polish, and Czech Poetry in a Comparative Key* is impressive and, in itself, reveals the scope of research required to produce such an extensive and intricate comparative study. In her work, Jelena Marićević Balać analyses more than one hundred editions of books by Serbian, Polish, and Czech poets, which makes the monograph not only an outstanding example of the application of comparative research methods but also a foundation for new, integrated European critical and literary-historical studies. The register of scholarly literature, online sources, and publications documenting Serbian–Polish literary cooperation (above all in the context of the signalist movement) is likewise exceptionally rich, informative, and carefully curated. Readers of this monograph will also find great pleasure in the text "Note: Światło i szelest," in which Jelena Marićević Balać reveals the genesis of her research. The story of how poetry that was not a formal subject of academic study enters the horizon of a reader's and researcher's attention; how moments of discovery, reflection, and interpretation are shared with professors, friends, and poets; how, within this web of communication, the will is formed to approach a subject that is itself a monumental topic within Slavic studies; how a reader's enthusiasm is born, and how dedication to literature yields exceptionally exemplary results—this is not merely an explanation of the origins of the monograph, but a place where the reader encounters the author's personality as a truth about the possibilities of trusting poetry, as a truth about the possibilities for fulfilling what is better within ourselves in the world.

Elevated into a broader Slavic poetic context, the interpretive framework developed in the study *Toward the Smile of Europe: Contemporary Serbian, Polish, and Czech Poetry in a Comparative Key* stands as an example of a culture of movement, reflection, recognition, connection, and systematisation. This culture makes it possible for philological work to be grounded both in what it inherently is—an evaluation of text, language, and meaning—and in what its resonance within a wider cultural environment represents: the closeness, kinship, and shared spiritual premises of literary creation. Jelena Marićević Balać's monograph defines a distinctive geography of poetics, a cultural spaciousness of poetics, and by transcending the borders of national literature—something possible only for an author of exceptional erudition, dedication, and scholarly inspiration—establishes a horizon within which the results of reading speak not only about us and not only for us. Perhaps only

a study such as this one, which interprets Serbian poetry in relation to Czech and Polish poetry, can fully articulate values we once believed we could recognise and describe solely on our own terms. To read contemporary Serbian poetry from the perspective of contemporary Polish and Czech verse is to open a mode of understanding that only a mature scholarly gaze can achieve. For such a gaze is simultaneously fixed on multiple points: it looks from one book into another, from one authorial poetics into another, from one literature, language, and culture into another literature, another language, and another culture. Occupying each of these literary, linguistic, and cultural vantage points, Jelena Marićević Balać has created a multidimensional study, equally relevant to all three literary traditions. As though through a kind of Slavic critical prism, the monograph *Toward the Smile of Europe: Contemporary Serbian, Polish, and Czech Poetry in a Comparative Key* articulates, in truth, a need for a European measure of our own, Serbian literary self-understanding. By interweaving three Slavic poetic cultures, the author has succeeded in showing what is, in literary terms, indispensable—what Europe, as the best of itself, may discover when reading Serbian, Polish, and Czech poets. What lies before us is an exceptional work of comparative research, whose insights radiate not only within the field of literary studies but extend throughout philology as a whole and into the domain of cultural studies.

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Translated from Serbian by
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MODERN AND INSPIRING INTERPRETATIONS OF LAZA KOSTIĆ'S POETRY

Poetry and the Poetic Principles of Laza Kostić, Proceedings, Eds. Svetlana Šeatović and Marko Avramović. Belgrade–Trebinje: Institute for Literature and Art–Dučić's Poetry Evenings, 2024, 413 pp.

The proceedings *Poetry and the Poetic Principles of Laza Kostić* are the result of an academic conference held in Trebinje in April 2023. It was the fifteenth academic conference organised in collaboration between the Institute for Literature and Art in Belgrade and Dučić's Poetry Evenings in Trebinje. The book is part of the Institute's series *Poetic Studies*, which for nearly three decades has been publishing collective monographs dedicated to the most important modern Serbian poets. The collection comprises twenty

papers, arranged into four sections, authored by scholars of Serbian literature from different generations and representing several academic institutions.

In recent decades, the work and personality of Laza Kostić have attracted the attention of numerous researchers and literary scholars, and have been the subject of several monographs, scientific symposia and studies. Several scholarly proceedings have been published on Laza Kostić, including *The Literary Work of Laza Kostić* (1982), whose publication was also made possible by the Institute for Literature and Art. Now, four decades later, the editors of this collection emphasise that the time has come again for a new reading of this classic, noting that its poetics remain modern and inspiring for interpretation. The proceedings presented here bring together a range of diverse topics and approaches to the study of Laza Kostić's poetic principles and poetry. After the editors' "Foreword", twenty works are grouped into four thematic units that correspond to one another, allowing readers to see Kostić's poetics from different aspects and its influence on the development of modern Serbian poetry in the past century.

The first section comprises studies that primarily address general issues in Laza Kostić's poetics. These are the texts by Jovan Delić, Svetlana Šeatović, Dušan Ivanić, Saša Radojčić, Goran Radonjić, Marko Radulović and Jelena Marićević Balać. Jovan Delić's study examines the influence of Laza Kostić's poetry on the trends in twentieth-century poetry. Along with Vojislav Ilić, Kostić is a forerunner of the creative tendencies that characterised Serbian poetic modernism. Delić pays special attention to Dragiša Živković's essays dealing with Kostić's lyrics in the context of European literature, as well as analyses of the poems "In Memory of Ruvarac" and "Santa Maria della Salute". Emphasising that Laza Kostić was the only truly significant theoretician of Serbian poetry in the nineteenth century and the creator of the most systematic poetics and aesthetics of the period, Delić concludes that Kostić's poetic thought attained philosophical seriousness. Svetlana Šeatović examines the echoes of Kostić's Venice and the figure of the Mother of God in modern Serbian poetry, noting that after the poet's death, his work was marginalised due to the influence of the criticism of Jovan Skerlić and Ljubomir Nedić. However, after the First World War, Crnjanski, Vinaver, and Todor Manojlović discovered an affinity with Kostić's poetry, which was subsequently revalorised through new readings and interpretations. Kostić's full rehabilitation occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. While Ivan V. Lalić foregrounds the theme of Byzantium, emphasising that it was precisely Laza Kostić who intuited its harmony and systemic order, Ljubomir Simović, in his interpretation of Kostić's poetry, focuses on the figure of the Mother of God. Svetlana Šeatović observes that the durability and circular movement evident in Kostić's poetics can also be found in Ivan V. Lalić's cycle of poems *Strambotti*. Through Kostić's poem "Santa Maria della Salute" and the figure of the Mother of God as a Saviour, the Venetian basilica has become part of

the Serbian literary and cultural heritage. Dušan Ivanić examines Kostić's polemical stance toward the domestic poetic tradition. A significant portion of Kostić's poetic polemics concerns his relationship to Serbian poetry and society, often assuming the form of political satire. As Ivanić concludes, Kostić's poetic polemics display a broad thematic and functional-axiological range. Saša Radojčić argues that the defining feature of Kostić's philosophical thought lies in a metaphysical principle. Noting that certain aspects of Serbian philosophical terminology remain insufficiently developed, the author suggests that Kostić's essays on aesthetics and philosophy could be highly stimulating in overcoming these limitations. Although they did not exert a direct influence on later Serbian philosophy, Radojčić maintains that Laza Kostić's views, despite their unfinished nature, are nonetheless highly relevant for understanding his overall poetics.

The following texts in the first part of the proceedings explore oneiric and religious themes in Laza Kostić's oeuvre. The relationship between dreaming and creation in Kostić's poetry is examined in Goran Radonjić's study within the context of Romanticism, particularly English Romanticism. An interest in dreams, a fascination with dreaming as another, alternative reality, as well as the pervasive poetic practice of recording dreams, constitutes important elements of Romantic poetics. Kostić recognises the similarity between dreaming and poetic rapture, and speaks of the need to "pour the dream into wakefulness in the form of a poem," since the poet's dream may offer a glimpse into an "other," metaphysical and transcendent world. Marko Radulović analyses the role and function of religious themes and motifs in selected poems by Laza Kostić, examining the poet's relationship to the transcendent, which develops from doubt and the struggle toward mystical surrender—that is, from engaged and humorous poems to those that are ecstatic and prayer-like. This analysis demonstrates how certain themes and motifs from Kostić's earlier work were gradually incorporated into the poem "Santa Maria della Salute", while others are present in it through distance and poetic repentance. Drawing on the conclusions of Miron Flašar and Miodrag Radović, Jelena Marićević Balać offers a typology of mythological aspects in Kostić's poetry. These aspects are grouped primarily around the myths of Tantalus and Prometheus, while the study also devotes attention to the Muses, as well as to the figures of Orpheus and Odysseus.

The second section of the proceedings brings together papers that analyse Kostić's language and verse. It was inevitable that the authors would also address Kostić's linguistic virtuosity, particularly with regard to his well-known coinages. Aleksandar Milanović examines Laza Kostić's coinages both in his poetry and beyond it, in essayistic, political, and journalistic writings, as well as in private and official correspondence. The author identifies numerous similarities and differences in the types of word formation and the functions of these coinages. While similarities are found in the types of de-

rivatives, the key difference lies in the use of stylistically strongly marked occasionalisms—that is, coinages that deliberately violate word-formation norms—which do not appear in the poetry but are not uncommon in the correspondence. Sanja Paripović Krčmar draws attention to two important issues concerning Laza Kostić's verse: first, the structure of Kostić's symmetrical decasyllabic line, and second, the presence of irregular verse forms, that is, the use of non-isometric structures. The three-volume edition of Laza Kostić's poems, edited by Vladimir Otović and published by the Matica srpska in 1991, served as the corpus for Mirjana D. Stefanović's paper on catalexis—that is, the shortening of the verse at its end by at least one unstressed syllable—in Kostić's poetry. This phenomenon has not been extensively interpreted in Serbian literary scholarship, and the author examines it as a critical commentary on traditional folk verse, linked not only to the poetry of Laza Kostić but also to that of other Romantic poets.

A prominent place in the third section of the proceedings is devoted to Kostić's Romantic irony, explored in the paper by Nenad Nikolić. The author demonstrates that in the poem "In Memory of Ruvarac", the lyrical subject responds to a sense of nothingness—arising from the groundlessness of human existence—with a vision of the aesthetic meaning of the human calling. Various cultural models are also woven into the poetry and poetics of Laza Kostić, a topic addressed in the papers by Goran Korunović and Jelena V. Jovanović. Korunović interprets the ballad "Minadir", taking into account analogies and motif-based affinities between the early Gothic novel and the lyrical situations in Kostić's poem. An imagological analysis offers a nuanced view of the position of the lyrical subject and of the specific overcoming of stereotypical representations of the Orient in Kostić's ballad. "Minadir" is also the focus of Jelena V. Jovanović's paper. Her study examines the interpretation of three genre-related texts by Laza Kostić that appear to have remained insufficiently read: "Minadir," "Đurđevi Stupovi," and "Samson and Delilah." The impetus for this research came from the publication of radiophonic versions of these three works, which opened questions concerning the contemporary reception and reading of their generic hybridity and poetic specificities. Milan Gromović points to the poetic convergence between the poet of Serbian Romanticism and the Byzantine poet and philosopher John of Damascus, identifying this connection on three levels: as a link to John of Damascus as a historical figure, as an affinity with his philosophical views, and finally as a relationship with his liturgical poetry. The author further traces the interweaving of the hymnic and the prayerful principles as integral components of Kostić's poetic procedure. The paper by Kornelije Kvas examines the influence of Petrarchism on the poem "Santa Maria della Salute". Through an overview of the most significant previous interpretations, the author shows that this poem expresses the deepest experiences and emotions of love and religion. The analysis proceeds from the hypothesis that Kostić

achieved this distinctive synthesis to a lesser extent by relying on the Orthodox iconophilic tradition, and to a far greater extent by adopting poetic procedures shaped in the seminal works of the great figures of Italian and world poetry, Dante and Petrarch. Persida Lazarević Di Giacomo analyzes the relationship between architecture and poetry in three poems of the same title and closely related themes. These are verses that celebrate the poet's relationship with the Venetian basilica of Santa Maria della Salute: "Santa Maria della Salute" by Laza Kostić, "Santa Maria della Salute" (1968) by the Italian poet Aldo Palazzeschi, and "Santa Maria della Salute" (1975) by the English poet John Sparrow. The author demonstrates that each poet metaphorized the encounter with this magnificent building through the prism of personal sensibility and experience.

The final paper in this section of the proceedings is devoted to an analysis of Laza Kostić's "Santa Maria della Salute" and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven." The author, Marija Terzić, examines the metaphysical contrast embodied in these poems: the union of the lyrical hero with his deceased beloved in Kostić's poem, as opposed to the eternal separation of the lyrical hero from his departed beloved in "The Raven."

The final thematic block of the proceedings focuses on the analysis of essays written by prominent modernist writers about Laza Kostić. Bojana Stojanović Pantović examines the questions raised by the poet Jovan Hristić in his essay on Kostić. She interprets Hristić's ambivalent relationship with Kostić's poetic achievements, which largely stems from Hristić's underestimation of Serbian Romanticism. Tanja Kojić's contribution analyses Veljko Petrović's essays dedicated to Kostić's character and work. It highlights how Petrović, in discussing Kostić's life and contributions within the context of Serbian Romanticism, was one of the first critics to recognise the nature and greatness of the poet's talent. Finally, Katarina Pantović explores the relationship between Vasko Popa and Laza Kostić. In 1973, Popa prepared a collection of selected Kostić poems, which he introduced with an unconventional preface. Pantović's paper analyses specific features of Popa's poetry and language that may have evolved under the influence of Kostić's poetic principles.

Through a series of innovative interpretations, the collection *Poetry and Poetic Principles of Laza Kostić* demonstrates how open Kostić's oeuvre is to new readings and evaluations. Overall, the studies presented in this collection establish that Laza Kostić's poetry and poetics are crucial links in the modernisation of Serbian poetry, connecting romanticism, modernity, avant-garde movements, and contemporary poetry.

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Translated from Serbian by
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JOVAN DELIĆ (b. Borkovići near Plužine, Montenegro, 1949) writes literary criticism and essays. Books: *Kritičarevi paradoksi* [The Paradoxes of a Critic], 1980; *Srpski nadrealizam i roman* [Serbian Surrealism and the Novel], 1980; *Pjesnik „Patetike uma"* (o pjesništvu Pavla Popovića) [The Poet of "The Pathos of the Mind" (On the Poetry of Pavle Popović)], 1983; *Tradicija i Vuk Stefanović Karadžić* [Tradition and Vuk Stefanović Karadžić], 1990; *Hazarska prizma – tumačenje proze Milorada Pavića* [The Khazar Prism: An Interpretation of the Fiction of Milorad Pavić], 1991; *Književni pogledi Danila Kiša* [The Literary Views of Danilo Kiš], 1995; *Kroz prozu Danila Kiša* [Across the Prose of Danilo Kiš], 1997; *O poeziji i poetici srpske moderne* [On the Poetry and Poetics of Serbian Modernism], 2008; *Ivo Andrić – Most i žrtva* [Ivo Andrić – The Bridge and Sacrifice], 2011; *Ivan V. Lalić i njemačka lirika – jedno intertekstualno istraživanje* [Ivan V. Lalić and German Lyric Poetry – An Intertextual Study], 2011; *Milutin Bojić, pjesnik moderne i vjesnik avangarde: o poeziji i poetici Milutina Bojića* [Milutin Bojić, a Poet of Modernity and a Herald of the Avant-Garde: On the Poetry and Poetics of Milutin Bojić], 2020; *Sažeta poetika sažimanja: ka poetici Danila Kiša III – tendencije i dominante u prozi Danila Kiša* [Concise Poetics of Summarization: Towards the Poetics of Danilo Kiš III – Tendencies and Dominants in the Prose of Danilo Kiš], 2023; *Hodočašća uz Uspravnu zemlju* [Pilgrimages along the Upright Land], 2024; *Gojko Đogo – crni Argonaut srpskog pjesništva: o poeziji i poetici Gojka Đoga* [Gojko Đogo – the Black Argonaut of Serbian Poetry: On the Poetry and Poetics of Gojko Đogo], 2025. Interview: *Dostići nemoguće – razgovori sa Jovanom Delićem (razgovor vodio Miloš Jevtić)* [Reaching the Impossible: Conversations with Jovan Delić] (conducted by Miloš Jevtić), 2025. Delić has edited numerous books by and on Serbian authors.

VLADAN DESNICA (b. Zadar, Croatia, 17 September 1905 – d. Zagreb, Croatia, 4 March 1967) was a Serbian and Yugoslav writer and translator. He studied law and philosophy in Zagreb and Paris, graduating from the Zagreb Faculty of Law in 1930. He worked as a lawyer before entering the civil service. In 1934, he founded the literary-historical annual *Magazin sjeverne Dalmacije* [Magazine of Northern Dalmatia], which he edited for two years and published in Cyrillic script in Split. He also engaged with film,

writing the screenplay for the film *Koncert* [Concert] in 1954. The film *Pravda* [Justice] was produced from his screenplay in 1962, and in 1974, after his death, *Pred zoru* [Before Dawn], based on his short story of the same title—a realist analysis of urban-rural relations within the context of wartime events. In 1974, a television drama, *Florijanovići*, was produced based on his short story of the same title. Desnica spoke five languages and was broadly educated. He translated from Italian, French, and Russian. Major works: *Zimsko ljetovanje* [Winter Holiday], 1950; *Olupine na suncu* [Wrecks in the Sun], 1952; *Koncert*, screenplay, 1954; *Proljeće u Badrovcima* [Spring in Badrovci], 1955; *Slijepac na žalu* [The Blind Man on the Shore], collected poems, 1956; *Tu, odmah pored nas* [Here, Right Beside Us], 1956; *Proljeća Ivana Galeba* [The Springs of Ivan Galeb], Zagreb and Sarajevo, 1957; *Fratar sa zelenom bradom* [The Friar with the Green Beard], collected short stories, 1959; *Ljestve Jakovljeve* [Jacob's Ladder], psychological drama, 1961; *Sabrana djela I–IV* [Collected Works, Vols. I–IV], Zagreb, 1975; *Progutane polemike* [Swallowed Polemics], 2001; *Hotimično iskustvo: diskurzivna proza Vladana Desnice I–II* [Deliberate Experience: The Discursive Prose of Vladan Desnica, Vols. I–II], 2005/2006.

IVANA DIMIĆ (b. Belgrade, 1957) writes plays and short prose, and translates from English and French. Plays: *Pred ogledalom* [Before the Mirror], 1986; *Pepeljuga* [Cinderella], 1989; *Beli ugao* [White Corner], 1998; *Golje* [Paupers], 2001; *Zmajovini pangalozi* [Zmaj Jova's Rascals], 2007. Short story collections and novels: *Crna zelen* [Black Greens], 1995; *Mahorka, mastilo i muž* [Tobacco, Ink, and Husband], 1998; *Uzimanje vremena* [Taking Time], 2001; *Ima li koga?* [Is Anyone There?], 2006; *Popis imovine* [Inventory], 2009; *Arzamas*, 2016; *Sve u svemu: izabrane i nove priče* [All in All: Selected and New Stories], 2019; *Iz mrtvog ugla* [From the Dead Angle], 2022.

GORDANA ĐILAS (b. Nakovo near Kikinda, 1958) is a librarian and bibliographer who writes poetry and prose. Poetry collections: *Pred ogledalom* [Before the Mirror], 1985; *Gospodine, gospodine* [Sir, Sir], 1989; *Carski vrt* [The Imperial Garden], 1996; *Zvezda juga* [Star of the South], 2002; *Usputna stanica* [A Wayside Station], 2005; *Učitelj sećanja* [The Teacher of Memory], 2009; *Sećanje koje se nije dogodilo* [A Memory That Did Not Happen], 2011; *Druge stvari* [Other Things], 2012; *Bila sam poslušno drvo* [I Was an Obedient Tree], 2012; *Sever, udaljen zvuk* [North, a Distant Sound], 2015; *Svakidašnji hleb* [Daily Bread], 2018; *Opraštanje: poema za majku* [Farewell: A Poem for My Mother], 2020; *Zaštićena mesta* [Secluded Places], 2022; *Hvatanje mesečine* [Catching Moonlight], 2023; *Anđeli u kapi mastila* [Angels in a Drop of Ink], 2025. Short story collection: *Srce male ptice* [The Heart of a Small Bird], 2022. Monographs: *Šest poslenika Biblioteke Matice srpske* [Six Important Workers of the Matica srpska Library], 1998; *Mapa sveta Petrovaradinske*

tvrđave [A Map of the World of the Petrovaradin Fortress] (co-authors B. Popržan, N. Mamula, Đ. Pisarev), 2005; *Bibliografija INDIS 1976–2009* [INDIS Bibliography 1976–2009] (co-author S. Vuković), 2010; *Bibliografija Svezaka za istoriju Novog Sada 1–20* [Bibliography of the Materials for the History of Novi Sad, Vols. 1–20] (co-author Ljiljana Kosijer), 2019; *Poslenici Biblioteke Matice srpske* [Important Workers of the Matica srpska Library], 2022; *Bibliografija Nebojše Kuzmanovića: povodom 40 godina rada u nauci i kulturi (1986–2026)* [Bibliography of Nebojša Kuzmanović: On the Occasion of 40 Years of Work in Science and Culture (1986–2026)], 2026. She has compiled and edited numerous books, collections of papers, and selective bibliographies of contemporary Serbian writers.

JELENA Z. FILIPOVIĆ (b. Leskovac, 1987) completed her undergraduate and master's studies in Serbian language and literature at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, where in 2012 she defended her master's thesis titled "Od antroponima do onomastičkih kategorija" [From Anthroponyms to Onomastic Categories]. Since March 2024, she has held the position of lecturer in Serbian language at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, where she had previously served as visiting professor until December 2025, when she was appointed to the position of Lecturer in Serbian Language. She has published articles in the field of methodology of teaching Serbian as a foreign language in the journals *Svet reči* [The World of Words], *Školski čas* [The School Class], and *Lingvometodika*, as well as a study in the field of comparative phraseology of Serbian and Slovenian in the scholarly monograph *Govoriti, razumeti, raditi: uvid u primenjenu lingvistiku* (*Govoriti, razumeti, delovati: vpogled v uporabno jezikoslovje*) [Speaking, Understanding, Acting: An Insight into Applied Linguistics], published by the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, 2025.

MOMČILO NASTASIJEVIĆ (b. Gornji Milanovac, 6 October 1894 – d. Belgrade, 13 February 1938) was a Serbian writer associated with the modernist tendencies in Serbian literature of the interwar period. He attended primary school in Gornji Milanovac, then in Čačak, completing it in Belgrade, where he later studied French language and literature. During the First World War he returned to Milanovac. After the war, the entire family moved to Belgrade, where Momčilo resumed his studies and lived among poets and friends with a shared interest in the arts. In 1923, he spent the summer in Paris on a vacation scholarship. Upon completing his studies he worked in Belgrade as a secondary school teacher, a position he held until his death. He began publishing later than his generational contemporaries Rastko Petrović, Miloš Crnjanski, Desanka Maksimović, and others. He wrote slowly, developing his craft and experimenting with form. He tried his hand as a poet, prose writer, and playwright. He withdrew from public life and grew increasingly

solitary over the years. Nastasijević's literary expression—his language—is dense, idiomatic, vividly coloured, full of inversions, and rhythmically distinctive. Major works: *Iz tamnog vilajeta* [From the Dark Vilayet], prose, 1927; *Međuluško blago* [The Treasure of Međulužje], musical drama, 1927; *Nedozvani* [The Unsummoned], drama, 1930; *Gospodar Mladenova kćer* [Master Mladen's Daughter], drama, 1931; *Pet lirskih krugova* [Five Lyrical Circles], poetry, 1932; *Celokupna dela u devet knjiga* [Complete Works in Nine Volumes], 1939: *Pesme* [Poems], *Rane pesme i varijante* [Early Poems and Variants], *Hronika moje varoši* [Chronicle of My Town], *Iz tamnog vilajeta* [From the Dark Vilayet], *Rane priče* [Early Stories], *Drame* [Plays], *Muzičke drame* [Musical Dramas], *Misli* [Thoughts], and *Eseji* [Essays]; *Sabrana dela Momčila Nastasijevića u četiri knjige* [Collected Works of Momčilo Nastasijević in Four Volumes], 1991: Vol. I – *Poezija* [Poetry]; Vol. II – *Drame* [Plays]; Vol. III – *Proza* [Prose]; Vol. IV – *Eseji, beleške, misli* [Essays, Notes, Thoughts].

IVAN NEGRIŠORAC (b. Trstenik, 1956) is the author of poetry, fiction, plays, and literary criticism. From 2005 to 2012 he served as Editor-in-Chief of *Letopis Matice srpske* [Matica srpska Chronicle]; in 2012 he was elected President of the Matica srpska. Poetry collections: *Trula jabuka* [Rotting Apple], 1981; *Rakljar. Želudac* [Dowser. Stomach], 1983; *Zemljopis* [Geography], 1986; *Abrakadabra* [Abracadabra], 1990; *Toplo, hladno* [Hot, Cold], 1990; *Hop* [Hop-Skipping, 1993]; *Veznici* [Conjunctions], 1995; *Prilozi* [Adverbs/Contributions], 2002; *Potajnik* [The Secret One], 2007; *Svetilnik* [The Torchbearer], 2010; *Kamena čtenija* [Petrographic Readings], 2013; *Čtenija* [Readings], selected verse, 2015; *Matični mleč* [Royal Jelly], 2016; *Izložba oblaka (izbor i nove)* [*Cloud* Exhibition: Selected and New Poems], 2017; *Ogledala oka nedremana* [Mirrors of the Sleepless Eye], 2019. Novel: *Andjeli umiru* [Angels Are Dying], 1998. Plays: *Fredi umire* [Freddy Is Dying], 1987. *Kuc-kuc* [Knock-Knock], 1989; *Istraga je u toku, zar ne?* [The Investigation's Under Way, Isn't It?], 2000; *Vidiš li svice na nebu* [Do You See the Fireflies in the Sky?], 2006. Studies: *Legitimacija za beskućnike. Srpska neoavangardna poezija—poetički identitet i razlike* [ID for the Homeless: Serbian Neo-Avant-Garde Poetry: Poetic Identity and Differences], 1996; *Lirska aura Jovana Dučića* [The Lyrical Aura of Jovan Dučić], 2009; *Istraga predaka—iskušenja kolektivnog i individualnog opstanka* [Ancestral Investigation: The Temptations of Collective and Individual Survival], 2018; *Njegoševski pokret otpora* [The Resistance Movement of Njegoš], 2020. *Poezija Jovana Dučića — od empirijskog negativiteta do lirske metafizike* [The Poetry of Jovan Dučić: From Empirical Negativity to Lyrical Metaphysics], 2022; *Buntovnik s razlogom: umetnost pripovedanja u „Autobiografiji — o drugima" Borislava Mihajlovića Mihiza* [Rebel with a Cause: The Art of Narration in the "Autobiography — About Others" by Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz], 2024; *Svetlost, senke i šaputanja — eseji s povodima* [Light, Shadows and Whispers: Essays

on Occasions], 2024; *Zaveti Matice srpske — vodič kroz najstariju srpsku ustanovu* [The Pledges of the Matica srpska: A Guide to the Oldest Serbian Institution], 2026. In 2023, his *Izabrana dela* I–VII [Selected Works, Vols. I–VII], were published. Negrišorac chairs the Editorial Board of *Srpska enciklopedija* [Serbian Encyclopedia], Book 1, Vols. 1–2 (2010–11); Book 2 (2013); Book 3, Vol. 1 (2018).

ČASLAV NIKOLIĆ (b. Peć, 1983) defended his doctoral dissertation *Politički i ideološki horizont romana, eseja i novinskih članaka Miloša Crnjanskog* [The Political and Ideological Horizon of the Novels, Essays, and Newspaper Articles of Miloš Crnjanski] in 2011 at the Faculty of Philology and Arts, University of Kragujevac, where he is employed as full professor. His research focuses on twentieth-century Serbian literature; he also writes essays and studies. Books: *Biografija Pera Slijepčevića. Bibliografija Pera Slijepčevića* [Biography of Pero Slijepčević. Bibliography of Pero Slijepčević] (co-author S. Ćirković), 2013; *Knjiga o Londonu* [A Book on London], 2022.

JELENA MARIĆEVIĆ BALAĆ (b. Kladovo, 1988) is a philologist specializing in Serbian studies, whose research focuses on Serbian literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as on the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde. She writes poetry, fiction, studies, essays, and reviews. Poetry collections: *Bez dlake na srcu* [Pulling No Punches], 2020; *Arsenal* [Arsenal], 2023. Books: *Legitimacija za signalizam — pulsiranje signalizma* [A Licence for Signalism: Signalism Pulsating], 2016; *Tragom bisernih minđuša srpske književnosti (renesansnost i baroknost srpske književnosti)* [In the Wake of the Pearl Earrings of Serbian Literature: The Renaissance and Baroque Character of Serbian Literature], 2018; *Ka osmehu Evrope: savremeno srpsko, poljsko i češko pesništvo u komparativnom ključu* [Towards the Smile of Europe: Contemporary Serbian, Polish, and Czech Poetry in a Comparative Key], 2023; *Metamorfoze Milorada Pavića* [The Metamorphoses of Milorad Pavić], 2025. Maričević Balać has compiled and edited numerous books.

MARKO PAOVICA (b. Cibrijan near Trebinje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1950) writes literary criticism and essays on contemporary Serbian literature. Books: *Rasponi prozne reči: o proznim knjigama savremenih srpskih pisaca* [The Spans of the Prose Word: On the Books of Fiction by Contemporary Serbian Writers], 2005; *Aretejev luk* [Aretaeus' Bow], 2009; *Orfej na stolu: ogledi o savremenim srpskim pesnicima* [Orpheus on the Table: Essays on Contemporary Serbian Poets], 2011; *Metakritički izleti* [Metacritical Excursions], 2017; *Skice za spomenik / Sketches for a Monument* (bilingual), 2021; *Sa pesnicima: novi ogledi o savremenom srpskom pesništvu* [With Poets: New Essays on Contemporary Serbian Poetry], 2022.

ALEKSANDAR PEJČIĆ (b. Belgrade, 1976) graduated from the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, at the Department of Serbian Literature and Language in 2004. He completed his master's degree in 2008 with a thesis titled "Teatralizacija vlasti u komedijama Branislava Nušića" [The Theatricalization of Power in the Comedies of Branislav Nušić]. In 2012, he completed his PhD, defending the dissertation "Zaplet u komediji srpskog realizma (između Jovana Sterije Popovića i Branislava Nušića)" [The Plot in Serbian Realist Comedy (between Jovan Sterija Popović and Branislav Nušić)]. Following a career in education, Pejčić joined the Institute for Literature and Arts in Belgrade in April 2018. Books: *Teatralizacija vlasti: komedije Branislava Nušića* [The Theatricalization of Power: The Comedies of Branislav Nušić], 2012; *Zapletena igra: komedija srpskog realizma* [The Entangled Game: The Comedy of Serbian Realism], 2016; *Književno delo Ljubena Karavelova na srpskom jeziku* [The Literary Work of Lyuben Karavelov in the Serbian Language], 2018; *Poetika zapleta: tragedija, komedija, drama* [The Poetics of Plot: Tragedy, Comedy, Drama], 2019; *Bibliografija Brane Cvetkovića (1890–1942)* [Bibliography of Brana Cvetković (1890–1942)], 2023; *Književno delo Brane Cvetkovića* [The Literary Work of Brana Cvetković], 2024.

PETAR PIJANOVIĆ (b. Kamenmost near Imotski, Croatia, 1949) writes essays and studies on recent Serbian fiction. Books: *Poetika romana Borislava Pekića* [The Poetics of the Novels of Borislav Pekić], 1991; *Proza Danila Kiša* [The Prose of Danilo Kiš], 1992; *Pavić*, 1998; *Poetika groteske: pripovedačka umetnost Miodraga Bulatovića* [The Poetics of the Grotesque: The Narrative Art of Miodrag Bulatović], 2001; *Naivna priča – srpska autorska proza za male ljude i veliku decu: žanrovi i modeli* [Naïve Story—The Serbian Author Fiction for Young Adults and Adult Children: Genres and Models], 2005; *Književnost i srpski jezik* [Literature and the Serbian Language, textbooks], 2008, 2010; *Srpski kulturni krug 1900–1918* [Serbian Cultural Circle 1900–1918], 2012; *Moderna tradicija – ogledi iz srpske književnosti* [Modern Tradition: Essays on the Serbian Literature], 2012; *Izazovi granične književnosti* [The Challenges of the Border Literature], 2014; *Srpska kultura 1900–1950* [Serbian Culture 1900–1950], 2014; *Rasprava o Gatalici* [A Treatise on Gatalica], 2015; *Anđeli i ratnici: stara srpska kultura* [Angels and Warriors: Old Serbian Culture], 2018; *Srpska kultura u 18. i 19. veku* [Serbian Culture in the 18th and 19th Centuries], 2020; *Kratka istorija srpske kulture* [A Short History of Serbian Culture], 2025; *Srpska kultura dvadesetog veka* [Serbian Culture of the Twentieth Century], 2025.

MIODRAG RAIČEVIĆ (b. Podgorica, Montenegro, 1955 – d. Belgrade, 2025) wrote poetry and prose. Poetry collections: *Osjećajne pjesme i jedna konjska* [Emotional Poems and One Horse Poem], 1984; *Čarape u travi* [Socks in the Grass], 1987; *Debele devojke* [Fat Girls], 1990; *Gore glavu visibabo*

[Head up, Snowdrop], 1993; *Trice and Kučine* [Trifles], 1994; *Muzini vetrovi: tandarologija* [The Muse's Winds: Tandarology], 1995; *Dlan & lopata* [Palm & Spade], 2009; *Muzini vetrovi: tandarologija – popunjeno a zabibereno izdanje sa eroti*č*eskim proplamsajima* [The Muse's Winds: Tandarology—An Expanded and Spiced Edition with Erotic Flashes], 2019; *Bluz dva prijatelja – u 54 tjedna* (pesme M. Raičevića i eseji B. Koprivice) [The Blues of Two Friends: In 54 weeks (poems by M. Raičević and essays by B. Koprivica)], 2022; *O stvarima koje je Homer propustio* [On Things That Homer Missed], 2022. Miscellany book *Sviranje Malaparteu* [Playing to Malaparte], 2002. Books published under the pseudonym T. H. Raič: *Opet silovana* (roman) [Raped Again (novel)], 1990; *Najbolje od Džeka Trboseka* (roman) [The Best of Jack the Ripper (novel)], 1995; *Rečnik afrodizijaka* (erotska svaštara) [Dictionary of Aphrodisiacs (Erotic Miscellanies)], 1997; *Čovek bez kostiju* (roman) [The Man Without Bones (novel)], 2003; *Ko je rekao živeli – roman jednog života* [Who Said Cheers: A novel of a Life], 2011. Book published under the pseudonym Ravijojlo Klikovac *Dukljanski rječnik (Librus docleanus palamudus)* [Dictionary of Duklja (Librus docleanus palamudus)], 2005.

STEVAN SREMAC (b. Senta, 11 November 1855 – d. Sokobanja, 12 August 1906) was a teacher and writer. He completed his secondary education in Belgrade in 1875 and went on to study history at the Velika škola [Great School] in Belgrade, where he also became a member of the Liberal Party. In 1878, he completed the history and philology programme at the Great School. He spent his professional life as a teacher at secondary schools in Niš, Pirot, and Belgrade. He participated as a volunteer in the wars of 1876 and 1877–1878. Sremac began his literary career relatively late in life and belonged to the realist epoch. As a prose writer, Sremac drew extensively on the earlier tradition of Serbian prose, particularly on the works of Jakov Ignjatović. This influence is evident in their shared traits: a conservative and traditionalist outlook, the idealization of the past, a profound affinity for the lives of ordinary people depicted in their works, and a remarkable talent for humor. Major works: *Nasradin-hodža*, 1894; *Ivkova slava* [Ivko's Slava], 1895; *Pop Ćira i pop Spira* [Father Ćira and Father Spira], 1898; *Zona Zamfirova*, 1903; *Kir Geras*, 1903; *Vukadin*, 1903.

NENAD ŠAPONJA (b. Novi Sad, 1964) writes poetry, essays, travel writing, and literary criticism. For a decade, he served as a critic for the daily newspaper *Politika*, and in 2002 he founded the Agora publishing house. Since January 2021, he has been a member of the editorial board of *Letopis Matice srpske* [Matica srpska Chronicle]. Poetry collections: *Đokonda* [Mona Lisa], 1990; *Odrazi varke* [Reflections of Deception], 1993; *Očevidnost* [Obviousness], 1996; *More* [The Sea], 1998; *Četiri poeme* [Four Poems], 2000; *Slatka smrt* [Sweet Death], 2012; *Postoji li dodir tvoje duše?* [Does the Touch of Your

Soul Exist?], 2014; *Izgledam, dakle nisam* [I Appear, Therefore I Am Not], 2017; *Silazim u tišinu tega bačene kocke* [I Descend into the Silence of the Weight of the Cast Die], 2019; *Psihologija gravitacije* [The Psychology of Gravity], 2023; *Srećna voda* [Happy Water], 2024; *Blizanac vremena* [The Twin of Time], 2025. Essay and criticism collections: *Bedeker sumnje* [Baedeker of Doubt], 1997; *Autobiografija čitanja* [Autobiography of Reading], 1999; *Iskustvo pisanja* [The Experience of Writing], 2001. Travel writing: *A Brisel se dâ prehodati lako* [And Brussels is Easily Walked Through], 2018. His poetry has been translated into numerous world languages. He has edited over 700 books and compiled several anthologies. His books have been awarded the most prestigious Serbian literary awards.

DRAGANA VUKIĆEVIĆ (b. Kraljevo, 1967) is a professor of Serbian literature at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade. She writes essays, studies, and monographs. Her research interests include nineteenth-century Serbian literature, as well as the intersections of literature with ethnology, narratology, and erotology. Books: *Poetika čitanja: kritika proze 1868–1901* [The Poetics of Reading: Prose Criticism 1868–1901], 1998; *Ogledi o srpskom realizmu* [Essays on Serbian Realism], 2003; *Pismo i priča: srpska realistička pripovetka i folklorna tradicija* [Letter and Story: The Serbian Realist Short Story and Folk Tradition], 2006; *Ka poetici srpskog realizma* [Towards the Poetics of Serbian Realism] (co-author Dušan Ivanić), 2007; *Anarhija teksta: ogledi o srpskoj književnosti 19. veka* [The Anarchy of the Text: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Serbian Literature], 2011; *Ogledavanja: Laza Lazarević i Simo Matavulj* [Reflections: Laza Lazarević and Simo Matavulj] (co-author Snežana Milosavljević Milić), 2014; *Skriveni narativi* [Hidden Narratives], 2015; *Divna disharmonija: Jakov Ignjatović* [Wonderful Disharmony: Jakov Ignjatović] (co-author Dušan Ivanić), 2020; *Bebe u posteljici književnosti* [Babies in the Placenta of Literature], 2021; *Trompleijska bića fikcije: bebe, vampiri, oživljene statue i čitalac* [Trompe-l'œil Beings of Fiction: Babies, Vampires, Animated Statues, and the Reader], 2024; *Kroz ključaonicu teksta* [Through the Keyhole of the Text], 2024.

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