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LITERARY LINKS OF MATICA SRPSKA  
12–13/2023

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BRANKO ČOPIĆ

## AN EXPEDITION TO THE MOON

I'm only five years old, and already the world around me is starting to close in and shrink. You can do this and you can't do that, this is good, that is not, you can say this, you can't say that. Restrictions spring up from all sides; a flock of angry geese; they're also known to strike.

"You'll get yours, lad, then you'll stop with your foolery."

Stop how! In the morning, as soon as I open my eyes, they're everywhere, pecking at me like sparrows, so I have to ask questions. The world around me is silly and foolish, not me.

The grip loosens only when the old pack saddlemaker, Petrak, a tireless hobo, shows up in front of our house. Before even entering the yard, he's already croaking at my grandfather:

"You still alive, Rade, you old nag?! Well, look at you."

Yay, it's started! If he dares to call Grandpa an old nag, there's no end to what he'll do to the rest of the family. Everyone in the house will probably forget about me, I'll be able to make a run for it, across the stream and into the hazelnut orchard.

When the pack saddlemaker comes to visit, I'm allowed to do all kinds of things. I climb trees, peek into the attic, wander around the stream, and even go to a small mill tucked under a raised grove. I'd even end up in America if I knew the way and wasn't afraid of dogs.

"Just you wait when old Petrak leaves," the family threatens me when I go overboard.

Those "Petrak Days", in early autumn, were usually always festive, bright, and full of whispers, and I was carried away, dizzy, not knowing where to go first: through the cornfields, down the stream, up the hill. I'd crouch on a willow tree and stare at a silent, glittering swarm of fish, and then suddenly a dense treetop of a tame chestnut tree with

bursting overripe pods would branch out before my entranced eyes: ah, to the chestnut orchard, what am I doing with these dumb fish!

I zig-zag back and forth all day, and when the dusk surrounds me and forces me home, a new troublemaker comes around – the moon.

It surfaces from behind the scarce trees on the hill, shining, close at hand, mysterious and silent, a golden-fin fish. I, too, became speechless, trembling with hidden thievish hope:

“Maybe I could touch it somehow?!”

At night, I wake up with a start: the moon is peeking through the window, the whole yard is on fire, and the shining visitor is getting in my face, whispering:

“Let’s go!”

I get up, airy, possessed, but as soon as I take my first step I’m sobered by the voice of my ever-vigilant Grandfather:

“Baya, where are you off to?”

They always do that: Just as I’m about to start something, quivering with excitement, above ground, someone shouts, and I – thud! – land on a hard grassy plain.

Good thing Petrak’s unfettered days come once a year when you can do many different things.

So came the moon’s turn.

The family was making brandy from some early plums, which lasted well into the night. Couldn’t be better for me! There was a blaring fire under the cauldron, Uncle Nidžo got drunk early and fell asleep, and only Grandfather and Petrak remained by the hearth, in the wagon barn. Grandpa was looking after the cauldron, and the old pack saddlemaker was just keeping him company because he never got involved in any sort of work directly related to people. If the horses drank brandy, it would be a different story.

I hang around the two of them, doing more harm than good, eavesdropping on their conversation, and finally, I get up the courage to sit quite close, ready to ask questions. They mentioned the moon.

“Grandfather, could you reach the moon with a rake?” I ask abruptly.

“Heh, look what’s on his mind!” replied Grandfather somehow from above, not addressing me but the pack saddlemaker. “He wants to reach the moon.”

The pack saddlemaker sighed and looked at me over his glass.

“So what, the boy is right.”

“Right, about what?”

“Let him try. I wish I had, maybe different birds would be singing for me today.”

“Ah, what birds, what... You’re already drunk like my jolly Nidžo.”

“Nah, my blood brother” replied the old man gloomily. “I remember as if it was tonight: the moon appeared over the grove, a hundred meters above our house, and my legs carried me towards it all on their own. ‘Where to?’ Pop shouted, reaching for the tongs, the whip, for... whatever he could get his hands on. He beat me, whipped me, and I lost my spirit at a young age. If I had just broken free and run off, Rade, my blood brother...”

“Oh, c’mon now, look. Don’t spoil my grandson.”

“Ah, Rade, Rade ... if it’s too late for the two of us, it’s not for this boy. Come on, son, get up, find a rake, so you and I can go; there it is, behind the hill.”

I scamper to the corner to get our longest rake, and the old pack saddlemaker slowly straightens his legs, then his back and neck, and turns to grandfather, who is sitting motionless and baffled.

“The two of us are leaving, and you watch the cauldron, you old mill horse.”

Grandpa is so taken aback that he can’t even move or ask anything. He holds an empty glass in his hand and watches the two of us leave: they’re probably joking or something.

We make slow progress up the dark, quiescent hill. Above us, the burning sky announces the approach of the most mysterious traveller, the moon. Ha, the rake’s here, all we have to do is hook it and pull. It’ll be in our lap in no time.

A shout echoed from the fallow fields, from the direction of Grandfather’s small, murky fire:

“Hey, fools, come back!”

I feel sorry for that fire in the valley, I feel sorry for the shouter, but the fire above me is getting redder and wider, while my companion plucks up the courage to shout a jeering reply:

“Shut up down there, you old fart.”

We continue with resolve. I’m already feeling a bit fearful, wondering what it will be like being face to face with the moon, and then, as if just for spite, more shouting is heard coming from below:

“Hey, you donkeys, ‘vantasizers’, you’ll catch a cold, God damn it!”

“Get inside the barn, you old jackass, and bray in there,” retorted the pack saddlemaker.

The feeling of sadness for the valley and Grandfather, whom I left behind, is still eating at me, but when, through the dense treetops, a huge moon fire erupts before me, very close, I forget everything and begin cooing with excitement:

“Here it is?”

“Yep, see it?”

The old man takes my hand and now, together, we conquer the last short slope, and when we reach the very top, the moon suddenly jumps out before us from behind a tree, appearing bright, shrunken and innocently calm above the crest of the neighbouring hill.

“Aha, it got away, didn’t it!” shouts the old man victoriously. “The rake frightened it, isn’t that right, you rascal?”

The pack saddlemaker gives me a firm hug, trying to chase away my sadness, and says, comforting me:

“The scoundrel ran away, of course. No matter. C’mon, find me one boy down in the village from whom the moon slipped away so quickly. There are none. It’s you, only you, and me with you.”

Hmm, not one?! ... Well, there really is no such boy in our entire valley. I’ve neither seen nor heard of him. There’s a reason why Petrak comes to our house. I’m there, me...

“Our tough guy,” adds Petrak as if he had finally found the right, final words for all my spellbound sleepwalking towards the moon that filled my mind so much that it too began to glow and shine like a yellow pumpkin left behind in a harvested cornfield.

“Grandpa’s clever little head!”

The bearded man smiles.

I’m standing there in the moonlit night, before a chilly unearthly view that appears only in dreams, it’s a bit scary and sad... You either can’t or don’t go any further, unless the traveler is a fool and a “vantasizer”, in the words of my Grandfather, a kind, good-hearted old man whose love warms me even here, on this dangerous edge where one detaches from this earth and harsh everyday life.

Still... still boldly, with conviction, I swallow this bitter drop of my first, boyish, crucifixion: next to me, with his hand on my shoulder, is the bold, unfettered one, who wants and can do everything, and below, waiting for me in the warm valley, is the other, the good, kind grumbler, who would grieve and remember me always if I ever gtt lost on my amazing journey.

“Grandpa Petrak...” I start to say with a lump in my throat, and the old hobo, sensing my unspoken boyish sadness, readily adds:

“Let’s go, tough guy, let’s go. We’ll come back, no hurry”.

One foot in front of the other, downwards, in the moonlight! Every step of our return is so dear and fulfilling. And as it grows larger, Grandfather’s tireless fire starts to enflame my very heart. There it is, watching, calling and showing us the way.

“The old nag is still waiting for us,” shouts Petrak. “You don’t write off two tough guys like us that easily.



“Here they are, the fools are coming back!” Grandfather Rade welcomed us. He even walked up to us as if we were arriving from God knows where maybe even America. “What happened, did you touch the moon?”

“Don’t you worry about that,” the pack saddlemaker brushed him off. “You just sit by that cauldron and brew your brandy, the two of us know what we’re doing.”

Whether we do or don’t, I’m not clear on that, but, excited and tired from the wonderful night experience, I quickly doze off between my grandfather’s knees, me, the tough guy, the daring moon hunter, armed with a rake three times longer than myself. The last thing that my eyes remember from that evening is the playful flame of my grandfather’s fire, which imperceptibly moved into my dream, where it grew into a powerful and terrifying moon fire.

My grandfather, they say, carried me to bed (how embarrassing for a great traveller!). I spent the whole night talking in my sleep, tossing and turning and waking up my brother, my roommate. Grandpa scolded Petrak and “his hare-brained moon”, Mom washed my face with ice water, and when that didn’t help, she smacked me two or three times on the cheeks, and I calmed down and slept like a log.

The next day, in the dove blue, sunny morning, everything was already behind me like a dream, just a dream. I wanted neither to talk nor ask about it. It seems Grandfather and Petrak felt the same way. They were sitting by the cauldron, and when I appeared, they didn’t mention last night’s event. It was as if they were embarrassed to be reminded of something far from light, day and sanity, where one shouldn’t find themselves either as an accomplice or a witness.

Only Uncle Nidžo, who neither saw nor heard anything, stepped, hungover as he was, on the sinful conquering rake, then continued to ramble on, unable to leave it alone: “Who leaves a rake where it doesn’t belong, and how is a rake needed to make brandy, and then do “those squanderers” (who are ‘those’?) know how difficult it is to find a good rake, this house is falling apart, and on and on... Finally, he got so annoying with his rambling that Petrak simply had enough, and he, as a guest and an older man, felt inclined to reproach him:

“Calm down already, you horse fly! What were we doing? Collecting moonlight and dividing it into stacks, that’s what we were doing. You could have been with us if you hadn’t gotten liquored up.”

Uncle grumbled under his breath that “sleepwalkers” aren’t God knows how much smarter than drunkards, and quickly disappeared. (“He’s off to sleep,” observed Petrak.) I remained, somehow as an equal and third party to the conspirators who knew about last night’s experience with the moon.

And still to this day, just like back then: I stand torn between Grandfather's calm fire, which burns steadily in the dark valley, and the terrible, flashing fire of the moon, cold and unfaithful, which grows and expands across the horizon and pulls violently into the unknown.

But then, every so often, I dolefully ask myself, as if I had stepped on Uncle's rake from childhood:

"Is it smarter to be a sleepwalker or to sit peacefully at home, and when things get tough, comfort yourself with brandy, like my Uncle?"

Translated from Serbian by  
*Persida Bošković*

RADOMIR ANDRIĆ

## SIX POEMS

### THE PROMISED LAND

Who says I have no  
living relatives  
on earth

One of them incessantly  
rolls a stone  
uphill

and believes  
the promised happiness  
is not far away

He needs to push just a little harder  
and shortly the stone'll finally  
be at the top

becoming a monument  
to my persistent cousin  
So tireless

## SHADOW

It was not Odysseus who returned  
from the Trojan war  
but his shadow  
and the epic hero himself still  
floats on an unreal raft  
between the deadly rocks  
of Scylla and Charybdis driven  
mostly by insatiable yearning  
For Unknown monsters  
and beauty glowing  
in the wavery images  
in the eyes of a blind rhapsode

## WITHOUT A SINGLE AUDIBLE WORD

A conversation  
interrupted abruptly  
at the moment of greatest  
excitement and wondering  
whose hand turns  
the Hourglass of sighs away  
from a kiss and holds it upside-down  
as if nothing whatsoever had been lost  
with not a single audible word  
in a room having been built  
forever from the glow  
of young blood

## INSCRIPTION ON BEER FOAM

On Saturdays  
in the afternoon  
I go to the corner inn  
where I read in its entirety  
the biography of an  
old friend of mine

written for a long  
time on beer  
foam

Truly  
on days other  
than Saturdays I have  
no real motive for  
reading anything  
more exciting

#### OLD ISTER YOUNG DUNAVO<sup>1</sup>

Between  
a black forest  
and a black sea  
from language to language  
from infinity to dream  
self-generating in  
a unique colour

The old Ister  
only recognises itself  
in otherness and unveils  
in various ways the young  
Dunavo on the emerald lips  
of swimmers unborn yet but all too  
willing to prove to what extent  
each new stroke's irreducible  
to one foreseeable goal  
dissolving by way  
of poetics

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ister* is the old Latin name for the Danube river. *Dunavo* is the way the name of that river is often pronounced by Hungarians living in Serbia, instead of the customary *Dunav*, *translator's note*.

## WATER REMEMBERS EVERYTHING

An estranged  
relative of mine  
goes every night  
to the river bank alone  
where he whispers his secrets  
in the only language understandable  
to the water which regardless of  
whether it flows fast  
or slowly  
remembers everything  
and confidentially preserves it  
forever for the one who  
recognises in each drop  
the major part of his own  
existence

Translated from the Serbian by  
Novica Petrović

GORAN PETROVIĆ

## THE MOTHER OF GOD AND OTHER ENCOUNTERS

I never managed to convince anyone

Hardly a month would pass and at times not even a full week, before I would see the Mother of God once more. I want to emphasize that I don't refer to it as an apparition, but a usual encounter. Something like this may have occurred before. I'm not certain, but I was just like everyone else—I didn't pay attention to her. In fact, I didn't even see her. It's human nature to constantly scan our surroundings, but the closer something is, the harder it is to truly see it. Furthermore, each of them was different. For a while, I struggled to adapt and disregard any preconceived notions or conventional ideas... But ultimately, I was proven right. It was as if a fog had cleared from my perspective. Their facial features, hair and eye color, body type, behaviour, attire, and social position varied greatly, despite the majority being young women approximately thirty years old. However, these inconsistencies could no longer confuse or deceive me.

"You swear you are seeing the Mother of God?!" repeated the elder priest, Father Toma, when I went to the nearby Church of the Holy Trinity to confide in someone who, based on their life's calling, knows about such things.

"Yes, and a different one each time," I confirmed.

"The name is... Jovanović?", the priest was squinting. "Dear Mr. Jovanović, what you have told me, is a step away from spiritual illness, and you are not far from blasphemy either."

Nevertheless, looking at the silver-trimmed icon on his right, and the One holding baby Christ in her arms, the One preparing to feed Him with breast milk, not the most skilled work of some self-taught, "Prečan" painter, probably from the nineteenth century; looking at that

image illuminated by only a single slanting ray of sunshine, a ray full of dust, you could see tiny chaffs gathering; I stubbornly replied:

“Here, I encountered one just like this the first time, in the waiting room of a small railway station, up in Vojvodina.”

For a moment, lost in thought, the priest stared into the distance, as if striving to reach that northern region. Then he waved his hand dismissively, as a sign of giving up or attempting to persuade me any further. He crossed himself and said in a pitying voice:

“May the good Lord help you... Jovanović, take my advice and read the *Holy Scripture* more often... And now, you must excuse me, I have work to do.”

And since I had nothing more to add, I was left alone. Father Toma turned around and continued filling the chancel lamps with oil. Slowly and with great concentration, he carried out his duties, just as the priest who preceded him had done, and the priest before him, and the very first priest who established this parish in the distant past. The sleepy saints were bathed in the flickering flames. As I was leaving, I thought I heard a liturgical hymn dedicated to Her:

“It is truly meet to bless Thee,  
O Theotokos, ever-blessed and most pure,  
and the Mother of our God.  
More honourable than the Cherubim,  
and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim.  
Without defilement Thou gavest birth  
to God the Word,  
True Theotokos, we magnify Thee!”

This is exactly what I heard as I exited the church. The same verses followed me, only more subdued, as I walked down the path leading through the churchyard, between pine trees, by the candle shop, slowly, one step at a time. That liturgical song followed me to the very gate. It was only when I walked outside, amidst the hustle and bustle of passersby that the song was drowned out. A few panhandlers flocked around me, begging:

“Sir, can you spare a couple of dinars, may the Lord give you health...”

“Sir, give me some since you gave him...”

“Sir, you split it three ways, they won’t give me anything after you leave...”

I headed for the square, thinking that I couldn’t hold it against the priest for not believing me. Besides, it was my fault; I didn’t convince him. Nor anyone else. I never managed to convince a single person. Although, even if I did, would anything change?



## There's no "change"

The silver-trimmed icon in the church truly resembled the first Mother of God I saw. I mean she resembled the first Mother of God that I recognized, and now discerned.

The summer of 1991. A conflict ensued; though some disputed it was truly a war. Women, children, and the vulnerable sought refuge here while the army advanced there. Chaos reigned as people scattered in all directions, their destinations unknown. A real tangled mass of people. Eventually, no one knew where anyone else was going. I'd like to remember, but I forget; I still ask myself: Where did I think the train was going? Still, I must have had a good cause when I made this decision in those uncertain times. Suddenly, the already slow train—stopped. Half an hour passed and it continued, crawling, barely moving through Vojvodina. It almost seemed like the weeds along the embankment were growing faster than we were moving. The conductor, a man with overly slicked-back hair, was walking through the train corridor, announcing that there was a malfunction:

"We don't have enough pressure in the air brake system," he said standing at the door of the previous wagon.

"In other words, as we railroad workers say, 'there's no change?'" And more than half of the brake valves don't work..." he appeared at the door of the previous wagon where I was sitting.

I overheard him saying to someone in the next car, "What can I say people, it's a good thing the railroad tracks are on a level plane because the braking system is on its last legs".

He went on talking, telling everyone something different, but advising them to be patient. Not because of him, but because of us, we'll need patience. Indeed, it took some time before we somehow reached the siding of a modest train station, approximately an hour's walk to a small town in an endless plain. In the distance, tips of baroque towers and concrete silos were reaching for the sky...

The locomotive stopped with difficulty, right next to a pile of completely rotten sugar beets, ready to be loaded since last year. It stopped, shuddering as if breathing a sigh of relief. The train operator came out to jam the brake shoes under the wheels, cursing the entire time. At first, everyone else was quiet but the train operator, and then they told us to leave the train and wait for a new, working assembly; so they could forget about us.

## Something here has fallen apart

The waiting room was packed with people, resembling a bustling crowd. The nearby "Sloga" buffet was jammed with mostly army reservists,

while others sought shelter inside the station building as if they were running late for something. Outside, the midday heat was unbearable, the unharvested fields were still, and only a handful of tall poplars swayed, indicating any sign of a breeze. The only ones who ventured outside were those who wanted to drink water from the public fountain or see if any of the soldiers were vacating spots at the buffet, which was certainly a futile attempt, and the most persistent, who went to the open office window of the confused train dispatcher, to lean in and enquire if there was any hope of something, anything, arriving at the station or passing through.

The water from the public fountain, specifically the memorial one with a plaque bearing the names of fallen soldiers from past wars, was lukewarm. And had a bizarre odour. The longer you let it run, the murkier it became. After a while, the sediment would collect in your palms. But the odour persisted, it wouldn't diminish.

"Leave us alone, we won't, we can't..." pleaded two girls, twins, dressed identically with matching hair clips. However, the parted hair revealed their individuality—one on the left, and the other on the right.

"What do you expect me to do?! Can't you see where we are? In the middle of nowhere! Are you trying to get heatstroke?! Hold your noses and drink up!" their mother exclaimed, growing impatient.

The soldiers had no intention of leaving the buffet. As they were nursing their large beers, there was already a lot of noise about who would beat whom in the war. The three officers pleaded with them and begged for the rifles to be locked and put away in the corner. The elderly waiter with gray hair must have heard his fair share of similar exaggerations, and he readily confirmed every statement with a nod, but he was too tired to watch so he squinted just enough to see that nobody skips out without paying.

"Hey, waiter. Can we put the rest of our drinks on the tab? We'll settle up after we return from the front," one of the reservists repeated with a cheerful expression and a flushed face.

"It's best to get it done right away... I have to settle everything before I hand over my shift, as the place is not mine, it's under lease, and the owner insists," the waiter didn't even bother looking at him, instead placing a cash notepad with an illegible signature on the table...

The train dispatcher, unlike the waiter, was youthful and almost boyish. This was likely the first instance he encountered such a large gathering at his modest station. He stood at attention, unsure of what to do, as he spoke on the phone. Eventually, he removed his cap and let out a sigh before relaying the conversation to the train operator of the faulty composition. The train operator, who was immense, had no intention

of conforming. He was uttering curses and making the sign of the cross simultaneously:

“Looks like the office geniuses have it all figured out. Let’s see them put their knowledge to use and run the train.”

The young train dispatcher immediately put his cap back on, stood at attention and called again. He made an effort to comply with regulations, so he refrained from outright rejecting the order from the other party. However, he did attempt to clarify the situation.

“This is the last time I go somewhere by train!” declared a short passenger, peering through the office window and holding his briefcase with a vice-like grip.

“Don’t use such words, sir... The railway connects the world!” the train dispatcher announced, spreading his arms wide.

“Well, it seems like something has fallen apart here!” retorted the short man, peering into the office.

Standing on tiptoes, he lost his grip on the briefcase, causing it to spill open and reveal its lack of contents. In a state of panic, the short man frantically scanned his surroundings before snapping the briefcase shut and locking it. Fortunately, few onlookers witnessed the empty case.

Which is more deceiving:  
the vast heavens or the earthly fields?

The waiting room was filled with silent, cramped individuals who seemed to be rationing the air. The only sound was an occasional muffled cough, and anyone who dared to speak quickly thought better of it. The nation was embroiled in conflict. Though not directly in our vicinity, it was close enough to be a source of worry. And with the lines between friend and foe blurred, it was essential to be cautious. This gathering included individuals from all sides—primarily theirs, but also ours. Then, theirs from theirs and ours from ours... And that was about it.

In an attempt to block out the sun, the outer wooden shutters were closed. However, the space felt even more constricted and oppressive, resembling a gas van. The sound of laboured breathing filled the room as people wiped away their perspiration with handkerchiefs or palms, arranging themselves in a way that provided some respite from the penetrating rays that sliced through the gaps in the shutters, ruthlessly scorching everything in their wake. This incident immediately brought to mind the classic magic trick where an audience member is locked in a box and the illusionist dramatically stabs it with knives, leaving everyone on edge to see if a cry of pain will escape from the darkness.

A chubby elderly woman beside me let out a sigh and remarked, “What has become of us”. She then opened her bag, which was bursting at the seams like its owner. Following an extensive search of her bag, she retrieved a hearty piece of bread and, guided by a rustling sound, revealed a greasy paper cone overflowing with fried whitebait.

“Would you or would you not care for some?” she asked.

I declined with a dismissive shake of my head.

“Can’t you see that nothing ever stops here, not even for a moment?! The trains are all international, refined, with sleeping cars.” The small man carrying the briefcase refused to give up and was now maneuvering his way to the front of a framed timetable, its age apparent from the dead flies scattered under the grimy glass.

“How long does the break last?! An hour, a day, a week, a month, a whole year or maybe several decades?!” the small man made his way from the posted timetable to the closed cashier’s counter.

“This place is like a cursed land, with no way out... We’ll rot here, just like the abandoned pile of sugar beets by the tracks...” Eventually, even he grew weary.

The brief interruption of sound quickly faded, leaving us in silence once more. But from the nearby “Sloga” buffet, we could hear singing, indicating that the soldiers were already quite drunk. Despite the indistinguishable lyrics, the melody conveyed a feeling of sorrow. And it was always the same. The intervals between the repetitions were gradually decreasing, creating a continuous lament that seemed to have begun centuries ago and may never come to an end. We spent what felt like an eternity in that waiting room, situated in a small train station where only noon seemed to exist. It appeared that the nearest town was an hour’s walk away, but in truth, it could be significantly further. The vast and shining plains of Vojvodina can be deceiving, making the baroque towers and concrete silos appear within reach, but in reality, it could take forever to get there. It’s hard to tell which is more deceiving: the vast heavens or the earthly fields. As time passed, the people stopped wiping the sweat from their foreheads, either because it seemed pointless or because the effort became more and more challenging with each attempt. Who knows how many unintended travellers stood frozen in place, gazing at their feet in defeat, with no desire to take a single step.

### An hourglass of human fates

It could be attributed to the lack of any other movements, save for the elderly woman who was constantly munching (leaving behind only the lingering scent and a few larger fish heads), that I only then became aware of a young woman with a baby in her arms, undoing her blouse

and exposing her plump breast. In the beginning, I was astounded by how I hadn't noticed her before. I had meticulously examined each person, or at least casually observed every single one, amusing myself by trying to figure out their jobs and where they were headed:

...a group of six seasonal workers, sporting large feet and hands, dressed in once-formal shirts, clean-shaven, quiet, set out to find employment during the peak season...

...five sports enthusiasts, practically boys, absurdly wrapped in warm team scarves, amused themselves throughout the train journey by scribbling graffiti, slyly dodging the conductor, and taking down the standard photos of cities above the seats, but only those from one or two republics...

...four female friends, all smugglers, sleep-deprived and pale, intently observed four bulging bags referred to as "sows", each guarding her goods from the other while enviously assessing the others' haul...

...three anxious young men, constantly scanning their surroundings, alert to every rustle; they chose not to respond to the mobilization request last week and are now taking local trains, evading military checkpoints, to reach the northern border...

...two men, more precisely, an elderly man whose son was once again taking him back to the nursing home, didn't utter a word; they've said everything they had to say to each other a long time ago...

...one man, a surveyor, equipped with a knapsack and hiking boots, was brought in to resolve a years-long legal battle between two brothers regarding their property's boundary...

...a man, who has been covertly tailing his newly enlisted son for days, now standing with the others, refrained from going into the buffet, not wanting to embarrass his son in front of his comrades, so instead, he sat here, letting out a heavy sigh, knowing he would break down in tears if he were to approach the buffet...

...two men, a grandfather and his grandson; the old man was recently informed that his condition was terminal; his grandson was escorting him because the grandfather wanted to see his sisters for the last time, who have married and are living in different regions of the country...

...a family of three, a mother and two twin daughters dressed in their finest attire this morning, before hastily packing the rest of their belongings into a suitcase and sneaking out of the apartment, leaving behind their husband and father, an incorrigible alcoholic...

...four con artists who operate the shell game, with one posing as the "worker" and three more polished ones, who supposedly don't know him, acting as lookouts and "luring" unsuspecting customers; all four disappointed as there wasn't much business on the train; nowadays,

people are inclined to take bigger risks and even pawn what they don't own...

...five elderly women, sisters, sitting hand in hand, came together from different parts of the country to return to their hometown and visit their terminally ill brother for the last time...

...six activists, carrying party flags and banners, seemed a little confused; they'd been travelling up and down the country for days, from city to city, unsure if they were coming from or going to a support rally...

I had meticulously examined each person, or at least casually observed every single one. Countless times, they all walked back and forth in front of me, like sand falling through an hourglass of human fates, yet I cannot recall seeing that young woman with the baby... The question arose in my mind: had she been with us throughout the entire journey?

She's completely unaware of what's yet to come

I replayed all the images in my head. Yes, she was. I remembered she was here, with all of us, from the beginning, yet always in the background, constantly overshadowed by another face and their story... Furthermore, I likely didn't notice her earlier because the young woman was incredibly reserved and the child in her arms didn't make a sound, not even a whimper.

Even at that moment, the young woman's actions remained unchanged as she unbuttoned only two buttons on her simple blouse, exposing her right breast in a quiet and almost imperceptible manner. If I had closed my eyes a second earlier, a common habit to prevent sweat from stinging my eyes, it would have seemed as if she had been sitting there, her blouse unbuttoned, since we entered this packed waiting room. Conversely, a gut feeling suggested she did it discreetly but not because she was embarrassed. She wasn't embarrassed in the slightest. She wanted to feed the child and she executed it in the same manner that is likely practiced worldwide, with the most instinctive gestures imaginable. She seemed indifferent to whether she was alone or amid a large crowd in a tight space.

The chubby elderly woman sitting beside me let out a sigh and remarked, "Oh if you only knew how salty the fish was! I'm so thirsty. Would you or would you not care for an apple?" Now she was taking out and gobbling down small, shrivelled apples, munching on the seeds and leaving behind only the stems.

I declined with a dismissive shake of my head.

"Her first child" the chubby elderly woman sighed again, between two bites, seeing who I was looking at, "Ugh, young women. We didn't

need a doctor. To think how many of those I've delivered in a blink of an eye before the towels were even ready and the water boiled."

Her tone was undefined, a combination of disdain and pity. In any case, she said it in a significant tone, as if she wanted to add: "She's completely unaware of what's yet to come!" But she didn't. She continued eating her apples, relishing every bite.

This might have been the young woman's first time giving birth. Despite her age, one might not have assumed so, but her slim hips and petite chest gave the impression that this was her first child. And then, that breast, pure and white, adorned with a soft rosy peak, its shape resembling that of a delicate, milky marble sculpture crafted by the Creator in a moment of divine inspiration. A dainty silver chain encircled it, accented by a small cross pendant. If I hadn't witnessed the child eagerly nursing, attempting to grasp it with both hands, I would have thought it had never been touched before.

With even breaths, the new mother calmly nursed her child, a serene smile on her face as she looked off into the distance, away from the waiting room... As her symmetrical features softened with tenderness, her attention would shift to the child in her arms. A smile would grace her lips and her enigmatic gaze would once again wander to a distant place. Her focus was solely on what she saw; the sticky heat in a crowded room and people staring at their feet didn't faze her at all...

Yes, only then did I notice that she was wearing some kind of long, light scarf, some kind of veil draped over her head, but there was not a drop of sweat on her forehead.

You believe that we won't make it back from the war

I think I could have watched her all day... All of a sudden, the singing in the "Sloga" buffet began to fade and eventually ceased. Shouts could be faintly heard, followed by a heated argument. I found out later that a certain soldier, the one with the flushed cheeks, refused to settle the bill for the three beers he ordered. He remained stubborn and continuously declined to pay, slurring his words:

"C'mon, treat the army to at least one round... We don't have to pay for everything in this failed state... Buy a round of the large beers, since you won't let us put our drinks on the tab... Put aside your work, join us and let's sing together. But let's be honest, you won't give us credit because you assume we won't make it back from the war... That we'll meet our end there."

The aged waiter narrowed his eyes, calculating the potential outcome. The profits for that afternoon surpassed those of the past ten days combined. Nevertheless, the patrons grew increasingly demanding.

The main concern was whether someone would have the ability to control them afterwards. He was familiar with these types of clients. Hesitant, he concluded it wasn't worth the gamble. There's no doubt that there will be more business and passing armies stopping for a drink. That's the only thing you can count on here. He turned for a moment and announced, "The restaurant is closing."

"What do you mean closing?!" the one with the flushed cheeks jumped to his feet. "Just that, we're closing. My shift is over... Thanks to you, I ended up working overtime," the waiter said, turning to organize items behind the counter.

"What about us, where are we to go?!" Red tapped his chest. "To the platform, a train is bound to arrive soon," the answer was barely discernible over the noise of empty bottles being stacked.

"To the platform? Like some stray dogs..." he spit on the floor and muttered profanities.

The waiter acted as if he didn't hear. But for such a great profit, one can tolerate bigger insults. Nevertheless, the soldiers must calm down. It's none of his business what they do after leaving the "Sloga" buffet. The responsibility lies with the three officers, who have been preparing them for this moment their entire lives... He just wanted them gone and whatever happens next is not his responsibility.

And so it was... The younger ones, with barely any facial hair, ditched their gear in front of the buffet and tossed aside their helmets, weapons, gas masks and backpacks. They unfastened their harnesses, tore off their shirts, and scattered along the tracks, playfully chasing each other and shouting. They leaped over railway ties, relishing the crunch of gravel under their boots and tumbling down the embankment like carefree kids.

The more rampant ones engaged in a spontaneous competition, testing their aim here and there. The sound of slugs hitting the lamp post and turn signal echoed in metallic clatters, and then the boldest among them took aim and fired at the "St. Andrew's Crosses" from both sides of a nearby railroad crossing, causing them to become deformed...

Some gathered around the fountain, using the murky water to wash off. The memorial plaque of past wars held their gaze, but they struggled to decipher the years or any of the names on its surface. The once-carved letters had been washed away by years of rain, without any attempt to restore them with bronze paint.

Others gathered to discuss the potential distance to the town across the plain, the tips of the baroque bell towers and wreaths of concrete silos by cutting through the furrowed fields... There must be a cafe or at least a shop there. So what if they happen to miss something



that is supposed to pass through here? Where are they in such a rush to go, the three officers reassured them. The non-existent war can wait.

A few of the soldiers from the buffet made their way to the station building... only three or four of them.

I found out all that later. That's how things were there.

It was as if she held an infinite understanding for all

I think I could have watched the young woman with the child all day... Until four soldiers stormed into the waiting room. The one with the flushed face shouted drunkenly, trying to appear stern:

“My, my, civilians. What brings you to this hidden location? It's like you've burrowed into a hole or a cave!”

The people were numb from both the long wait and the sweltering heat, with no one bothering to lift their gaze, still looking down at their own feet. Naturally, aside from the elderly woman, who was currently pulling a homemade, three-finger-thick piece of poppy seed strudel from her bag. Just moments earlier she repeated: “Would you or would you not care for some strudel, neighbour?” For the most part, the newcomers probably intended to make a jest, to alleviate their boredom, and distract themselves from the war. However, as nobody seemed to be paying any heed, the four soldiers felt as though the civilians were intentionally disregarding them. They were offended.

“What is it, civilians, are you ignoring us? Minding your own business? Now we're not worthy of a simple greeting, meanwhile, you sent us all off to war waving!” shouted Red again, this time with a clear head, while his companions stared fiercely, making it clear that they were ready for a confrontation.

The activists sat slumped in their chairs. One of them started to speak but quickly thought better of it. Meanwhile, the grandmother savoured every bite of her poppy seed strudel. The man with the briefcase kept a tight grip on it under his armpit... I was squinting so that the sweat wouldn't get into my eyes... The soldier's attention was captured by a pensive young woman cradling her child, lost in contemplation as she gazed beyond the waiting room. The absent look on her face seemed to be what angered them the most. The quartet advanced a few steps and positioned themselves in front of her, staring at her with increasing impoliteness. And even though she didn't let on, in any way, that they were bothering her, that those men in uniform were harassing her, the baby let go of the breast and began to cry. Two or three drops of milk dripped from the soft rosy peak. The woman's smile was kind as she gently rocked the child, trying to calm him down... Now the majority of the people in the waiting room raised their heads.

“Looks like the little one’s had enough!” exclaimed Red, winking exaggeratedly at his comrades for all to see.

And since they expected something more from him, he added:

“No sir, I wouldn’t part with that so easily.”

The remaining trio started nudging each other. The woman turned her gaze towards the soldiers for the first time. Despite this, her expression of kindness remained unchanged. She looked at them as if she held an infinite understanding for all.

“Oh ho, the little lady pretends not to understand anything,” that was how Red interpreted the woman’s patience.

Time seemed to stand still for a few moments. (Except that the four smugglers instinctively clutched their bags, known as “sows”, closer to their bodies.). The soldiers’ next move was eagerly anticipated, but it appeared that an impending event was on the horizon that they were hesitant about. However, it was already in motion: they were on their way to war, which for some it wasn’t... the train broke down in the monotonous plains... they drank to get rid of their fear, and now they didn’t know what to do with their courage... the waiter threw them out of the buffet in such a humiliating way... they felt invisible, like an invading army from a foreign land... they narrowly avoided something that they had no desire for... as though anything that came earlier turned out as they wanted.

Everyone was waiting to see what was going to happen. Everyone was waiting to see what was to come, regardless of how it played out, as it would provide an excuse and mark the conclusion of any possible solutions. Everyone was waiting for this to end, so they could lower their heads again and wait, as calmly as possible, for something, anything, to come their way.

The atmosphere was filled with swirling dust particles. The slanted blades of the sun’s rays, piercing through the gaps in the shutters, illuminated every speck of chaff.

What’s he talking about

“Why is she purposely provoking? Can’t she just button up her blouse? God knows what lies ahead. All we need now... What’s more, she could have breastfed the baby someplace else, somewhere less public. Must we be witnesses to everything?” the short man uttered, clutching his briefcase protectively.

The chubby elderly woman remained silent. Her cheeks bulged with food. In a gesture of approval, she nodded her head fervently, while diligently removing the remnants of various foods from her lap—bits

of bread and strudel, small fish heads and apple stems, powdered sugar and specks of ground poppy seeds.

I still can't explain why I stood up. I've never been overly brave. On the contrary. I'm not sure why I decided to get up, I guess I saw it as a chance to improve my self-esteem before it's too late. To make an effort to stand up and avoid sitting there doing nothing. Perhaps my impetuous legs were to blame, acting on their own accord: rather than heading towards the exit to avoid watching, I found myself walking towards the soldiers. To be exact, the one with the red face. I inched closer to him, tilted my head, and whispered into his ear:

"Please, don't do this..."

Suddenly, a voice that didn't sound like my own took over and spoke with more energy:

"For the love of God, leave her alone... Can't you see the resemblance to the Mother of God?! She looks just like the real Mother of God cradling baby Christ in her arms!"

It's hard to say who was more surprised. Red or me. He was undoubtedly the first, as he never could have foreseen such boldness. He glanced at the woman holding the child, then turned to me, and finally back to her... My actions left me stunned, but what shocked me even more was the realization that I had unconsciously verbalized a suspicion that I had been carrying with me all this time, but struggled to put into words. Yes, the woman with the child seemed to be the real Mother of God with Christ. With a mournful gaze, she surveyed the soldiers and me... As the child quieted in her arms, she embraced him and smiled tenderly at someone outside the gas van. This person appeared to be very far away, well beyond the waiting room and the seemingly infinite plain. The soldier with the flushed cheeks was now burning red. One of the others, while setting down his automatic rifle, enquired over his shoulder:

"What did he say? What is he talking about?"

"What is he talking about?! Nonsense... All nonsense, the people have completely gone insane..." he answered, then hesitatingly turned to face the woman and child once again, his cheeks flushing even deeper. "Let's get out of here. We have better things to do. Move. We're leaving!"

Before I could even sit back down, the four soldiers stormed out in a fit of anger, and the young train dispatcher walked into the waiting room. He had a very formal appearance, with every button on his shirt neatly fastened, donning a cap and carrying a dispatch baton, the circular plaque used for greeting and departing trains. He solemnly announced:

"Please make sure you don't miss the train; it's leaving in five minutes. Regrettably, a new composition couldn't be arranged, so you'll have to take the old one to the departure point. From there, it's your choice what to do."

## Looking for old spots

In the same manner as before, the people didn't complain much. Everyone was glad to leave the waiting room. Even the man with the briefcase stayed quiet. Moreover, his expression exuded pride, as if he himself had single-handedly orchestrated our departure. Just as we were about to exit the waiting room, the chubby elderly woman inquired:

"Forgive me for prying, but I've been observing you closely. Whatever you have in the briefcase must be of national importance, considering how tightly you're holding onto it."

"Yes: something very important," the short man tapped his briefcase with his other hand while puffing out his chest confidently despite the hollowness of his luggage."

"Lucky you. I don't have much left. I'm not sure what I'll do now," said the elderly woman, picking up her now lighter bag.

We boarded the train, pushing each other. For some unknown reason, we were seeking out our old spots. After some back and forth, we finally found our seats and settled in.

Six seasonal workers, clearly fellow countrymen, sullen, in the same compartment. No jobs. What are they to do now with the feet and above all—the hands?! With no work, what purpose do their colossal hands serve?!

Five sports enthusiasts, practically boys. A bit livelier. The real season hasn't even started yet, and they've already done so much. However, they still haven't taken down all the photographs above the seats, which they will do when the conductor turns his back.

Four female friends, smugglers, on the verge of dozing off, but keeping a close eye on each other, dragging their overloaded "sows". Each enviously assessing the others' haul.

Three young men, who managed to evade mobilization, appeared visibly pale, almost as if they had a premonition that the military police were waiting for them upon their return—and they were proven right.

The elderly man, feeling much happier, was in stark contrast to his son who was in a sombre mood. Despite this, the man was relieved to have postponed his return to the nursing home for another day. They remained silent. They've said everything they had to say to each other a long time ago.

The surveyor, not at all excited—not even the holy father can reconcile those two brothers, that property border can be measured tomorrow, the work isn't going anywhere. As he pulled a compass out of his backpack, he couldn't help but be amused by the needle's unwavering northward orientation, regardless of his movements.

The man, who has been covertly tailing his newly enlisted son, sat with his head lowered, worried that his son would spot him and equally worried that he would see him and become emotional.

The terminally ill grandfather was leaning on his grandson, confused; he thought he saw a group of elderly women passing by. Five in total, just like the number of sisters he had.

The mother and twin girls were in a state of panic. The mother softly pleaded with her daughters, assuring them that their alcoholic father may still be asleep and they could slip back home, change clothes, and unpack without being noticed.

Four con artists who run a shell game. The one in charge of manipulating the shells had their sights on the seasonal workers. Take what you can. The workers certainly didn't have much money, but they seemed to be the most desperate among the crowd. It's now up to the more polished ones to entice them into the game.

Five sisters, five confused elderly women, thought they had passed by a very familiar-looking man in the corridor, leaning on a boy.

Six activists, who were all quite serene, had already been compensated for their attendance at the meeting.

We boarded the train, pushing each other. For some unknown reason, we were seeking out our old spots. As the saying states, he who seeks shall find.

Have everyone's tickets been duly cancelled

With great enthusiasm, the dispatcher blew his whistle. The train operator leaned out of the window and made the sign of the cross. The locomotive screeched in agony, moving at a snail's pace (like a limping monstrosity because the fault in the brake system had not been fixed), as we made our way back to where we started. While we were enveloped by an infinite, misleading expanse, it felt as though our journey had not been disrupted at all, and not a single moment of our time here had been lost. The deception brought a sense of joy to the crowd, causing them to burst into laughter and engage in conversation. They even began discussing their destinations, momentarily forgetting about the constant backtracking...

The youthful train dispatcher adhered to regulations and maintained a composed demeanour as he stood by the platform for an extended period, almost as if he was under the scrutiny of the Directorate of Yugoslav Railways itself.

In the far-off distance, amidst the untouched wheat fields, a small group of soldiers marched in formation towards a settlement with baroque towers and concrete silos, anticipating the possibility of finding

open cafes or shops. (The father, who secretly followed the recruit, buried his face in his palms. He couldn't see clearly, but he knew, he could feel that his son was among them.)

We left behind the heap of decomposing sugar beets from last year. After a sigh of relief, the elderly waiter must have diligently counted the cash from the till and proceeded to reopen the doors of the "Sloga" buffet. Perhaps another group will venture this far today.

After he vanished from view, the soldiers began spewing curses at him through the corridor windows of the wagon. The only one who remained quiet was the one with the flushed face.

Moving from one compartment to another, the conductor with the overly-slicked back hair checked for any new passengers and verified that all tickets were properly cancelled. He retorted back harshly to those who were protesting:

"Who cares if you didn't reach your destination? You're still on the train, aren't you?"

The woman with the child remained in the station building. She didn't return to the train. The baby was still breastfeeding and she deemed it crucial not to disturb him. She was left to herself and only a handful of individuals noticed her absence.

Did they perhaps have a premonition,  
while we were completely unaware

That was my first encounter. In the waiting room of a humble train station. After that, I saw them often. It was as if the entire world was just a single, suffocating waiting room with closed shutters and intersecting sunbeams...

The Mother of God always looked different, just as the circumstances were always different. I saw them confused, on the streets... lonely, on park benches... proud, in the last month of pregnancy... soaked from the rain, standing at bus stops... exhausted, surrounded by the hustle and bustle of public transportation... waiting for someone, in the garden of a cafe... propped up on elbows, gazing out the windows and balconies of buildings... anxious, among a group of refugees... hunched over, during the bombing... even the calmest yet most determined ones, amidst the loud crowds of protesters... Some of them didn't have a child in their arms, and even if they did, not all of them were breastfeeding, nevertheless I recognized them unmistakably by their serene smile. Nothing could throw me off, not even when their appearance seemed to be inspired by Eastern icon artists or the imagined depictions of old Western masters. Nothing could dissuade me anymore, even though some were slender, with long necks, while others were luxurious and softly rounded. No,

nothing could dissuade me, not even the fact that not all of them wore the enigmatic smile; some were even crying, inconsolably, completely broken, as if they had reached the pinnacle of infinite understanding.

Upon receiving guidance from Father Toma, I began to turn to the Holy Scriptures with greater frequency and surprisingly, I began to perceive other visions as well. For example, the very famous one, which we usually refer to as “The Last Supper”, especially on television. It didn’t always include thirteen participants—sometimes, there were a few dozen or only two or three; they didn’t always sit at the same table: the scene varied, some were surely sitting in front of the TV screens, some at their home table, while others didn’t even have a table, let alone a supper—but my intuition told me that the outcome would sadly be the same. Then I recognized many other biblical scenes, those depicting the flood and drought, sea monsters and locusts, wanderers, Pharisees and scribes, petty thieves and corrupt judges, those incurably wounded or broken, those fused with insensitivity forever, the unyielding devils circling the ladder to heaven with unrelenting ferocity, tired angels of all nine ranks, some of the faces of the forty martyrs, proud stumbling and gruesome crucifixion...

And excerpts from “The Revelation of Saint John the Divine”. There were more and more of them... They would start there, continue here, and conclude over there. The scattered pieces were strewn about, but those who possessed the skill to piece them together and arrange the details were able to see and interpret them like the pages of a book:

“And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:  
Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.”

However, I saw the Mothers of God most often. I could always identify them. Despite my efforts, I could never convince anyone else, but I remained convinced. The only mystery that eluded me was—were they aware? Did they have a premonition? Because we, and not just us, were in the dark—unaware of what we could have been.

Translated from Serbian by  
*Persida Bošković*

MIODRAG RAIČEVIĆ

**SIX POEMS\***

THAT

to Novica Tadić

That which you've been looking at all your life  
do not think that it is not  
looking back at you

That which you've been thinking of your entire life  
somebody has already (you can be sure)  
thought of before you

That which you've been searching for in the fallen leaves  
someone has already found  
someone's just about to find

That which you have wanted to put in order  
all these years somebody will at some point  
do instead of you

That which you have laughed at your entire life  
it has been looking and laughing at you  
heartily as if it knew you from somewhere  
showing its teeth that are counting on you.

---

\* Selection from the book of poems by Miodrag Raičević *About the Things that Homer Omitted*



## ABOUT A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

*My life came to an end when I was happy.*

Kavafis

No one doubts any longer that Sartre died happy.  
He despised money and bourgeoisie. He wrote at night,  
concealed from the things he spoke about during the day.  
He possessed, they say, certain cheerfulness, and tranquility,  
which made him special. That was, as many of them say,  
where his great success with women came from. Women like those  
men who  
carry their own beauty inside. That is so chic!

However, as time went by, Sartre was getting nervous,  
but on the inside, “in his consciousness and subconscious”, much more  
tranquil,  
more than one would expect from this point of view.  
He liked to whisper when he talked. Many were convinced  
that he communicated with ghosts, but what does the crowd know!

The belief that the one who crosses the Lethe  
without getting his feet wet shall sit next to the Lord,  
that is, ladies and gentlemen, what it’s all about here.

When they asked him to say something about death,  
he responded: “I would like to die at a table,  
in some restaurant. A stroke, something like that!  
To pull the tablecloth while I’m falling!  
To knock over the soup plate!  
It would be good if someone of the present  
should have a camera. To record that.  
For years, I have been looking around myself and haven’t seen anything  
that I like. Everything is a remembrance.”

In French, that sounds funny.  
It is said that a similar view of death have those  
who are not tired of eating every morning  
their scrambled eggs with a glass of sheep milk yogurt,  
which is so good for the stomach.

He respected engaged artists. He read the other ones.  
He was happy, they say, because of that.

The freedom, which he felt “to that degree”  
(let’s trust him without questioning), he never misused.  
Let us say that Simone could, with a clear conscience,  
climb up the stairs in front of him.

Sartre and freedom, they were just made for each other!  
Simone, after all, came later. Liberté toujours.  
I’ve been watching that slogan these days, on billboards,  
remembering the fine existentialist, shaved,  
and handsome, too, in a way.  
With glasses, behind which he hid.

Let us summarize:

It is enough to know about someone that he died happy.  
Then why shouldn’t one say this as well: his materialism  
was stronger and stronger up until his death. In the end: I am convinced  
that life makes sense only if it is lived  
the way Sartre lived it.  
Personally, I cannot imagine any other option.

## COMFORTLESS

Today I remember my poems written at an early age  
as something that had a certain form (just that).  
Oh, yes, there was too much death in them (I remember that  
very well), and, I think, nothing else. I also remember the afternoon  
when I took the pages torn out of the notebooks in which I had written  
to the neighbour’s garden and, having prepared them,  
burned them together with the fallen leaves there.

Oh, you must know that my heart was burning with them at the time,  
but I knew that if I should give up, nothing would come of the book,  
the one that I write. I was watching the flame destroy  
something that didn’t stand a chance to be eternal, not even as a flame.  
That flame was devouring my anxieties, unseen loves, and all of them –  
the epigonic verses (I passionately read Aleksa Šantić’s  
translations of German romanticists at the time) – so, all of  
my adolescent sorrows, rose to the sky, while I  
remained down there, on the ground, with a serious intention  
to do it all over again.

Let me summarize:

Never again have I been to that garden, not even to light a cigarette, but today I think that one should have done it frequently. After that one feels better in a way, even though one feels bad. And those who expected more from me would have felt better. If I had made up my mind then, all that I wrote later would have made more sense – yes, there wouldn't be so many poems, silent witnesses to some unimpressive moments of an uninteresting life, there wouldn't be that self-centredness which only added fuel to the fire, just when one didn't need it. You will see, all that affected my life. You should do it, too, young man, silently wait to forget them.

### ABOUT DEATH

*Those few thoughts that you have had about death,  
that's actually the life you have lived.*

Branislav Petrović

Can one not fulfil what one has not promised?  
This is, gentlemen, what it's all about here.  
But do not forget, nothing depends on us.  
You see, everything in life is somehow undefined,  
lights are on, lights are off, and we don't have anything to do with it.  
Or we do?

Once I was you, once we were we (and you who is now reading this were the same), but the stars, the stars are differently arranged now, and when autumn comes, you start to turn yellow, together with the leaves. At first imperceptibly, but with November approaching, you can feel – winter is placing needles under your fingernails. Well, my boy, we both know it, you're fucked!

Only an apple swaying in the wind can be so beautiful,  
ah, swaying in the wind above your head.  
(Your face is still ruddy, and the wind is still Yours.)  
But the apple, you can feel, that apple is your heart!  
Ah, once that heart was pure tenderness, too!  
But the apple, it will never cease to be an apple,  
and your heart will!

It all makes you experience the world around you  
as something that never ever has been yours.  
And that everything is in vain. Isn't that nice?  
However, something tells you that happiness is not far away,  
that happiness is never far away – but you must always  
go somewhere, return from somewhere. You must always  
be in motion if you want to come across happiness.  
After all, it is the only way to live properly  
– between those two darknesses, none of which is yours,  
unless God should decide otherwise, as in the enacting terms.

And that which is in your chest, which never stops,  
isn't only yours. Someone, whom you haven't seen for years  
(you just know that he exists), will come and take  
your place, without saying: that is mine!

#### ABOUT HEAVEN

There is no better feeling  
than when you jump out of a plane  
*and play in the heavens.*  
Jimi Hendrix

Why would a man lay claim to eternity  
when a rabbit, raven, fatal viper do not do it?  
Birds do not do it, either a thrush or a nightingale.  
And what about an eloquent parrot, wonders Aristotle.  
Why would just a man lay claim  
to that luxury, the only one that God hasn't promised him?

And in paradise, in God's supermarket,  
there would be mostly birds, chosen by consensus,  
with amazing vocal capabilities.  
(The viper would remain down there, with its ugly craft.)  
Man would have Eve, in a bed of flowers,  
in youth that lasts forever, in a life  
where memories would not exist, because  
each following day would be more harmonious  
than the previous one, and in the veins, brothers and sisters,  
instead of blood, wine would flow, the eloquence  
of gods would finally be available

to every human being.  
So, everything would be as it is here on earth,  
only now in heaven.  
There, over there, above us!

Ah, one often thinks about paradise  
when one gets old. Those little pictures altered  
with Photoshop are comforting. One rarely wonders  
if the one who invented heaven  
had ever seen it – there are many unclearnesses there.  
The story simply doesn't hold water.  
But if God ordered so,  
then it has to be done.  
Right, bro! But what if he didn't?

Let us summarize:

We wonder: If this is a must anyway, why  
a living man shouldn't go *there*? The story with the earth,  
you must admit, is quite an awkward thing.  
And what's the point of death if it makes no sense?  
What's the point of heaven if life makes no sense?  
What's the point of all this, damn it,  
if you and me are not together?

## THERE ARE NO OTHER ANGELS

I will never forget your face  
twitching in pain, which then  
seemed to be no pain at all  
but some incomprehensible language that I, you would say,  
luckily, still could not understand.

That is why I do not cry, now, when you're dead,  
my good one: I just whisper sometimes  
your nickname, *Ćuna*, *Ćuna*, alone and numb.

And you, lying on a no man's land,  
there, in the mortuary, which hadn't been made  
for the ones that we loved, you were only *then* conscious  
of the haughtiness of those coming to hear  
the nibbling of a mouse in their own heart.

And I saw, for the first time that spring,  
that the cherry under the window had turned grey.  
Its leaves were singing to the ground,  
low, low...

The following day, in the small church, Christ  
passed his hand over your forehead,  
removing the wrinkles from your face...

I remembered that – as was looking at the crumpled  
paper on which I had written a poem about you.  
Since then, I have always flattened the paper with my palms,  
hoping to remember some nice,  
simple words that I miss,  
so as to say to the one who is still writing  
this poem: Do not ever crumple  
and throw away the poem of your mother, no matter  
how unpretty it might seem at the moment.

If you do it anyway, pick up the paper,  
straighten it on your knee, add something  
that you remember dearly, which could remind you  
of the days when she was alive. You know, when she  
brings you a cup of tea with trembling hands;  
or when she takes a nap in the small window frame under  
the balcony, with her head on her chest,  
waiting for you to return from somewhere.

You will see, that will not be bad.  
You will see, my sad heart,  
that will not be bad at all.

Translated from the Serbian by  
*Dragan Purešić*

JOVAN DELIĆ

**GOYA IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR  
– ABOUT AND ON THE OCCASION OF  
ANDRIĆ'S ESSAY *DISCUSSION WITH GOYA***

Always strict to himself, almost to the point of cruelty, as only the most exceptional among the greatest can be, Ivo Andrić said that in his essays, and in his poetry in particular, he did not reach the high measures he was so fortunate to achieve in his narrative prose – his short stories and novels. This might be one of the reasons why his essays, sometimes, and his poems regularly, are carelessly put into aside into background. We, on the other hand, know of no better or more beautiful essay in Serbian, or any other South Slavic literatures, than of Andrić's *Discussion with Goya*. Paralleling it is the essay *Njegoš as a Tragic Hero of the Kosovo Idea*, followed by his Nobel Prize acceptance speech *On the Story and Storytelling*, as well as his anthological prose poem, i. e. an essay-poem *The Bridges*. Essay writing, along with it, permeates the entire Andrić's opus; it is in his foundations.

If in *The Bridges* the poet opened up the prose poem towards the essay, by creating the hybrid genre of essay-poem, then in his *Discussion with Goya*, the poet has also opened up the essay towards the short story, achieving also a treasured genre hybrid. *Discussion with Goya* is valuable as an exceptional work of art, and in the manner It is artistically shaped. Moreover – our senses tell us – through this essay Andrić 'discovered' a type of a short story in which a deceased and real historical figure (or somewhat less significant figure from one's own past life) is in search of an author; knocks on his door of solitude and seclusion, enters without permission or invitation, unconcerned with locks, bolts, or curtains. Namely, between the Andrić's essay and his narrative wreath *The House of Its Own*, there is a typological kinship. Goya, already deceased for over a hundred years, visits Andrić's café table in order

to have conversation on art and life with our writer. It is the reason why we find the following questions equally important and indivisible: how is this piece of work written and what does it mean? Can it tell us anything about Andrić's narrative?

Andrić's graphostylistics immediately strikes us and overgrows into the writer's dominant stylistic procedure within the essay: we are talking about the existence of *two types of writing*, which in turn suggests *two voices* and *two levels of narration*. The italics is used for printing the part of the text written by the traveler, i. e. 'the travel writer', or *the narrative I*. The position of his voice is ambiguous: 'the travel writer' is *within*, inside the story, part of the summary, meaning – simultaneously *the narrator* and *the story's hero*. He travels, and on that road he experiences a miracle: an encounter and conversation with the ingenious painter – Francisco Goya – who had already been dead for an entire century. But he is *outside* in relation to the painter's experience; inferior in relation to the painter's voice. All that is relevant for views on art and on the world is told by another – an uninvited guest, a deceased, Francisco Goya. His voice comes "from the other side", which provides it with particular consequence and significance, although it appears in this world.

His – i. e. Goya's – voice is in the first person as well, expressed as a direct speech, a soliloquy, a particular monodrama, with pauses, and interruptions. Pauses and interruptions come, as a rule, when the painter is changing the subject. The conversation is reduced to a single – i. e. painter's voice, while the traveler's voice is in the function of description, prologue and epilogue, and a particular "didaskalia".

The dialogue itself with Goya, or Goya's monologue, has something of Plato's dialogues. Goya's voice is privileged, as the voice of Socrates in Plato, but there are truly no opponents. The traveler's voice is significantly reduced, while the traveler himself has been transformed into a relatively passive recipient. But then the traveler's voice is privileged in the beginning and at the very end, or while connecting Goya's narration; while describing either the landscapes, or the painter himself, i. e. his hands. This is why the status of his voice must in no way be disregarded, albeit it is regularly done so in reviews and interpretations of this essay. Goya's views and attitudes towards art and the artist are regularly quoted as if they belonged to Andrić himself, while the text printed in the italics is almost regularly and entirely disregarded.

In a way, this only comes as natural: the traveler does not dispute Goya's views, but is rather listening and receiving them with exaltation, asking the painter, mostly by employing facial expressions and glances, i. e. voicelessly participating in the conversation marked with the ellipsis, to continue with his address, to supplement or clarify something. The referential function of the essay, at least as far as art and the artist



is concerned, belongs to Goya's voice, while significance and meaning of this voice are at no instance disputed. The traveler never behaves as an opponent, but rather as a privileged and attentive listener. This why this "conversation", in its essence, is Goya's monologue.

Let us know reflect primarily with the function of the traveler's, i. e. "the travel writer's voice. It spreads something over first two pages of the text and these are, primarily, marked with *description*, followed by *symbolization* of the elements described within the landscape, then with the *creation of atmosphere* which *readies the appearance of the miracle*, i. e. of Goya, a painter who had been dead for a hundred years. The traveler's voice, therefore, is in the function of *composition* and *motivation*. He builds up the story and the atmosphere preceding the appearance of miracle. The writer, evidently, cares very much that Goya's appearance and the conversation he is having with the hundred-year-deceased painter should seem credible to the reader.

The narrator, a traveler providing the description in first person, is some twenty kilometers away from Bordeaux, at the time when on a warm and peaceful afternoon, *first shadows* start to descend on the road. To the right, he notices *the wireless telegraphy station posts*, the wireless telegraphy station being technical a *miracle* of its own, a symbol of establishing *remote connections*, which somewhat later will be transferred *from spatial to temporal plains*.

The comparison of wireless telegraphy steel towers with ancient cathedrals is in the function of symbolization of these steel spires and, our feeling is, of hidden critique of rationalism. What used to have a rational foundation – the cathedrals – has witnessed its rational foundation being slipped away. The writer himself will slip away this rational foundation from beneath these steel tower by placing them in the function of the irrational – the symbol of remote connections in temporal distances. *The revival of times gone by and of people deceased* is slowly foreboded:

"Such analogy has accompanied me constantly and in my mind it made the thoughts unusually clearly and convincingly tie the things we call close to what we call remote, "the possible" with "the impossible". Carrying within my eyes the image of those modern churches, in which at every moment a new miracle appears, it seemed to me that my thought and my fancy cross more easily and more quickly and revive the times gone by and the people deceased."

The traveler wandered across the wine-making town, finally settling down in a cafe within the suburbs, a cafe no different than any other, in any other suburb of the world:

"Within these disappearing quarters, where nothing has been established yet or constant, where nothing disturbs or impedes the thought, a stranger finds the most beautiful place to reflect."

Not far from the cafe, a circus tent is assembled. One might say – the writer’s concession to mimesis. It would turn out later that this tent would become the subject of conversation and Goya’s comparison of theater with circus. Not a single detail in descriptions is accidental or superfluous. In an ambiance such as the cafe just described, which never changed with the time or fashions, *“one might always invoke people, costumes, and customs from various epochs, not slightly altering from any of these, free from any anachronisms which would spoil the illusion or make the scenery less credible.”*

That is the moment when the impossible becomes possible and when Goya’s voice appears, initially as a vindication of traveler’s thoughts, as if they had been announced aloud or in public. What follows is a brief, condensed description and identification of the fellow interlocutor:

*“It was uttered in a deep, coarse voice by the elderly gentleman in an unusually tailored dark green raincoat. He wore a black hat, under which one might have discerned his completely gray hair, and the glow of his very tired, but incredibly fiery eyes – Don Francisco Goya y Lucientes, former principal painter of the Spanish Court, and since 1819 a permanent resident of this town – was sitting right across the table.*

And then, at the very frame, at a borderline where the conversation begins, we find the most important place within the traveler’s voice, entirely autopoetic in nature, on the conversation that follows; on what it is like, why it is a monologue, and what is it that binds him from within:

*“And we continued with our conversation, which actually was Goya’s soliloquy on himself, on arts, on general matters of human destiny.*

*In case this soliloquy appears to you somewhat disjointed or broken, please note it is held within with an internal bond connecting it to Goya’s life and his artistic opus.”*

Introductory, “travelogue” pages might, therefore, be understood as a wide scope for Goya’s appearance and his soliloquy. They make this appearance credible and believable; they create an atmosphere in which *the impossible* and *miracle* become acceptable and believable. What follows is the description of our heroes with several very particular details and poetics of his soliloquy. The “travel writer” himself marks this conversation with Goya as a soliloquy.

The traveler’s voice can be heard for the second time following Goya’s praise to simplicity, i. e. to simple and humble environments such as his homeland. The traveler’s gaze comes across the painter’s hand, and he describes it with attention to detail and skillfulness of a portraitist. The hand becomes the hub, the focal point of Goya’s portrait; the hand that creates; the painter’s hand:

*“A fearsome hand, as a magical root-amulet, knotty, gray, powerful, but dry as a desert mound. That hand lives a life, as invisible as of stone. It has neither blood, nor venom, but a rather different substance, whose properties we do not know. This hand is neither for shaking, nor for caressing, nor for taking, or for giving. Merely by looking at it, one fearfully asks whether such thing can become of a human hand?”*

Third paragraph of the traveler’s text functions as a connective tissue. It fills the painter’s quietness, showing that Goya’s appearance is “between dreaming and awakening”, it can vanish as an apparition, and it correctly describes its position in the conversation as the one of who asks the “silent questions” with his eyes, safeguarding the magic – an old man before him – from vanishing. Goya’s speech is described as spontaneous and unsystematic:

*“Thus he spoke further, of arts, of people, of himself, switching topic after topic easily and simply, following short silences I dared not interrupt but with a quite questioning look in my eyes, constantly fearful that the old man would vanish suddenly and quietly, the way apparitions do.”*

The traveler’s perception is, like a didaskalia, inserted into the third part of Goya’s monologue, where the painter speaks of little Rosarito: the traveler’s intervention is a part of the same semantic whole as Goya’s speech, albeit separated with parentheses and italicized. The traveler seizes the moment of the tenderness in painter’s eyes and determines his relation towards the girl: *“(At the mention of that name, the old man’s piercing gaze falls down and something of a haze haunted his shut eyelashes.)”*

We find similar process in the fourth part of Goya’s monologue. This time the text in the parentheses begins with a small letter, as if amalgamated within the part of the sentence pertaining to Goya’s voice; as part of not only the same semantic, but of the syntactic whole as well:

*“I knew quite well one actress... (and the old gentleman muttered something, as if saying her name solely to himself, his eyelashes shut once more, and the same haze visited his eyes again.)”*

Between the third and the fourth part of Goya’s monologue, the traveler shortly describes the circus, i. e. the sound of trumpets and drums beneath the circus tent. This part of the text functions as an announcement of Goya’s consideration of the relation between circus and theater. The traveler’s text again functions as a connective tissue, but it also motivates Goya’s new association, i.e. associative field, the transition onto the topic of circus-theater relationship:

*“Trumpets and drums had sounded from the circus, towering above the clearing adjacent to the cafe. The old gentleman briefly paused his speech. He listened for a while showing neither gloom, nor*

*impatience. The instruments faded. The only thing left was one thin trumpet. Accompanied with its music, the old man spoke softly and clearly."*

Later on, the "connective text" will be omitted. The pauses in Goya's speech will be marked by the elision and the mark for the traveler's silent voice, which should encourage the painter to continue the conversation. That is our traveler's contribution to the conversation and his participation in it:

"\_..."

What follows this mark, is "a change of attitude", i.e. a change of subject of Goya's monologue. It is the signal of pause in Goya's monologue and encouragement on the part of the traveler for Goya to continue his talking; to change the subject. It is a musical-compositional marking.

Once more, the final word belongs to the traveler – a little less than two pages of text. The traveler explains Goya's rising from the cafe table and his leaving with the old-age sensitivity to "daily and weather changes". His rising, moving of the chair and departure, had not caused even a slightest murmur, just like when shadows and apparitions rise and leave. A little later, the traveler leaves as well.

The following day, at sunset, the traveler hurried to the same cafe in the suburb, hoping to find his fellow interlocutor from yesterday. He sat at the same table, watched the completed circus tent and remembered all that the painter had told him. Finally, after he asked for a quill and some ink, he got a huge, black inkwell "the kind of which can nowhere be found nowadays", and "a black, rusty French quill, thin like a snake's tongue". And he wrote down what he had heard the previous day. The comparison of the old, rusty French quill with a snake's tongue is a typical Andrić: it suggests the awareness of the dangerous and venomous nature of writing.

Once he wrote down all he had heard the previous night, the traveler left the cafe. At one point, he thought he had spotted his fellow interlocutor from last night and he ran towards him, but he had vanished. He gave up "looking for what could not be found", "he returned tired to the town", and tomorrow morning left Bordeaux, "eternally". Thus endeth the essay.

There is one lyrical motif recurring and varying in the traveler's view of Goya. It is precisely this motif and its analysis that show the traveler's exceptional gift to observe and nuance the character; the gift to perceive what hardly can be perceived: a sort of a mysterious haze occasionally appearing around the painter's eyes. Our traveler thus identifies himself as an exceptionally gifted author, keen on rhythmic, musical composition and leitmotif repetition and variation, capable of

catching moments that are rarely and hardly caught. We have already listed these moments and now let us briefly recur to them. We have pointed out the moment when the painter mentions little Rosarito, who lived within his house with her mother. Little Rosarito is exceptionally precious to Goya; her infantile perspective and view of art and creating is of great significance in the essay, and at the mention of her name the painter “lowers his piercing gaze and something of a haze haunts his shut eyelashes”. At another time, “something of a haze” will once again visit his eyes when he remembers the actress whom he went to see playing and whose company gave him great pleasure. For the third time, “a thin haze” would dance “around his eyelashes” once he settled down after a loud and temperamental presentation of the very core of his aesthetics – a praise to myths and legends. This motif, with a significant lyrical achievement of its variety, has almost entirely been overlooked in the analysis of this renowned Andrić’s essay. The essay, most often, has been reduced to Goya’s voice and to most significant Goya’s attitudes on art and artists.

Andrić could – had he been keen on such reduction – leave out the traveler and his voice, leave out the description and the epilogue, and downplay his essay to Goya’s narration. The master of conciseness knew that all too well, but could not coax himself to such possibility. He would have lost the magic of narration and the encounter, the beauty and symbolism of describing the steel towers, the premonition and motivation of Goya’s appearance, the possibilities of commentary and of the epilogue. The essay would have lost its artistic value. The master of narration needed to tell a story and he opened up the essay to the short story. Goya was ideal for a story of an artist and of art. He was an artist with destiny, the destiny-anointed one. This is why we insist on the traveler’s voice – on the text in italics. It is exceptionally important for understanding of the essay’s entirety and its artistic value. This essay is the pinnacle of the artistic prose.

Andrić needs Goya as an old man, at the end of his life and artistic creativity, the Goya from 1828, with his entire life and artistic experience, as a man who “had seen it all”, experienced a lot and accomplished a superb artistic opus: “Today, in the year 1828 of our era”, says Goya precisely determining the time of his encounter with the traveler. In which century and in which year is our traveler; has he been transferred a hundred years into the past – we do not know that. Anachronism in literature is sometimes most precious; fiction is oftentimes founded upon it. Without the dive into time, the encounter of Goya and the traveler is impossible.

Goya’s voice has been cut with pauses into eleven fragments exactly, into eleven smaller semantic wholes which we will provide with

working titles within this analysis. Conversational form, i.e. Goya's monologue with pauses, will enable Andrić the associative composition of the painter's narration, which is how we achieve the monologue-as-associative prose within Goya's voice. In every sense, and particularly at the time of its publication, "Conversation with Goya" was a profoundly modern text, valuable as a very complex artistic narrative prose in two voices, the one of the traveler being more descriptively-symbolic, while the one of Goya being a cerebral, intellectual, and associative monologue. It is very rare that we find so precise an example of the hypothesis by Sreten Marić, which states that essay is in fact a conversation. Andrić's "Conversation with Goya" is the pattern of such an essay.

### 1. On the Side of Simplicity

Goya distances himself from the things he had spoken as a young man. Only towards the end of his life, on the threshold of death, he clearly sees the importance of a simple and humble environment, the likes of which he originates, his native Aragon, but from such place he also clearly sees the opulence and glitter he witnesses and experienced at the Spanish Court. He is the one who had been allowed to directly experience both worlds. This is why he knows to appraise, and through his personal example to attest to the importance of simple and humble environments: they are "the stage for miracles and great things". Temples and palaces with their glitter are merely a sign of "final burning and blossoming of what had sprung from simplicity and misery", and so the old artist generalizes:

"The seedlings of future is within simplicity, and the unmistakable sign of decline and death is within beauty and glitter."

People equally need both glitter and simplicity, both "faces of life", and it is impossible – the one who had experienced it knows that all too well – to see them both at the same time, but rather while we look at one, the other is out of our sight. The one, however, who had been given to see both, can hardly by looking at one, forget about the other.

The descendant of poor Aragon finally, decides on simplicity.

"I, personally, have always been with all my heart on the side of simplicity, on the side of a free, profound life, devoid of any glitter of any form."

Andrić, evidently, doubles down when it comes to such traits of his artist and hero of choice. Had not Andrić also originated from a humble environment and directly, as an eminent diplomat, felt later on all the glitter of major metropolises? Has not his entire opus "on the side of a free, profound life?" Has not the ideal of seeming simplicity remained his aesthetic ideal?

## 2. "A Suspicious Character"

Who is an artist and what is he; what is his relation towards the society; towards nature; towards God and the Antichrist? These are all questions Goya answers in his second monologue fragment, the one with greatest significance:

"– You see, the artist – "the suspicious character", a hooded man in the dark, a passenger with a false passport. The face under the mask is beautiful, its rank is much higher than the passport says, but why care? People detest such uncertainty and such perplexity, which is why they call him suspicious and duplicitous. And once suspicion is born, it knows no boundaries."

The artist, by his very nature, and by the very nature of his work, provokes suspicion within the "normal" folk. He is never fully believed, for he truly is the one wearing a mask. His destiny is "to be befallen by one insincerity after another and to attach one contradiction to another. Even those tranquil and happy, whose behavior never displays such things to be seen or felt, even they hide within them permanent vacillations, constantly making the two ends meet that can never be met."

Contradiction is, therefore, artist's natural property, while vacillation is his permanent spiritual state. It has never been bestowed upon us whether such contradiction stems from the openness towards the world; openness towards all its contradicting sides. Or from the need to live the contradicting characters and their contradicting states and situations. It is clear, however, that the artist is at misunderstanding with the world and with the society. Goya recalls the words of his Roman friend, the painter Paolo, who formulated their common thought:

"– Between the artist and the society, there is, within a microcosm, the very same gap that exists between Deity and the world. The first antagonism only being a symbol of the other."

A mathematically precise proportion has been established – artist : society = Deity : world. It is about the two equally proportional gaps, eternal and unbridgeable, just like the truth being "one and ancient".

On the nature of artist's calling – and it truly is a calling since it fills a man's life entirely bringing him great pleasures, as well as sufferings – Goya speaks with interrogative intonation, but, despite his wondering, reveals its key secret and depth:

"What irresistible and unquenchable longing makes one wrestle from the darkness of non-existence or from the dungeon represented by this connectedness of all things in life, and from the bondage of emptiness piecemeal do so with a human life or dream, and to shape them and "forever" entrench them, with a brittle chalk on a transitory parchment?"

Instead of *chalk*, one could freely use *ink*, if only to observe the art of literature. Despite, therefore, all the brittleness of chalk and impermanence of parchment, despite the unreliability of the means used by the artist to express himself, despite the transitory nothingness of life and a tangle of relationships and circumstances, despite deceitfulness and airiness of dreams, something “forever” is created under the artist’s hand after all; something – if measured by human dimensions of duration – eternal and universal. Everything from which and by the means of which a work of art was created, is void, brittle and transitory; only the art itself offers hope of something “forever”. Artist’s effort can appear to most of the people as “senseless and vain”, but there is “something of the great urge and tenacity through the means of which ants erect their anthills at a busy spot, predetermined way in advance to be destroyed and trampled under foot.”

Artist’s job is “an accursed toil” and “an incomparable allure”, and artists feel they snatch something from someone, “taking from a dark world for another one which is unknown to us, transferring from nothing into something we do not know what it is”. The world from which artist trawls his substance is dark, transitory and void; the world he creates is “something”, albeit unbeknownst to him, or at least most of it; to himself secretive and enigmatic. Creativity is uncertain and unknown even to its creator. For this reason, artist is an outlaw of a higher degree:

“This is why artist is “outside the law”, an outlaw in a higher sense of the word, sentenced to supplement a higher and invisible order through superhuman and hopeless efforts, disturbing this lower, visible order, in which he should be living with the entirety of his being.”

Within this condensed and mentally super-tensed sentence, worded in such a lapidary manner, we read the autonomy and specificity of the artist and the art itself (a man “outside the law”, “an outlaw in the higher sense of the word”), and a misunderstanding with the world, a gap in relation to the society (an outlaw), and exceptional, superhuman, even hopeless efforts, and certain unclear, invisible new order – an order within the sphere of the works of art – and disturbance of the lower, visible world, to whom the artist should belong, and from which, well, he had become a renegade. Art is a form of a repeated, yet ancient creation of Order from Chaos.

This is why artists, “as another nature”, are capable of holding back youth or maintaining the gaze “which in “nature” only several minutes later changes and dissipates”, to catch, separate and condense “lightning movements, otherwise never to be seen by anyone”, leaving them, along with all their mysterious meanings, “to the eyes of future generations”. Artists accentuate, amplify, and nuance these movements,



providing them their lasting seal, certifying that through art a certain object “has been created for a second time, for a more permanent and meaningful life, and that such miracle had taken place in us personally”. In this manner, a work of art receives and carries certain excess. “On the basis of that excess, carried by each and every work of art as a vestige of cooperation between nature and the artist, one can observe the demonic origin of art”, and Goya, thus, interpreting his friend Paolo, evokes the legend of the Antichrist, who will, once he appears on Earth, create everything that God had made, only more perfect, concluding that:

“Artist may be the harbinger of the Antichrist. Maybe we “play the Antichrist” in our thousands, upon thousands, the same way children make war games in the midst of peace.”

If God created the world and consolidated forms, the artist creates them, reshape and consolidates them anew, “for is own account”, becoming thus “a forger, albeit an instinctively disinterested forger, which is why he is dangerous”. Artist is a creator “of new, *similar*, but not equal phenomena and inconstant worlds”. The idea that an artist “deforms”, alters, recreates the world and forms was very close to Andrić’s Goya, i. e. to his friend Paolo.

Although essentially accepting Paolo’s theory, Andrić’s Goya insists that “there is only one reality with the eternal high and low tide of its laws only partly familiar, yet undoubtedly the same”, since the truth is one and eternal. Goya is fearful of conclusions and generalizations:

“Paolo said: artist is doomed, because he, as you can see, is such and such. And at this point I entirely agree with him.”

In another fragment of his monologue, Andrić’s Goya opens up an entire array of significant aesthetic questions and provides an entire battery of very modern answers.

### 3. Who Created People?

In the third fragment, Andrić introduces a children’s point of view: big theoretical-philosophical questions are asked and discussed by the children. Namely, Goya recalls a conversation between a five-year old Rosarito and a somewhat older boy who had just started going to school and bragged before the girl with his newly acquired knowledge. The boy is telling the things he learned, in a rather insecure and unreliable manner, while the girl is speaking of things she had seen and experienced, in a spontaneous manner, full of belief. The boy’s big question:

“– And do you know who created people? –”

Is brushed aside by Rosarito at her answer that it was done by uncle Francisco, simply by showing the portraits in Goya’s studio. The little pupil drew God as an argument, utterly perplexed by the presence

of a large number of human faces he started to discover. Nevertheless, Rosarito does not give up, but proudly, defiantly and rhythmically repeats:

“– Uncle Francisco... Uncle Francisco...”

The fragment illustrates previous discussions on the very nature of artistic creativity and on the God-artist relation. Also, little Rosarito knows that uncle Francisco creates people, what is left to us is to believe in God as the creator of the world and people. What the painter created can be seen in his studio and is easily verified. Uncle Francisco creates differently than God – “deforming” and transfiguring God’s creations, God’s people, and condensing the movements.

Continuation of this discussion is the fifth fragment, where one speaks of the condensed portrait, while Goya previously discusses the circus and theater.

#### 4. A Circus of Theater

Andrić felt uneasy about the theater – he neither loved it, nor appreciated it. Neither does so his Goya. The fragment about the theater cuts across the discussion on creativity and portraits. It is a sign of associative composition of prose and connection of the descriptive and cerebral levels of the essay. Sounds of various instruments were coming from the tent next to the cafe, which only entices Goya’s association.

“– For me, circus is the most decent form of theater. Of all the miseries there are, it is the tiniest one,” – unambiguously put by Andrić at the very first sentences. The theater is, therefore, *misery*, and a great one at that.

What follows is the retelling of a humiliating dream, psychoanalytically speaking a rather interesting one. The question is how come a dream of theater can be a nightmare for someone who does not care for theater and who regards it as a great *misery*? Are we dealing with a childhood or with a young-age trauma which made the great writer disgusted with theater throughout his entire life? In this particular dream, Andrić’s hero is standing on a stage, in front of an invisible, but also very numerous and rather strict audience, and is to start playing a part for which he is entirely unprepared! He had not even read it; he does not know a single word of it. The painter often had that dream, which exhausted him a great deal. But this says nothing of the theater’s value, rather implies some form of trauma.

Goya says he had often been in touch with theater and actors, and that at such times he had been convinced anew “how theater had always been the most fruitless of all our efforts. While in touch with stage and actors, such emotion of misery and hopelessness overwhelms me, and

I wonder: is this nothingness of theater only a picture of what, sooner or later, lies in store for all other skills further down their road?"

Again *misery*, and then *hopelessness*! What follows then, is the symbol of that misery and of hopelessness: a theatrical prop, "honey made of cardboard", which, for hundreds of times, gave its best on the stage to be what it was intended to be, and was always returned to its prop trunk dirtier and less hopeful that its illusion would ever become the artistic truth. Having spotted the prop, Andrić's hero becomes so disgusted that until the next day he is neither able to eat, nor to paint.

Andrić's hero associates dust and dirt even with most prestigious theaters, believing the actor's calling to be "the most difficult and most miserable of all the callings". Therefrom – Andrić's hero believes – originates the great urge by actors to "frolic, feast, drink, revel, as if on an eternal death row, awaiting the execution".

Such miserable position of actors, Goya illustrates with the horror experienced by an actress he used to be close with: during a play, on stage, a piece of her exceptionally lengthy white dress got caught by a protruding nail on the floor, so she, while loftily reciting the sublime verses, was at the same time desperately jolting her leg trying to set herself free. The situation is a metaphor for the actor's misery.

Curiously enough, Andrić whirls in no key argument on the ephemeral nature of theater: after a performance, there remains nothing. The illusion lasts only as long as the performance. The theater, both for Andrić and for his hero, was a spiritual anguish – a circus of theater, *misery* and ephemerality, humiliation, filth, and hopelessness.

## 5. Condensed Move

In the fifth fragment, Goya defends himself from the critics reproaching him for his "excessive and unhealthy affinity to dark objects, and to forceful or ambiguous scenes". Once attached labels are uncritically and unthinkingly repeated, exactly the same as with "most of the things" people do – without any sense or thinking.

Andrić's hero adds that, for a time, men and women would, during conversations, secretly observe his hands, for it had been rumored he painted at night, with a help from the unholy one; and it had also been rumored he was in the power of satanic vices. And all this at the time when in Spain "there was not a single more modest, fearful and normal man" than the likes him. Goya emphasizes this as an example how critics tend to misunderstand the art, as well as by the common folk, so he offers an interpretation from the perspective of a master and his atelier.

Goya focuses on the primordial and the elementary within the human nature and its behavior – on instincts and the unconscious. All

human movements originate from a need to attack, or to defend; it is the single most principal driver, albeit unconscious and forgotten. An artist cannot paint thousands of tiny movements, none of itself being either sinister, or ominous, but if he paints a condensed movement, summing up the numerous tiny ones, in that case the condensed movement necessarily bears the mark of its true origin, of defense and the attack, of fury and of fear". The greater the number of movements *woven* and *compressed* into the painting, the more convincing the outcome, and a condensed movement appears more expressive. This is why his characters, their movements and their postures are dark, "oftentimes terrible and eerie", since "there can be no other movements". Therefrom stems the "dark" in his paintings.

Goya, not without subtle irony, says he knows there are also "lovely and charming painters" out there, who painted only idyllic scenes and carefree characters, but immediately adds:

"Otherwise, around beauty one always finds either dark of human destiny or glitter of human blood. One should never forget that each step brings us closer to the grave. That fact itself is a sufficient justification for me. No one can deny that."

It is only natural then that Andrić's doppelgänger of choice condenses movements of his characters, so they can bear upon themselves such vestiges of their master's self-consciousness, i. e. of basic human instincts of defense and the attack.

The constant approaching of death, of which the painter is talking, can be inferred even from the paintings where it is not most immediately and tellingly emphasized; the paintings created during play. Once, during play, he painted a water surface in the evening glow, and on it a boat traced by a fan-shaped furrow. He showed the painting to a friend he believed to be *a cheerful* and *a smart* man, with the sole request to think of a suitable name for it. Without hesitation, the cheerful and smart friend wrote down the following: "the last cruise". He hit the very essence of the matter on the head, although it had not been visible; at least not too apparent. The cheerful and smart man, despite his cheerfulness, had seen the proximity of death.

From such attitude, one might also anticipate Andrić's sentiment towards critique: too much repetition without sense or reflection. We confess that this warning of his has long been on our mind, especially while working on this book.

## 6. The Portrait

Goya was the master of portraits; Andrić the greatest portraitist our literature has had. This is why in *Conversations with Goya*, the

portrait is often thematized; often returned to, both by the author and his hero.

Goya sees the extraction of character from its surrounding and the environment as a particularly difficult task and “painter’s huge torment”; *liberation* from all the outside and ambient ties. With painting, it is different than with any other form of art. With any other form of art, a man has ties with other people, with the world, while the painted character is “alone, in bondage, separated once and forever, since the portrait has neither mother, nor father, neither sister nor children. It has no home, nor time, or hope, often not even its own name. While looking at us with its living eyes, it already represents a former life, extinguished in order to endure. It is the last, not last, but the sole human being in this world, in its final moment.”

Separation, i. e. *liberation* of one particular character while painting a portrait is a particular kind of “counter-creation”, “a particular kind of an Antichrist action”, as discussed by Goya’s friend Paolo. The painter once again undertakes “the entire road that the model’s destiny had gone before”, only now “in an opposite direction”, until the face being painted is taken “out into the open where it is placed all alone, as if on a chopping block.” There the creation begins.

A Separated and painted character remains “a painting until the end of all time, and not a picture on its own at that, but a picture of *one single glance of yours.*”

Painters who paint another object next to the portrait itself – Goya believes – are wrong, since these objects age, and one day they find themselves next to a lonely portrait, aged and unintelligible, rendering such image even more lonely, separated, and distanced. Any writing on the painting, Goya believes to be his own mistake. Easily disposed words cannot be erased, and once finished, the portrait is not under the painter’s authority anymore.

Painting a portrait is a particular kind of manslaughter of the model:

“By painting a man’s portrait, we murder him a little by little each time we take a look, just like biologists kill off the animal they stuff, and once we totally deaden the victim, he springs to life again in our painting. The only caveat being that the solitude of a man on a portrait is greater than that of a skeleton buried in the ground.”

Beginners can rarely be good portraitists, since they “are unable to separate, isolate, and stuff them (the characters).” Bad portraits are easily recognizable: “The person in them (is) constricted, entangled and connected to the ambient”, while the painter “was incapable of performing the difficult task of liberation and separation, “of murdering” and “of immortalizing” the individual.”

## 7. The Only Way – The Dense Weave

We already spoke of *condensation of the movement*, of their *weaving* and *compression* into a singular dense movement. The same images are used by Andrić, i. e. his literary hero, in one of the central fragments, in which we describe the only way to create is to follow a *dense weave*, a *thick* tissue. There are no thousands of ways to paint, but one and only; the one Goya learned from his late aunt:

As a child, I used to watch my aunt teach her daughter, who was only slightly older than me, to weave. The little one sat next to the loom, the aunt right beside her. The shuttle flew, and the loom pounded, but louder than it all was my aunt, shouting each time weft met with the warp, each time the loom banged:

– Press it, press it harder! Don't feel sorry for it! Press it harder!

The little one was bending down under these words, hitting it with all the strength she had, but the aunt thought the weave could never get dense or thick enough. She would sit throughout the day above the girl, and scream her lungs out into the white parting of her black hair:

– Press it! Denser! It's not a sifter you're weaving!

The text carries the same meaning as the tissue. The painter's "text" is also a tissue, the weave; literary especially. Goya believes that throughout his life he painted under the motto of that simple and uncouth woman. Which is why he never "let loose his imagination", but rather condensed and thickened his subject. And at times he would not do that way – the paining turned out to be bad. This is why, just like Andrić, he also disciplined his imagination, and trusted more in the dense weave, not giving too much thought to the opinions of snobs and the "reformers".

Goya defends himself from two remarks that have often been directed at him: that he avoids difficulties and that he underlines one particular spot in a painting to the extent of a caricature. He never – he claims – avoided difficulties, but rather "solved them squarely", and he weaved and condensed into paintings the "underlined" spot, as well. Goya makes the underlined spot into law:

"You should know that in every painting, there is only one single spot that conjures up an illusion of the reality. It is the only thing that matters and responsible for making decisions, like a signature on a promissory note. That spot might be eyes, or hands, or a simple iron button, lit in a particular manner."

The law of "the underlined place" has been enforced by Andrić, when giving portraits of his own heroes. We have witnessed in this essay alone how much attention our "travel writer" has paid to the description of Goya's hands, but on no occasion has he neglected the

eye, i. e. the eyelashes, at times they are hazed by the mysterious halo. It has been long ago since Rajko Petrov Nogo described the hands of Bogdan Zimonjić.

## 8. The Legends – The Myths

In the eighth fragment, Goya primarily points out his life experience: he has seen and experienced a lot (more to follow later), although he had stepped into life naively, with little knowledge, and with many prejudices and dangerous yearnings. Serious social crises and numerous “wonders and penances” took place before his very eyes, which made him think. He has seen the misery of the ignorant potentates, and the incompetence, weakness and confusions among the men of letters and science; he has seen the principles and systems, which seemed harder than granite, which crumbled and dissipated like mist, and also how this freshly dissipated mist turns into new holy principles and became the new treacherous granite. In these terrible daily historical events he found no purposefulness, neither sense, nor plan. And he came up with two conclusions: “our personal thought in its effort does not mean much and cannot achieve anything”; and “one should listen to legends, the vestiges of collective human endeavors through centuries, and decipher from them – as much as possible – the meaning of our destiny.”

Collective experiences crystallized into legends – what Andrić’s hero calls legends, are in fact myths – and are incomparably superior to an individual thought. Daily events bring about confusion and disarray; youth has neither experience, nor profound knowledge. This is why Goya underlines that “in the second half of his life”, reaching full maturity, therefore, he probably came across the most important conclusion, so significant for Andrić’s poetics: “that it is wrong and hopeless to search for meaning in worthless and seemingly so important events taking place around us, but rather to search within the deposits of centuries created around a few main legends of mankind. These deposits constantly, albeit less and less faithfully, repeat the shape of that grain of truth around which they layer it, transferring thus through centuries. Fairy tales possess the true history of mankind, one can anticipate it from them, if not fully discover their meaning. There are a few basic legends of mankind indicating, or at least illuminating the path we have traveled, if not the goal to which we strive. Legend of the original sin, legend of the great flood, legend of the Son of man, crucified for our salvation, legend of the Prometheus and of the stolen fire...”

In the accompanying “didaskalia”, the traveler-listener informs us – fully grasping the importance of the theme and the climax of Goya’s narration – that the deaf old man had been shouting while speaking of

legends, and then went quiet “*gazing somewhere next to me, the way sailors gaze towards the open sea. It seemed as if he listened for all the voices of numerous legends in the sudden silence, whose meaning he did not know and was not able to list them all.*”

Finally, once he returned from the mysterious metaphysical spaces, the “thin haze” would once again, for the fourth time, dance around his eyelashes. The “didaskalia” underlines the importance of Goya’s conclusion on the depth and significance of legends, i. e. of humankind’s basic myths. Goya has, as concisely as possible, exhibited his own, as well as Andrić’s poetics of myth. And those who would later base their interpretations of Andrić’s work (P. Džadžić, I. Tartalja) on the foundation of such poetics of myth, would be profoundly right.

### 9. “Seen It All” – “The World Thinks”

What has been announced in the eighth, is hereby confirmed within the ninth fragment. Here, Goya draws very close to Njegoš’s Prior Stefan, who had been through “thick and thin / Who has seen this enormous world / And has drunk its poisoned chalice”, and who is familiar with “all that is, and all that might come to pass”, ready to “cope” with whatever might come. Goya also has the right not to be excited by anything before his death, earning that right by *seeing it all*: the nature, the society, the man. Throughout his rich, long, exciting and tragic life, at the time of great social turmoils, he met people of various stations and positions, and along with that, painted many diverse individuals. Andrić’s hero, in this fragment as well, supplements his portrait poetics:

“(… And I, when painting a portrait of a man, I see the minute of birth, and the moment of his death. And thus, these two moments are so close to each other that, truly, there is hardly any place left to place a single breath or movement between them.)”

The portrait, therefore, condenses, thickens a man’s destiny; making the individual more expressive, more rounded. The portrait is a “dense weave” in which the moment of birth and the moment of death draw closer.

But before what does Goya halt?

Before what one must halt and “before what one remains in the state of holy ignorance, mutely awed, it is the world of thought”.

Those, who at least once, walked through Andrić’s poetry and read his poem “Thought”, will find these sentences very familiar:

“The world of thoughts, which is the sole reality in this whirlwind of wraiths and apparitions we call reality. And were there not for the thought that supports and realizes the image I work on, all would collapse into the void from whence it came, even more miserable than dried, sub-sided color of the canvas which shows us nothing.”



Thought and thoughtfulness is what supports the things created by Goya and Andrić; they salvage from the void.

All who speak of Andrić's realism must bear in mind this quote. What people call reality – it is a “whirlwind of wraiths and apparitions”; it is an illusion. The only true and genuine reality is – “the world of thoughts”. If “the world of thoughts” does not support the portrait, everything collapses below the level of dried and subsided color of the canvas which shows us nothing.

Andrić's reflexive lyrics and his aesthetics invoke each other and complement each other.

Beware of Andrić's “realism” – it is way too broad.

## 10. Dream and Death: Mors

Even in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Andrić will, remembering Scheherazade, emphasize the defensive role of art, i. e. of narration, and how one can lead astray the executioner and redeem one's own life from the very jaws of death.

What Goya narrates in the tenth fragment is much more than that. It is, primarily, an ode to a dream, its unpredictability and its power; an indication and an opening of another, more profound and more truthful reality, and only then the fragment can be read as a parable. But it is not an allegory – whose honor Andrić successfully vindicates – but rather a convincing story of a decisive metaphysical experience. The great theme of artist-illness-creation, i. e. creation-death, opens up within this fragment.

The dream of which we talk is the one Goya had “just after he had turned thirty”, as a young man, even before the illness he would later suffer, which caused him lose his hearing. He dreamed of a warm and pleasant lordly room, covered with a single-patterned pale yellow wallpapers, containing letters of the word *mors*. The pattern repeated regularly and many times over, but despite its unambiguous meaning – *death* – the wallpapers in this dream were not unpleasant. To the contrary, the painter wished to stay much longer in the room.

The illness came, and some eight-nine years have passed; the painter suffered, traveled, and worked, which all made him forget the dream, but he suffered tremendously, sensing the presence of the evils of the world and fearing this evil. The potential for evil could be sensed in all the people, and at the times of solitude – in the painter as well.

In order to “deceive his fears”, to deceive “his executioner”, he started painting the walls of the largest room and fully covered them with paintings and drawings, except for a little triangle above the window. Into this triangle, he wrote the word from his dream – *mors* – as if being dictated, visually appearing to fixate the already suppressed dream:

“And there the word remained as an amulet which defended me from all the horrors, until I recovered and returned to a peaceful reign over my mind, where amulets are not required.”

The fear of evil has been healed with the word from a dream; a fearsome word – *death*. *A bitter wound requires bitter medicine*. No “pretty painting” will be able to resolve the problem of fear and the ubiquitous evil, instead one requires a painting able to fill the entire emptiness, and bring closure to the dream with the word – *mors*. Death has shown to be an artistic healing medicine; like magic, or an amulet.

Creation exhibits its “defensive function”, namely, the creation which does not revert to kitsch, nor to a naive “prettiness” – of which Andrić and Goya make irony – but rather heads to a direct face- off with death.

This introspective self-uncovering of the artist’s internal life is one of the most beautiful pieces in our entire prose. Andrić’s Conversation with Goya can be understood as a microcosm prequel to Vladan Desnica’s *The Springs of Ivan Galeb* – on about springs and death.

## 11. Sorrow in Arts and Pessimism in Sciences

What Andrić held most dear, and what is also true for his Goya – *thoughtfulness* and *spirituality* – is shown to be scarce and endangered, defenseless, disgusting to the society of *all epochs*, foreign to most people, endangered from the outside, disjointed from the inside. The thoughtful and the spiritual are way too precious and fragile rarities in the world of material and animal. This world is seen by Goya, at the end of his life, as “the empire of animal laws and animal life, deprived of any meaning or cause, with death being the end of it all”. Not the least comforting. As if Andrić’s melancholy condensed into a bitter reflection. In such a world, anything spiritual or thoughtful is virtually accidental, as if it came and landed into this “Disovian“ dungeon from another, better world:

“All that is spiritual and thoughtful in it is here by some accident, like civilized shipwrecked survivors with their suits, instruments and weapons, finding themselves on a far-away island, with an entirely different climate, infested with beasts and savages. This is why all our ideas bear the tragic and strange character of shipwrecked objects salvaged from the sea. They also carry *the signs of another forgotten world from whence we once set sail*, of the disaster that brought us here, and of a constant, fruitless drive to conform to the new world. For they are in a constant struggle with this new, essentially opposite world, in which they found themselves, but also in a constant transformation and adaptation to it. *This is why each great and noble thought is a stranger and a sufferer. From there comes the unavoidable sorrow in arts, and great pessimism in sciences*”. (Underlined by J. D.)

The spirit and the thought are not of this world, but rather originate from another, forgotten one, whence we were banished into this one. This is why they are strangers in the animal and material world; this is why they are endangered. This is why both arts and sciences are branded with pessimism.

This is what closes this essay; this short story essay. For this is a short story; artistic prose of the highest order. The author has multiplied himself many times over into the narrator-traveler – “the travel writer” – whose voice is branded with description and symbolism of what has been described, graphically separated with italics, and into Goya, his most favorite artist and painter, whose voice is used in order to express his aesthetic ideas. These two voices are having a dialogue on unequal terms: first in the position of a listener and a stenographer; second in the Socrates-like position of a sage and orator. Both voices are in first person. Both voices are in the function of the same thing – Goya’s narration. The first prepares it, motivates it, entices it, follows it with his “didaskalia”, comments it and signs it off; the other informs the ideas through his experience and of the old artist. There is a poetic halo circumscribed around both of these voices. This is why we see on several occasions a rather close relationship between the essay and Andrić’s lyrics, the one about reflection and melancholy. Throughout the entire narration, the boundaries of reality are constantly stretched; miracles are prepared and realized. Connections are being established according to temporal depths, the deceased appears an entire century later, while a twentieth-century man dives into time through an entire century. The character is in search of an author; Goya is sitting at a table in a suburb a cafe of a wine-making town, ominously announcing the arrival of Andrić’s guests in the *House on Its Own*. The greatest reality are thoughts and spirituality, and they are not of this world. The greatest truth comes through a dream – the word *mors* – and the creation it causes is by the struggle against the fear from evil.

“*Conversation with Goya*” is, for us, a magnificent Andrić’s narrative-essayistic moment in which, particularly in the ninth fragment, Andrić’s chosen painter is old, wise, experienced and deaf, very near to Njegoš’ Prior Stefan. It is by no means encoding of our own, but rather an expression of the affection Andrić feels towards Njegoš, infatuation he feels for him, rather than for any other creator, even more than for Goya himself.

Translated from Serbian by  
*Ivan Filipović*

GORANA RAIČEVIĆ

**FINALE: MELANCHOLY  
(1967-1977)\***

No matter what life is like, to live in one's own country is logical. To live abroad, is not.  
(*Novel about London*)

Past and present run like two clowns, in parallel, never to meet each other. They cannot.  
(*Ithaca and the Commentaries*)

Closest to my heart lies *Book on Michelangelo*... One has to console oneself in the end.  
(to D. Ređep, 1970)

What I make from *Michelangelo* is a comfort for the artist, whose only comfort is the cognition that he had created something.  
(to D. Orlović, 1970)

One must suffer immensely in order to feel the peace one eventually finds.  
(*Travelogues from Spain*)

*Non-finito*

In his book on Miloš Crnjanski, the Radio Belgrade journalist Vladimir Bunjac, notes that the author saw his opus a curve, a curve which, following the apex of assertiveness—the agon—descends to its oppositeness—into melancholy:

My entire life has been a theater, a farce, a tragic comedy, or just a comedy, if you will, written in several acts. Act number one comprises

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\* Selection from the book Gorana Raičević *Agon i Melanhologija* about Miloš Crnjanski

my books *Lyrics of Ithaca*, *Tales of the Man*, *The Journal of Čarnojević*, young, dashing, revolutionary literature, such as its times, such as the life itself used to be. Act number two is *Stražilovo*, the beginning of melancholy and homesickness, There might also be a kind of foreboding of life as it would come, an overture of exile, emigration, of the absence that would last for a quarter of a century. Followed by the act number three: *Serbija*, if I contain myself strictly to poetry, which intertwines pain and love one feels towards its own people. You see, my poetry is like a graph, a barometer of my life: the barometer drops from exhilaration, from patriotic exaltation, the mercury of my life drops towards pain and, finally, towards my swan song: *Ithaca*, *Stražilovo*, *Serbija*, *Lament over Belgrade*, finito! *Lament* is a premonition of the end: there is no trace youth, the melancholy has taken its toll and it would look simply ridiculous if I would, following *Lament*, continue to write poetry... (49: 109-110)

Melancholy is a feeling which deeply permeates all known works by Miloš Crnjanski: his heroes Pavle Isaković and Nikolaj Rjepnin are melancholic, as much as the narrator himself, the author's alter ego, in the book *At the Hyperboreans*. Since all these works, apart from *Novel about London*, were written and completed in exile, one asks the question whether Crnjanski found his peace, happiness or tranquility following his return to Belgrade? Or was this return, as suggested by the title of one of his texts, a disappointment, 'return abroad'? What was Crnjanski like in Belgrade? The way young Belgrade writers experienced our emigre-returnee can be understood from the testimony by Miroslav Josić Višnjić, a frequent guest of the Crnjanski-household:

Throughout the entire decade, what I have been reading from his face was tranquility and cheerfulness, there was not a drop left from that old bitterness, irony, or forwardness, everybody kept on babbling about.

While in my company, at my home or in public, Miloš was never nervous or unpleasant, frightened or gloomy, said or angry. Peacefulness surrounded us at all times, everything was harmonious and ravishing—earth, heaven—only the words glittered and murmured. (140:15)

Making notes on conversations with Miloš Crnjanski, following his return to the fatherland, Vladimir Bunjac remembered the author's frequent mood swings, when exaltation and dejection often changed each other, but also of the impression that the Serbian Ulysses finally found his peace at home: 'I know he firmly believed in happiness and in the years before him. He trusted he would write a few more books and continue with his literary opus where he had left it'. (49:97) From

the interviews he gave following his return, one can notice that Crnjanski was aware of the change in his demeanor and attitude: ‘I have always been in favor of that, of conflicts and struggles, but now, understandably, I take the stance of a viewer of my own self. I no longer take part, I am no longer interested in the struggle, I am rather more interested in what the young are doing’. (50:139 ‘Life towards the end is a life of contemplation... All the drama taking place most intensely, at the end of life, is by contemplation. And then you either find some purpose to your life, or you don’t, regardless whether it is something simple as soil fertilization, or literature’. (10:585)

Since the publication of his *Collected Works* in 1967, and the *Selected Works* in 1967—containing also his late memoir prose *At the Hyperboreans*—Miloš Crnjanski succeeded in publishing only one more novel within the last decade of his life: *Novel about London* (1971), for which he received the NIN Award in 1972, as well as the National Library Award for the 1974 best seller<sup>1</sup>. *The Book on Michelangelo*—an essayistic writing about the great sculptor—a writing he talked about and announced in nearly every interview he gave to the press, Crnjanski never managed to finish, just as it is the case was with *Embajades*—memoiristic and historic notes whose excerpts were published in the Belgrade journal *Savremenik*, since 1967. The novel *Return*—a work which Crnjanski also announced in his interviews—apparently had existed only as an idea, while his work on the book about Spain—which was supposed to be based on the texts written for *Vreme* in 1933 and 1937—there are only clues found in Crnjanski’s legacy<sup>2</sup>. The problems

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<sup>1</sup> The novel *A Drop of Spanish Blood* was published for the first time in the form of a book by Nolit in 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Following the author’s death, an unknown perpetrator allegedly took some unpublished manuscripts from Crnjanski’s Tolbukhin-Street apartment. It is, however, much more plausible that the writer himself had destroyed them. On September 18, 1975, the author said to Pavle Janković Šole: ‘Well, I would not like to talk a lot about the unpublished manuscripts, because it is always uncertain. I believe I will destroy it all...’ (132: 738) He also, explicitly, mentions and his envisaged, commenced, and also destroyed manuscript of the novel about Spain: ‘There is, primarily, a novel which I gave up and whose manuscript I tore, believe it or not. I won’t play too smart about it. It is the Spain España. What had been taking place in Spain for the last five hundred years. It is the purest possible example of man’s and mankind’s madness. They take turns, they murder each other, and they change in such a way that it incredible! I am not speaking of the present, I do not speak of Franco... Franco is a moron. It is, as it is: a coot, old general who, you know, thinks he should be famous. But I am talking of those who were there throughout Spanish history. It is an awful thing to read, it is an awful thing to know. One king ascends, another deposes him.... It had been going on like that for five centuries. I wanted to make one such novel from which you could see the entire Spanish madness. Since what is going on in Spain even today, that will also end up in a madness. I saw it wasn’t worth it. That is the main thing, since it would be one very pessimistic thing which proves it is all madness, it is all in vain... People die in vain, people die, they behave madly.’ (132:738-9) The mysterious drama

faced by the editors of the posthumously published *The Book on Michelangelo* (1981) and *Embajades* (1983), and all the difficulties related to the absence of a solid structure and composition of these works, prove that at the very old age, despite the fact that he wrote continuously, Crnjanski was distrustful to himself, extremely critical, or having unrealistic ideas about the whole work, i. e. about the finiteness or non-finiteness of the entire manuscript<sup>3</sup>. In the fall of 1969, Miloš Crnjanski traveled around Italy (Rome, Assisi, Naples, Florence, Siena and Milan), in pursuit of Michelangelo Buonarroti and his opus. In one of his four texts on the Renaissance sculptor and painter, published in Belgrade journals in 1973, Crnjanski wrote that he had been working on the book about Michelangelo for eight years now, while continuously living with the great artist for the last half a century.<sup>4</sup>

He, however, was never able to finalize this book on his life-long literary obsession. When editors came across a huge unedited manuscript in Crnjanski's legacy, their surprise was truly huge. Had it been published like that, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz wrote in his review, 'it would have been a cumbersome, chaotic, helter-skelter, book full of repetitions, of very little use to a reader—except maybe as documentary material'. (8: 656) A large number of variants written to the same topics and problems, made the editor of *Hyperboreans* and *Book on Michelangelo* Nikola Bertolino, to conjecture how Crnjanski, unhappy with what he had already accomplished, constantly started writing each chapter about the great sculptor from the very beginning, drawing facts 'from his memory', according to what he envisaged in his head. Variant, thus, just multiplied, while the aging author could hardly muddle through anymore in the towering heaps of paper which grew in his literary

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*Juhahaha* was also mentioned: 'You know that Zmaj Jova made things so that the constitution is proclaimed by the king, who then shouts: 'Juhahaha'. *Juhahaha* is about, how King Ale... the one who died, how he dealt with general Simović and with all others. It is rather light sort of comedy, which will truly make you laugh. It is written. I just do not want to... It is a difficult thing today.' (132: 739)

<sup>3</sup> What Crnjanski said to Vladimir Bunjac is, 'The fact that I am unhappy at times with what I write, is not due to the old age, since I have always been unhappy, I have always wanted to write better. It is only natural there should exist an artistic dissatisfaction. 'I always wonder whether all turns out the way I intended to, or not. And then I correct it. Not in the sense I am scribbling the manuscript, but rather rewriting it yet again, I retyped *A Novel about London* five times.' (49: 176)

<sup>4</sup> 'I observed Michelangelo's works during my first travels to Italy, starting from 1912, and the first time I wanted to write about him when I started visiting Florence more often, in 1921, and I made the decision to write this book during the three years I spent living in Rome. It is also the fruit of my readings of the last twenty-four years, which were spent abroad, in London, and I have been preparing it for the last eight years'. (8C64). 'It started as early as my childhood schooling days spent in the catholic friars' school, where I, for the first time, read the question posed to Michelangelo about his sculpture *Night* in the Medici tomb'. (8:66).

workshop. This claim is corroborated by the fact that there are many cases of overlapping and matchings of entire passages recorded in his interviews, as well as the already mentioned four preserved variants of a brief letter about the drama *Tesla*, all of which had been sent by the author to Velimir Lukić, before the premiere. The final decade of creativity of Miloš Crnjanski could be characterized with the mark used by art historians to briefly describe the opus of the great Renaissance painter and sculptor Michelangelo Buonarroti, whom Crnjanski dedicated an entire decade of his research and writing, and that is the incompleteness, the 'non-finito'. In his incomplete manuscript on Michelangelo, which—as the author himself often said—as a paradigm of artistic destiny stood for his only comfort in his old age, Crnjanski insisted on the social, and not on the psychopathological explanation of the phenomenon observed with the Renaissance genius, faced by Crnjanski himself in the old age. In all the obstacles he was forced to overcome throughout his life, in the fact that he had to fight hard for all his results, in that fact that despite—or possibly precisely because of his genius—he was constantly disturbed and hindered from outside, Crnjanski saw the explanation for the sculptor's, as well as for his own, life-long creative trajectory. In this manner, Crnjanski's late obsession with Michelangelo's work—sculptures, architecture, and with his less known poetry—unveil themselves as an autobiographic, but also as an auto-poetic story, as an insight conquered not only because of deep understanding of the subject matter, but also due to identification with the great artist, at the time—as Crnjanski put it—he wrote about him not as scholar, but as a medium. As early as *At the Hyperboreans*, in which the Michelangelo-problem was only opened up, but also when one reads all the manuscripts Crnjanski dedicated to the Italian sculptor and poet, one can realize how all levels of such identification are catching up in the feeling of melancholy. It was precisely this melancholy, apart from hubris (as the author interpreted the word *terribilita*, the usual way he described the sculptor's temper), that Crnjanski observed as primary traits of Michelangelo's persona<sup>5</sup>, but also determination of his own being, or at least one of its amplitudes. As testified by those who had been meeting Crnjanski in Belgrade during his last decade, one can ascertain that the other famous palm reading lifeline—the one pertaining to life and character, so prominent and dominant in youth, full of flare

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<sup>5</sup> The survey, allegedly invented by Marcel Proust as one type of personal psychological analysis, was filled by Crnjanski in *Čik*, a so-called erotic magazine (his endowment contains data concerning one more survey filled for the same magazine), stating that he sees 'hubris' as his primary trait. For the author, the ideal of happiness is 'pride', which is a characteristic he values the most with men. Besides, following Crnjanski's death, the magazine which wrote about him the most, was *Auto Svet*.



and struggle, so much reflected in his agon—faded with the author's years, giving its way to the omnipresent, yet not so frequent and deep plunges into melancholy. From all that he wrote at the end of his life, one can clearly see that Miloš Crnjanski was fully aware of that.

He perceived the phenomenon of melancholy within the historical context, or as a crucial artistic property of the 16<sup>th</sup> century authors who particularly interested him—apart from Michelangelo (1475-1564) and Shakespeare (1564-1616), the Italian poet Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) and the Portuguese poet Luís de Camões (or Camoëns, as Crnjanski used to call him, 1524-1580), as well as the German painter Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)—which is uncovered by carefully reading the book *At the Hyperboreans*, as well as texts on the Renaissance sculptor, painter, architect, and poet. Guided by the Galen's division of the four types of temperaments, i.e., of humors, which indicates a man's character through dominance of one of four bodily fluids, which determines people into sanguines, melancholics, choleric, and phlegmatics, Crnjanski found himself to be among those who, due to being born under the influence of dark Saturn, are ruled by the black bile. The Serbian author had accepted the Renaissance pre-evaluation of melancholy as a humor which, as oppose to the Middle-age period, does not indicate only fate, an innate code of destiny which pushes those who predominantly possess it, into misfortune, but which also indicate roots of genius, the presence of divine powers within a man, awoken due to the Renaissance creative individualism, justifying to us his considerations of Michelangelo's life, for we can interpret them as an auto-poetic legacy. Identification with Michelangelo, with his melancholy and difficult character, the properties our Serbian author found within him as well, tells us indirectly how Miloš Crnjanski, sensing death was approaching, summarized his life and his work, finding comfort in the fact that—despite his unfortunate life—he truly created something valuable, something to be remembered for in future, once he is gone from this world.

### Michelangelo's Melancholy

Although he incessantly tried in his study to refute the overwhelming opinions and attitudes towards Michelangelo's life and opus, Crnjanski was not the only one who believed that Buonarroti was the most unfortunate man in the entire Renaissance. (1:449) The author of famous sculptures—the David of Florence and of the Pietà of Rome—a recluse and an eccentric, was often described by all his biographers as a man of very difficult temper (*terribilita*), as 'the greatest and most dismal artist in the annals of human history'. (119:415) A conclusion can be drawn from numerous synthetic descriptions and Renaissance

analyses of an epoch—or at least of its late part—characterized by a clear orientation towards escapism and contemplation, that melancholy was not just an eccentric property typical of Michelangelo’s personality and character, but rather that melancholic sentiment was one of the key traits of the entire historical period. Platonism with its ascetic tone, a philosophy perceived as an approach to death, exchanged clear glorification of life from the first wave of an epoch which—after the Middle Ages—returned self-confidence to man and his powers.

In his *La civilisation de la Renaissance*, historian Jean Delumeau does not speak solely of melancholy, but of the ‘Renaissance Romanticism’ as well, that is one of the emotions this author observes as the dominant trait with numerous great artists and authors of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, for they felt ‘lonely and inclined towards sorrow’. Apart from the poet du Bellay and his *The Regrets*, Delumeau mentions Michelangelo’s example. Buonarroti’s melancholy represents ‘an expression of much deeper reality, whose roots spread all the way to the sculptor’s ‘terrible’ temper’, and is noticeable with other Renaissance artists’. (115:73)

Vasari claims that many painters from his time were melancholic: Correggio, Piero de Cosimo, Pontormo, Rosso. Ronsard described himself as ‘an unfriendly, suspicious, and sad melancholic’. Camoens depicted himself similarly, as an oversensitive creature from the earliest childhood, always ready to burst into tears. At any rate, there are numerous Romanticism accents within Renaissance art and literature. Truth being told, they are much more present in the 16<sup>th</sup> than in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Dürer’s *Melancholy*, as well as the painting with the same title by Lucas Cranach, are only the most renowned masterpieces dedicated to the subject. (115:373)

In what Delumeau saw as ‘Renaissance Romanticism’, Heinrich Wölfflin saw elements of a newly developing style. Michelangelo, Wölfflin claims. ‘never embodied merry existence, which is another reason why he departs from the Renaissance domain’. (95:90) ‘The epoch of post-renaissance is radically serious’, which is why we can discuss the existence of an entirely new stylistic period, which our author calls Baroque.

The story of melancholy as a type of humor, is typical of people Dante placed in Hell—for their deadly sin is the one of ‘living in sorrow of their own free will’, later in Renaissance to be transformed into a property inseparable from genius the—was not told by Crnjanski directly and explicitly, although the traces of his readings are present in one of the excerpts from the book *Among the Hyperboreans*:

The nurse is getting angry, so she says that since I do not have any children, I probably do not even like them, and such people are unhappy. I reply that I like children, as well as anything else that is young and what represents joy and happiness. Which only proves that the life goes on. I also like kittens, little birds, and squirrels. Nature is eternal, while death is only an illusion of certain people. *And concerning these unhappy people, Dante had already said that there are people who 'deliberately spend their lives in sorrow'.* (1:113, G. R.)

This part of Dante's *Inferno* is also indicated—while writing on Michelangelo—by the 'father of Modernism' Walter Pater, in his famous collection of essays on Renaissance topics. In his essay 'Michelangelo's Sonnets', Pater says:

In the story of Michelangelo's life, strength often turns into bitterness. Inharmonious tone echoes in every piece and almost ruins the music. He 'treats the pope in a way no French king would dare to presume'; he walks the streets of Rome 'as an executioner', says Raphael about him. Once, apparently, he locked himself in with the intent of starving himself to death. While reading his biography, we arrive at gruesome and difficult events, and then we are overwhelmed with a thought that he was one of those who deserved Dante's judgment, and that people like him 'deliberately live in sorrow'.<sup>6</sup> (209:85)

The question that could have been as well asked by the author, while studying Renaissance, is how it was possible that a still deeply religious 16<sup>th</sup> century gave way to the 'opulence of melancholy', while at the same managing not to arouse one of the most intensive human fears of the time—the fear of punishment that awaits them in the other world. Just like Michelangelo, who expressed his obsessions on the ceilings of the Sistine Chapel, 'Christians of the time lived obsessing with the end of time and Judgement Day'. (115:153) It is obvious that in the Renaissance experiences of melancholic temperaments, a radical change took place in relation to the Middle Ages, the attitude of which is expressed by Dante in the verses of his *Divine Comedy*. The reasons for this change have been attributed to a single text by Aristotle, who was not completely unknown in the Middle Ages, but who drew general attention only during Renaissance. In the study titled *30 problemata physica*, one speaks of melancholy as of 'humor of heroes and lords', thus bringing together the most unfortunate and most hated of all four

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<sup>6</sup> How this Pater's observation influenced his life as well, was extensively written about by Oscar Wilde in his notes from the jail *De Profundis*, such as Crnjanski knew them as one of his first youth-time readings.

humors with the Platonian enthusiasm as a property of great people, recasting it into ‘the temperament of genius’.<sup>7</sup> *Inspired melancholy*, melancholy of inspiration, as a prerequisite of the artistic and any other creativity in general, occupied the place in medieval perception where sinners willfully give themselves to sorrow. Such change could not have been possible without the Renaissance Neoplatonism.<sup>8</sup> ‘Adopted in Neoplatonism, through the Platonian theory of *furors*, the idea of a melancholic hero—whose genius resembles madness—would become close to European spirit. (134:55)

Melancholy, thus, does not show as the sole key element of Michelangelo’s sensitivity and Crnjanski, as their identical attitude towards the world, but also as a *poetic question*. In the light of Neoplatonistic philosophy, the Renaissance version of Platonism, whose traces we find in Crnjanski’s writing as well—as the foundation for his hyperborean quest—the author’s melancholy appears not only as the key to ontological, i.e., metaphysical questions, but to *poetic* ones as well.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the historian Francis Yates, ‘the most unfortunate and most hated of all four humors was Saturn – melancholy. A melancholic is of dark countenance, black hair, and black face – *facies nigra* – or of dark blue, exuded by the black bile of melancholic content. Typical physical demeanor is a character whose head is leaning on his hand, which expresses sorrow and depression. Not even gifts, nor typical preoccupations, are attractive. Such character is good at numbers, counting, measuring – but those are all lower-level professions as oppose to all the gifts of a sanguine man born in Jupiter, or all the gracefulness of a man born in Venus’. (134:54) ‘Arguments are very detailed, and medical, though the main thing is that a heroic frenzy, madness, or furor, which according to Plato is the source of all inspiration, in combination with the black bile of melancholic temper, produces great people and temperament of a genius. All extraordinary people were melancholics, heroes such as Hercules, philosophers such as Empedocles and Plato, and nearly all the great poets’. (134:55)

<sup>8</sup> Art historian Erwin Panofsky also confirms that the change in understanding melancholics born in the sign of Saturn is to be attributed to Florentine Neoplatonists, who actually only revived the Platonistic and Neoplatonistic tradition, by stating: ‘As a ruling planet, Saturn was considered an exceptionally unfavorable type; the word ‘saturnine’ in English even today means ‘inert, gloom-tempered’, according to the Oxford dictionary. People susceptible to its influence can be rich or powerful, though never pleasant or generous; they can be wise, but never happy. People born in the sign of Saturn are necessarily melancholic. Even these two extremely conditional advantages are given to only a few of Saturn’s ‘children’. Saturn – the coldest, gloomiest, and slowest of all planets – has usually been connected to old age, utter poverty and death. Indeed, since the old times, death was always – similarly to Saturn – depicted with a scythe or the sickle. Saturn has always been guilty of floods, famine and all other misfortunes. People born in this sign were always considered most wretched and most unwanted of all human beings, such as cripples, misers, beggars, criminals, impoverished peasants, toilet cleaners, and gravediggers. It was only in the last quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century that Florentine Neoplatonists returned to the Plotinus’ concept of Saturn, considering it the champion and advocate of deep philosophy and religious contemplation, while Jupiter was equaled to common practicality, rational intelligence. Nevertheless, not even this Neoplatonistic revival, which would eventually bring about equaling of saturnine melancholy with genius, could not have shaken the foundations of the belief that Saturn was a most vicious planet’. (208: 74-75)

According to Miloš Crnjanski, who placed soul and ecstasy onto the same plain of his early program texts, personal tone and inspiration, the poet—and artists in general—is a melancholic infatuate, who, in his creative trance, rises above the earthly nature and is capable of creating works otherwise not achievable by mere mortals. He is a frail and vulnerable creature, but in his creative ecstasy, he is endowed with supernatural powers. This is the reason *why the roots of Renaissance and its understanding of a man as mage* is viewed in philosophical learnings of Florentine Neoplatonists Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola—Christians ‘tormented with grief’, as Crnjanski calls them—deeply imbued with Cabala influences and Hermetic teachings.

### Platonism

It does not seem to be an overstatement to claim that Platonism is the unifying formula denominating all later works by Miloš Crnjanski, and that the influences of Plato’s philosophy came to the author through Renaissance writers, as well through his own experience of melancholy: through experiencing life as a dream, people as shadows, of which attest numerous examples from *Hyperboreans*.<sup>9</sup> Even the book’s title itself, reminding us of the antiquity myth about Apollo, who drives the swan-drawn chariot to a mystical, spiritual journey to the far North, refers to an entire tradition of esoteric writings and teachings, stemming from the Renaissance Platonism. Platonism has, according to historians of ideas, made a deep mark and returned the trust of the man who, as an artist and creator, a philosopher and mystic, was touched by the divine hand of mercy. Thus, the god-centered medieval world, under the influences of rediscovered Hermetic texts, turned into a human-centered universe, in which a human—with a seed of the divine within him—has once become ‘a measure of all things’.

Nevertheless, such glorifications of poetry by Crnjanski, and of art in general, as shown in his series of essays ‘My English Poets’ (1973),

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<sup>9</sup> Even in his interviews with journalists, Crnjanski often spoke of the ancient idea of a possessed poet, a poet prophet (*poeta vates*), remembering how ‘Stražilovo’ was created in a sort of creative ecstasy, or madness, while ‘Lament’ came for him to London: ‘Kalemegdan is homeland. That is why the poem went up there for me...’ (50:143) Creation is, according to Crnjanski, something that comes with birth: ‘Creation – is a thing that comes at the time you are born and leaves you only when you die’. (50:263) How long lived his heroes, his literary creations, is something that Crnjanski himself testified while discussing the times he encountered his emanations: ‘I saw all those invisible Isakovič-type of characters and listened to for years’. (10:474) He also remembered his wartime comrades, whom he only listened, but never saw. The whisper from ‘Lament’, the voices he heard, were for Crnjanski, thus, more than hallucination, more than fancy.

possesses a *translunar* character,<sup>10</sup> and we could question when faced with the fact that our author categorically refuted the thesis that Michelangelo ever knew Plato's teachings, of which he could hear a lot at the court of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

I think it was high time—regarding first epoch in Michelangelo's life—we added a little bit of skepticism to biographers and their stories. Throughout the centuries, the rumor spread that Michelangelo sat at the table of the Magnificent, with philosophers and poets of the Medici court, with Marsilio Ficino, the first translator into Latin of the works by Plato. Along with a young prince, whose name was Pico della Mirandola, and who believed he descended from the Byzantine rulers. Along with Poliziano, he was the poet who, they say, gave Michelangelo his first ideas. Along with the princely family as well. He drank and ate with the Magnificent. Participated in the conversations. Listened discussions about Plato. All this is unlikely, given the history. These are all anecdotes. (8:25)

However, as it is always the case when it comes to Crnjanski, paradoxes always have clear explanation. By opposing as a poet and as an artist to a certain Italian professor (a representative and an embodiment of the fossilized, prosaic thought about Michelangelo), Crnjanski wanted to

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<sup>10</sup> The essay 'My English Poets' was published in 1973 in *Književne novine*, but judging by the age attributed to the contemporary poets of whom Crnjanski wrote, it is possible to time-locate it in 1966. Crnjanski wrote about the author of *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400); about three authors of the Elizabethan era: Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), Walter Raleigh (1552-1618) and Philip Sidney (1554-1586), as well as of the "metaphysical poet" John Donne (1573-1631) or 'Dan', as his surname is transcribed by the writer. While he especially loves all these poets because of their poetry of sincerely lived feelings, as well as deep melancholy that imbues their verses, Crnjanski says writing about Shelley (1792-1822) that he loves this Romanticist because of his melancholy, and because his poetry is a consequence of his absurd life'. Life, its end, that is, constitutes a fact that also marked the poetry of Philip Sidney, who before his death, tormented by terrible thirst, gave his flask of water to another wounded man. That 'young Platonist' was remembered by history also for the way he ended his life – with a poetic thought that the most one can do in life is to feel sorry, and to help another, whose suffering is even greater'. (9: 167) Crnjanski's love of poetry can also be seen from this essay, poetry is personal, poetry is of the soul, but such that it is touched by mysterious influences of the super-personal, and that it was created in ecstasy. The term 'translunar' – with which Crnjanski marked such poetry – belongs to the Neoplatonist tradition because it refers to something that comes from the world of the cosmic mind and of the cosmic soul, according to the historian Erwin Panofsky. On such 'lunar' origin of inspiration, which makes the poet directly related to those who are mad and to those who are madly in love, Shakespeare refers to in his comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, because 'The lover, the madman and the poet / are beings / created from the imagination itself'. *Luna* is a feminine noun (for it is associated with changeability, inconstancy, inscrutability and irrationality) and is at the root of the term *lunatic*, which is used by this most renowned Elizabethan and the most famous world poet. Concerning these poets, as well as other contemporaries Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes and John Fuller, see more in 236.

say that the influence of Lorenzo de' Medici, as a patron, is exaggerated and inappropriate in art histories. The problem of patrons and of patronage is one of the most present themes in Crnjanski's *Book about Michelangelo*, one of the leitmotifs, phrases, cues, which are constantly repeated in dialogues with the Italian professor, who is sometimes called Zena, Zeno, and sometimes Cloeta. Guided by, no doubt, his personal experience with the so-called patrons, and opposing his interlocutor, our poet believed that neither secular, nor church leaders could have had the kind of influence attributed to them, neither on Michelangelo, nor on the entire Renaissance art. According to Crnjanski, his Florence, a town he calls 'the nest in which he was born', was of crucial importance for Buonarroti:

I just want to say that I think a great artist is not created by: *Charlemagne, Tiberius, or Napoleon*, by one ruler, by one clique, one patron, not even when they really wish to. However, this can be done by one town, one wider community, the birthplace of Michelangelo.

He would not have existed without the Medicis, the professor repeats.

Michelangelos don't even have fathers, let alone patrons—I say. Michelangelo called the pope: *Medusa*, the head of which is a yarn of snakes, and the look of which turns you to stone. Artists don't have fathers at all. Like the children in Naples, the city is their father and mother. Lorenzo was merely an episode in the life of Michelangelo, Florence was not. The court of Lorenzo is a narrow circle. Florence—a wide one. Michelangelo's memory of Lorenzo is superficial. His memory of birthplace is very deep. In his brain, Lorenzo is a portrait, albeit an unforgettable portrait, as the portrait by Vasari. Vasari, who is considered, in terms of painting, a true grandpa. How many times, for how many minutes, has Michelangelo seen this portrait up close? Florence, however, has been there for years in his eyes. From childhood. From boyhood. From youth... From the passing of youth. From the beginning of the old age. When he left Florence to Rome, never to return, he was sixty. It is a well-known fact that a town, or birthplace, can play an important role in the life of a great artist. Patrons? Seldom. (8:97)

Instead of helping artists, as historically emphasized, patrons are much more the cause of hindrance, prevention of creative energy and of great talent:

In psychopathological, psychoanalytical, literary, and philosophical interpretations of Michelangelo, since that four hundredth anniversary, the main question experts ask is: the incompleteness, the '*non-finito*' of

a large number of Michelangelo's works, the interruption, the abandonment of so many, almost all of Michelangelo's sculptural works... I wonder: are the main causes of that phenomenon not being overlooked—lately—perhaps: the facts. It seems to me that one should ask how many PREVENTIONS there are in the work of Michelangelo. In almost every work of Michelangelo. He is prevented, even by those who are for centuries now glorified by science as *patrons* of Michelangelo, among whom, I observe, several lunatics and rogues. He is prevented by the famous Medicis, and popes, not to mention the facts of war, political parties, revolutions and cliques of opponents, contemporaries (8:138)

Presenting the thesis about the artist's ignorance (which was supported by the data from Buonarroti's biography: that he lived the ascetic life of a stonemason, that he shared lodgings with his workers, that he did not care about external splendor, clothes or appearance, that he spent his days in hard work and solitude), Crnjanski sensed that the genius artist learned new things and found out about the world in a different, non-scholarly way. And that is why very often he insists on the artist's independence in the texts about Michelangelo, claiming that autodidacts are the greatest<sup>11</sup> in his country as well. While trying to prove that he was a Platonist artist, Crnjanski had to claim that Michelangelo did not *read* Plato, but that he was rather a living embodiment of his theory: as a contemplative who, unlike ordinary people, manages at times to rise to ecstasy, and observe the translunar world with the intangible eyes.

Although he does not interpret them according to the Neoplatonist understandings of Saturn's melancholic genius, Crnjanski paraphrases Michelangelo's verses, which speak of a tragic predestination by birth: He himself, Michelangelo, says that there are two worlds. The world of the Sun and the world of the Moon. And it depends on a single moment, after our birth, to which world we belong. They say that the age of *darkness* was predestined to him, *already at birth, already in the cradle*. (1: 610) In the context of the Renaissance understanding of melancholy, it was in this *predestination for misfortune* that our writer saw the *differentia specifica* that elevates the great sculptor, poet, and painter above his era, giving him a new, different quality. In this Renaissance artist, who created the sculpture of *David* 'rejoicing to himself' and to his own success—the dwarf who overcame the Giant, and the imperfect man who managed to overcome the stone—our writer saw, especially in his Lamentation sculptures, one other thing that is different, a new

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<sup>11</sup> 'And in my country, autodidacts are those who are the best, best in the head.' (1: 496) One should also remember Crnjanski's story repeated so many times about Đura Jakšić, who was capable of seeing the world with his inner eyes, to travel the world with his spirit, and not via earthly roads.



and original feeling that Crnjanski calls *baroque*. Melancholy thus becomes the central point of Michelangelo's life and creativity, a point of intersection where both his 'predestination' for art and the basic theme and sensibility that radiates from that art meet. Michelangelo's melancholy is the secret for our writer, from which he starts when he embarks on this journey into the past, the key to open the door that leads to the very core, the essence of the art of the Renaissance genius.

For Crnjanski, Michelangelo is a 'sculptor of the shadow', for whom turning to antiquity only meant mastering the craft. In accordance with the understanding of art as an inspired genius, 'poetics of *techne*', the art of verse creation had never been what Crnjanski valued in art. This is also evident from his judgments about artists who are the absolute antipodes of the Michelangelo-type creator: thus Raphael is a 'plagiarist of ideas and forms in painting' (8: 56), and an example of 'how far, even in painting, one can reach, through hard work, Hard work'. (8: 125) On the other hand, Michelangelo is a Hyperborean, a creator of a winged soul that rises beyond the mundane.

What is the truth?—exclaims the professor.

Those who seek Hyperborea are excused, not those who sit at home. I have nothing against Raphael after all. For me, he does not exist. Even Perugino is better. Michelangelo was Jason. Raphael wasn't. Michelangelo knew that: and he who taps behind others, he says, will never overtake them. *Chi va dietro ai altri mai non li passa davanti.* (8:237)

For Crnjanski, Raphael's counterpart in poetry is Petrarch. Petrarch is a *verse maker*, skillful at putting words together, his poetry is what he had *learned*. There is no real feeling behind the love he talks about:

What Michelangelo said in his sonnets and madrigals cannot be learned or taught. Never. From no one. Petrarch is a poet, a verse maker. Michelangelo is the Vesuvius and the lava. Volcanoes have no teachers. Petrarchs learn from the academia. They defend their doctorate in poetry and love. A doctorate in verse making. I nearly said that in love, Petrarch is a bookkeeper. Laura is a play on words, a creation of verse making. Vitoria is a creation of Italy, Love. (1: 460-461)

Although here he is mistaken about the author of *Il Canzoniere*, who was genuine, but who, precisely because of the great popularity of his poetry, was imitated by countless epigones, Crnjanski wants to make an opposition between *the classics in skill and what is in all respects inferior to him*. Causing the indignation of his interlocutors,

and attributing such insights to the influences by German professors with whom he studied, our poet talks about Michelangelo's *baroque*.

### Michelangelo's Baroque

Baroque art and its artists (and according to Heinrich Wölfflin, greatest Renaissance masters are the originators of the Baroque), on the contrary, overwhelm us with 'the power of sudden passion', they provide us with 'excitement, strength and rapture', all of which rest on the impression of the moment. The art of Baroque is not an art of tranquility in duration:

Baroque does not provide joy of existence, but rather creation, happening. It does not provide satisfaction, but rather dissatisfaction and discontent. We do not feel deliverance, but an entrapment within a tense state of affairs. (95: 40)

The ideal is no longer a contented existence but a state of excitement. (95: 88-89)

Crnjanski uses the term *baroque* precisely in this Wölfflinian sense. For the Serbian writer, the *baroque* in Michelangelo is in his brilliant spirit, his power to express very personal, melancholic sensibility in stone that will no longer exude only the ancient concept of bodily beauty, symmetry and harmony, but also a deep inner life, a struggle that takes place within the limits of an extraordinary being. Such passion and ferocity, with which he invigorated the wealth and power of human spirit 'in hard and rough stone', a force worthy of awe, which was discovered by the genius sculptor for the first time in human history, was called Michelangelo's *terribilita*. Such quality that radiates from his art, became the symbol, over time, of the artist himself. Between the *terribilita* and the genius of Buonarroti's, boundaries were very quickly completely erased, and the will to leave behind him the timeless works of art, as much as it served creativity, ultimately turned against the artist himself. American Will Durant wrote about this, very similarly to Crnjanski:

What was in fact this famous *terribilita*? First of all, it was the energy, the unbridled, destructive force, which tormented Michelangelo's body, and at the same time sustained him for eighty-nine years; secondly, the willpower that tamed and directed that energy towards one goal—towards art—ignoring almost everything else. In this sense, *the energy directed by a unifying will is almost the very definition of the genius*.

The energy that looked upon the shapeless stone as a challenge, that chiseled and struck and carved it with *con furia*, until the stone took on a crystal-clear meaning, was the same energy that flew furiously over the dull trifles of life, that did not pay attention to clothes or cleanliness or superficial politeness, but progressed towards its goal, if not blindly, then certainly wearing blinkers, treading over broken promises, broken friendships, broken health, and finally over the broken spirit, leaving the body and mind devastated, but the work completed—regardless whether it is the largest painting, largest sculpture, or largest architecture of the time. ‘If God helps me’, he used to say, ‘I will create the most beautiful thing that Italy has ever seen’. (119: 446-447, G. R.)

The divine gift of the sculptor, the innate, unique creative power, the drive towards a higher life, more worthy than pleasure, than mere human existence, *concentration on one’s goal*, even for contemporary sculptors, were the reason for respect and admiration of generations. The arbitrariness, inconsistency, ‘wildness’ of Michelangelo is well noted, but not condemned. And Crnjanski repeats Varki’s thesis that Michelangelo considered the ONLY meaning of his life, that he should constantly strive to know the mysteries of art and secrets of nature, which they haven’t been figured out yet’. (8: 40) This is the meaning of Michelangelo’s melancholy, but also the unfortunate fate of every true artist: to live, to create, to focus on the goal, to rise above disputes, troubles, poverty, hostilities, above the knowledge of finiteness and death. Michelangelo’s melancholy, says our poet, is the expression of *human solitude* in the world. Even if that person is a Christian, they are faced with the question how to prepare for death, because one can never know the moment when it comes.<sup>12</sup> The cry of a loner, a sufferer, a sinner, terrified of death and hell that awaits one there, faced with the question of meaning, is what, according to Crnjanski, separates Michelangelo from the Renaissance, and thus from antiquity: ‘Michelangelo’s art is not the art of communities, but of a lonely man, of the baroque loneliness of an individual... Michelangelo’s sculpture is always lonely. Sad. And when he speaks of death, he does not say it is a dream, but a SHADOW that befalls the world, as well as our faces’. (8:18) Baroque with Michelangelo is also the artist’s personal confrontation with the fate of a man:

Frank, violent, pathetic. Introduction of ONE’S OWN. The grain of his baroque is the face of his man, or woman—of wailing, as it is found, although not in marble—but in poetry with Tasso.

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<sup>12</sup> What is at stake here is the meaning of the sonnet: ‘Death is certain, though its hour is not...’ i.e., *Di morte Certo, ma non gia dell’ora...* (Rhymes, no 295, 333)

Until then, such baroque an outcry of the PEOPLE had not been heard in art. (8:52)

It is certain that our poet was also familiar with different interpretations of the baroque phenomenon, when he observes Mannerism features in Michelangelo's painting as 'the baroque in a bad sense', but also when he rejects the connotations of baroque as counter-reformation Catholicism and Jesuitism. For Crnjanski, Mannerism is ugly because it denotes repetition, drowning in clichés and commonalities. Hence, the perfection of Michelangelo's pictorial representation of the body and of the physical, has no great value for our poet, ready to accept the thesis of the French painter Delacroix, that the *Last Judgment* is merely a slaughterhouse—a butchery, a painting without individual or personal qualities. In the crucial understanding of Baroque as individualism, of creation as inspiration, of work's effect as an experience, of melancholic as well as rebellious attitude of the artists towards the world, one can also explain Crnjanski's affiliation towards romantic and expressionist aesthetics, which again exclude any understanding of Baroque as Mannerism, Conceit formalism, as rationalist poetics, whose 'craftsmanship' he despised so much. Emphasizing above all the sculptures of David and of the Roman Pieta, Crnjanski gave value to the sculptor's rebellion against the ideal harmony of the long-dead art, to the destruction of the illusionary ideal order of the world in which human existence is so fragile, in fact null, and so tragically divided between what one wishes and what one gets in life.

#### A Poet and A Lover

Melancholy of the great sculptor, carved in stone, within one feeble, withered hand, which—as Crnjanski says—is repeated in all his sculptures, passes through various different phases: from daring and challenging attitude of *David*, to the never-finished *The Rondanini Pietà*, by Michelangelo, who knew he would impress the world with their beauty, up to the poet who writes sonnets dedicated to Christ at the end of his life. 'This is the Michelangelo who, at the end of his life, started loving Christ, but also a man of suffering, crucified, not the Christ whom the Medici, the popes, and the Borgias worshipped hypocritically.' (8: 69) Christ from Michelangelo's poetry is also Crnjanski's alter-ego, the baroque figure of the double of every sufferer crucified by the fate on the cross of suffering. Michelangelo the ascetic, the loner and the voluntary exile from the world, infused the melancholy of his personality into verses. On sonnets and madrigals by Michelangelo, Crnjanski expressed his original judgement, which in these dialogues turned into

a great apologia for poetry, which, in our poet's opinion, was neither interpreted in the right way, nor received a recognition commensurate to its value.

Opposing—first of all—the assessment of the esthetician Benedetto Croce, who contested the value of Michelangelo's poetry claiming that it would not even have been noticed if it were not for the great sculptor and painter, Crnjanski starts from the already known arguments: it is the genuine, original poetry of a genius artist who he writes from his deep inner need, poetry of personal, life content. It is not Petrarchist, Epigonic poetry, the poetry of students. Because, as Crnjanski says, Michelangelo sings about what cannot be learned, and that is what makes it exceptional.

No doubt, I say it angrily, Michelangelo is to learn from Petrarch. Although I also know, from the beginning, that he read him also. Petrarch is a poet and he never went beyond poetry. Michelangelo is full of some bumps, lumps, apostrophes, but also what the English poets called TRANSLUNAR content. Satirist Berni told his contemporaries, the Italian poets, what the difference was between them and Michelangelo. *Egli dice cose, voi altri paroli*. He says the substance, the rest of you merely words. And that 'substance' is never forgotten. (1: 460)

In *Hyperboreans*, citing Kierkegaard and his division of people into aesthetes and romantics ('Kierkegaard saw people as a dichotomy. As an aesthete, thirsty for the enjoyment of life, and as a romantic, eager for revolution', 1:394). In Michelangelo, Crnjanski found a man who did not want to enjoy life, but to change the world with his art, as well as to speak at the same time about his own nature and attitude towards life. Apart from his art—says our poet for the Renaissance genius—nothing was important to him. Moreover, he is 'everything except the one who knows how to enjoy life'. (8: 260) A man who could make fun of himself, as Michelangelo would do, writing a sonnet of his many years of work spent in the Sistine Chapel, where he would stand like a stork—or penguin or marabou—on one leg, painting frescoes, which are the most fantastic painting success', or as Michelangelo, who paints ironically his self-portrait in the guise of Saint Bartholomew, whom they had previously flayed, holding his own skin in his hand, (1:492) could not have been the narcissistic Epicurean, concerned solely of himself and devoting his time to satisfying his own needs.

Presenting the great sculptor as a loner devoted to his work, as an artist who renounced all his earthly pleasures, Crnjanski develops an entire discussion to refute the theses about Michelangelo's homosexual loves. Behind the sonnets dedicated to his friend Cavalieri, or to the

young Fabio di Poggio, Crnjanski finds no trace of sensual love. Why he wrote the verses which—to us—look like love poetry and dedicated them to men, is something we do not know and cannot understand today. It has been concealed by the darkness of centuries: ‘Words change their meaning through centuries. They pass by like unknown passers-by. Winds carry them away like yellow leaves’. (1:459-460) They can be as funny as the clothes from the past. For Cicero, Crnjanski says, that only a madman played. To all the evidence, letters, and testimonies presented to him as counterarguments, Crnjanski responds to Michelangelo’s verses: he loves Cavalieri with pure love—*un casto amor*—and ‘the soul defends us from the hottest arrows of love even once we reach the other shore’ (*L'alma quasi giunta all' altra riva fa scudo a' tuo di piu pietosi strali...* 1:452).

And the sculptor’s love for Vittoria de Colonna, the Marquise of Pescara, is not a blind-passionate love—*cupiditas*. To the seventy-year-old Michelangelo, she is a comfort in life.

Vittoria means the last happiness in Michelangelo’s life, the peak of his life. She prepared him, with her love, comforting him for death, even though, afterwards, she was survived by him for seventeen years. In ancient Rome, women taught men of carnal love. *Ars amatoria*. In Middle Ages, they taught them death. Had Vittoria been immoral, could have so many religious writers and religious reformists respected her woman so much? (1: 470-471)

It is, I say, about Michelangelo. The most famous, the most unfortunate Italian of the Renaissance, about an aged man. And about a sophisticated middle-aged woman. Their love is a series of conversations about death, it is not sexual. (1:473)

Although he wants to refute the fact that the sixteen-year-old Michelangelo at the court of Lorenzo de Medici was influenced by scholars such as Ficino—who founded Plato’s academy in Florence, and was the first who translated Plato’s texts into Italian—in his defense of the sculptor’s virtue cannot ignore the traces of Platonism that he finds in his poetry. As Walter Painter also noted, and what catches his eye, is the verse in which Buonarroti ‘explains love at first sight with previous existence—*la dove io t'amai prima*.’ In the chapter from *Hyperboreans* ‘Supper with the Sonnets of Michelangelo’, Crnjanski, accompanied by Professor Della Cloeta, recites a sonnet in which the poet wonders whether the glow that appears in the soul at the beginning of love comes from some otherworldly past, or the past from within our life?—with the returning shadows—in memory’. Crnjanski is now the one who

enthusiastically asserts that ‘one could now firmly believe that Michelangelo had read Plato’ (1:488-489), and Della Cloeta is the one who categorically rejects this, observing in the great artist an illiterate and an ignorant man.<sup>13</sup> No matter how much it contradicts his theses, Crnjanski could not hide the influences of Platonism on Buonarroti. Although his known love for Vittoria Colonna is love ‘without heart’—we are talking about a woman of this world’, from whom Michelangelo sought comfort. She is a safe haven, a shelter to which he escapes from himself:

He certainly knows that sonnet by Michelangelo, which begins with the words: A man in one woman, and more, a god in one woman... Un uomo in una donna anzi uno dio... In that sonnet, one can clearly see what has Michelangelo asked from the woman—although she might not have seen that sonnet at all. He sought consolation –Take me—he tells her. Give me the streets that lead to joy. From floods and fires. Not to return into MYSELF. Never again. (1:468)

This is not the only example of verses in which the poet sees death ‘within a different beauty’. Between lovers, there is always death, as Crnjanski translated Michelangelo’s verse: *Fra l’uno e altro obbietto entra la morte!* That outcry is a sincere and terrible howl of an unhappy man who ‘says the deepest things there can be about love between a man and a woman’, who ‘reveals his secret’, the secret of ‘his unhappiness in life’. As in the sonnet *Non ha l’ottimo artista...* in which ‘Michelangelo says: it is not love, therefore, nor its beauty, nor chance, nor her cruel heart, nor her great contempt for him, which is to blame for his misfortune, nor it is the fate. If she has both death and pity in her heart, his own ineptitude is to blame for all he does not know in his longing—not to gain anything from her, anything apart from death.’ (1:485)

In the verses in which the aged sculptor turns to Jesus Christ, Crnjanski did not see a religious convert but a man filled with anxiety when faced with death, which appears to him as the concluding, final point at which human life ends.

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<sup>13</sup> In other versions of Michelangelo’s dialogues, there are examples in which the author and his interlocutor switch roles, so that in one case the author defends a claim that the other will dispute, while in another, it is the other way around. This fact supports the thesis that dialogues about Michelangelo, but also about other artistic themes in *Hyperboreans*, are actually Miloš Crnjanski’s dialogues with himself, while the colloquial names are only meant to fake the reality of life’s situations. This is all the more likely because it is hard to imagine that Crnjanski’s Roman friends, regardless of the fact that they belonged to higher social classes and therefore possessed significant education, were to that extent familiar with the life and work of the writers and artists Crnjanski thinks about and discusses.

I was amazed by the melancholy of Michelangelo, when it comes to the question of death in these madrigals. Michelangelo elevates human death to the last, highest fact, in life, as a point, definitive, for life, and in his poetry, it shines in the distance like some extinguished star. Before Michelangelo, I had never known about that terrible struggle, which arises in one's old age, between something terrible, icy in a man, and something bright, like fire, which begins to die out. Nearing the end, fire and ice are Michelangelo's most frequent words. Every now and then he says he is made of ice, or of flame. *Ora d'un giaccio or d'un ardente foco.* (1:495)

For our poet, this is the real Michelangelo, 'the one who writes to himself, and to no one else, verses that are difficult to even understand' (1:492), but who, despite his extreme distance from the world that terrifies him, and in which he tries to find meaning, belongs to the entire community of Italian poets. The individual in Michelangelo's poetry is transformed into the general in verses that are sweet at first, but in the brain, later, turn into an outcry of desperate men and women, as death approaches.' That individual outcry turns into the voice of 'millions of Italian men and women' who 'slither and slide, as snakes do, with those who are bitten in the collision of love.' (1: 496) Although he speaks of Michelangelo as an artist of baroque solitude, he does not see in his art the art of community as it was in antiquity. Crnjanski sees a different type of connection, now diachronic, that Michelangelo's hunting works establish with all of humanity.

### Mother and motherhood complex

On his spiritual journey from Rome to Hyperborea. Crnjanski placed Michelangelo in the context of a special community of people. Writing about the destinies of writers from the European North—Kierkegaard and Ibsen, Strindberg and Andersen—but also the southerner Michelangelo and his much more famous contemporary compatriot Leonardo da Vinci, Crnjanski points out the common denominator of melancholy that pervaded their lives and deeply marked everything they wrote about, thought about, and what they lived with: the hidden memory of the one who gave them life. Our poet proves his thesis by asserting that one obsessive theme is dominant in Michelangelo's art, the theme of Lamentation, starting from the most famous Roman *Pieta*, to the unfinished *Rondanini* sculpture. Looking for an answer to the question of who Michelangelo's mother was, Crnjanski believes that he is plunging into the depths of a secret that is the key to the life, and personal melancholy of the genius Florentine, but also to his entire creativity: 'I only suspect that, in Michelangelo's mother, if we could



find her trace, a more visible one, in the archives of Florence, they we could also find the cause of the melancholy—the main, the first—unhappiness, and of loneliness of Michelangelo’. (8:73) The unknown mother is a central figure in Michelangelo’s life, and his entire life opus is, in fact, a sublimated nostalgia for his mother, who died young and whom he may not have even remembered. Crnjanski concludes that the sculptor mourned her all his life, because the motif of the *Pieta* was the central theme of Buonarroti’s work: apart from the famous completed sculptures, three were left unfinished after his death, the most famous of which is *Pieta Rondanini*. ‘That work almost no longer belongs to art,’ says Arnold Hauser, but it is rather a transition from a work of art to an ecstatic confession; it represents a unique discovery of the spiritual interregnum in which the aesthetic touches upon the metaphysical, an expressive act that, hovering between the sensible and the supersensible, seems to have been plucked from the mind’. (278: 263)

What is the connection between such a thesis about Michelangelo’s melancholy related to his early lost mother and Miloš Crnjanski’s personal relationship with his mother Marina, is a question that we would hardly be able to answer. We should not forget how, in the autobiographical note that he sent to his first editor, Julije Benešić, the young Crnjanski wrote: ‘Who brought him into this world? A mother made of stone, like one of Meštrović.’ Reading *Lament*, and its verse: ‘I know you will take me on your lap’, we imagine the poet as Christ who rests on his mother’s lap, as in Michelangelo’s *Pieta*. The only thing that is certain, is that Crnjanski wanted to show in this sculpture how deep identification is of the artist with the crucified Christ, who was indeed ‘Michelangelo’s alter-ego’, and who embodied his memory, his pain for his own mother, in the figure of the young Madonna. When discussing motifs of mother and of motherhood, so present in the book *At the Hyperboreans*, as well as in the early works by Miloš Crnjanski—*The Journal of Čarnojević*, as well as in his travelogue *Love in Tuscany*—one thought of Oswald Spengler imposes itself upon us, as an acceptable solution to the puzzle:

Endless existence is contained within *the idea of motherhood*. A woman as a mother is time, and destiny. Just as the mystical act of experiencing depth creates spatial from the sensual, i. e. the *world*, thus a physical human being—through motherhood—becomes an individual member of this world—in which now one possesses a destiny. All the symbols of time and of distance are also the symbols of motherhood. *Concern* is the primal feeling of the future, and every concern is also maternal. It is expressed in the creations and ideas of the family, and of the state, as well as in the principle of *heredity*, which is the foundation to both. (287:130-131)

In this interpretation, a previously invisible and perhaps seemingly paradoxical connection suddenly emerges between Crnjanski's 'masculine principle' as a careful guardian of the state 'which, when created, is the greatest intoxication for everyone who is male' (10:185) and his life's preoccupation with the state, political affairs, and symbols of motherhood. In the light of this connection, movements of Crnjanski as an artist can be seen more clearly, which is determined by the space between the two extremes: the point at which all the connections with the world are severed by 'parricide', and from which movement ends with the Sumatran Nirvana, and the point at which an engaged romantic fighter culminates filled with 'maternal concern' for the future of his nation, which, as we have seen, is only a feminized version of the 'patriotic feeling'.

### Patriotic Feeling

*I am not saying there are no misfortunes in other places too.  
But others were allowed to take a breather, to forget. We weren't given that,  
not even that.*

(Pavle Isaković, *The Second Book of Migrations*)

Upon his return to Belgrade, Crnjanski explicitly emphasized that he was no longer interested in political engagement:

I am a happy man now. I returned to my country and I am living again the way I used to when I was twenty. I am only interested in my literature. The moment I returned to the country, I renounced all political opinions. This is not difficult for me, because politics has not interested me for a long time (16:544).

Both before and after his return, his former friends and ideologically hard-line communist critics declared him a nationalist, which is why our writer occasionally needed to distance himself from his former 'nationalistic' *self*. Such was the case in London in 1964, at the time he spoke of literary beginnings to Nikola Drenovac.

Translated from the Serbian by  
*Ivan Filipović*

SLOBODAN RELJIĆ

## A SHORT HISTORY OF SPIN—A DEADLY VIRUS IN THE BLOODSTREAM OF LIBERAL SOCIETIES

*Journalism is printing what someone else does not want printed;  
everything else is public relations.*

George Orwell

### 1.

It is widely believed that the term “spin” came from George Orwell. These activities were mentioned in his Oceania (1984) and on farm (Animal Farm). And in the preface to the book of Orwell’s political texts, half a century later, Timothy Garton Ash wrote that “the extreme, totalitarian version that he satirized as Newspeak is less often encountered these days, except in countries such as Burma and North Korea” but “the obsession of democratically elected governments, especially in Britain and America, with media management and ‘spin’ is today one of the main obstacles to understanding what is being done in our name. Read Orwell and you will know that something nasty must be hidden behind the euphemistic, Latinate phrase used by NATO spokespeople during the Kosovo war: ‘collateral damage.’ (It means innocent civilians killed.)” (Orwell, 2001: xviii)

What is the fate of great thoughts? Even when referring to Orwell’s discovery of “spin” (to spin – turn around, revolve), kind Ash “spins” – “interprets information or events in a positive way for him” (Reljić, 2011: 144). So, if the so-called Kosovo war was not spinned, it would be the unlawful aggression of the NATO pact through bombing against the sovereign state of the FRY, something that did not hinder the righteous advocate of “pure language” (Orwell’s text *Politics and the English*

*language* for healing and reading) from remaining in the same political, legal and humanistic positions as the NATO spokesman that is the subject to his irony. Otherwise, when you see that Orwell's text "with your own eyes" (not with Ash's!), you see that the great writer found "spinning" precisely as a way to avoid seeing the world realistically. Therefore, he advocated that language should not be used as a tool in the industry of lies, so it should be saved from pollution, while citizens should be saved from brutal manipulation. "In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible," wrote Orwell in 1946. "Things like the continuance of British rule in India, the Russian purges and deportations, the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, can indeed be defended, but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face and which do not square with the professed aims of the political parties. Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness." (Orwell, 1946) "Political language — and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists — is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable... It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently, the defenders of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning. Words of this kind are often used in a consciously dishonest way. That is, the person who uses them has his own private definition, but allows his hearer to think he means something quite different... A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outline and covering up all the details. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish spurting out ink. In our age there is no such thing as 'keeping out of politics'. All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer." (Orwell, 1946)

When language becomes a bare instrument of lies, the pursuit of truth, which is a natural human need, becomes completely meaningless. When an individual is expelled from this state then democracy, as a form of governance established on the freedom of choice, sinks into a state of anti-system. Therefore, spin is a deadly virus in the bloodstream of Western liberal values.

## 2.

Spin is not an incidental lie that emerges in the complex information system of a democratic society as an immoral act. Spin goes beyond

systematic production of untruths, which is characterized in the European cultural space by the concept of *disinformation* (Volkoff, 2001), defined as “the deliberate circulation of false information intended to deceive and mislead” (*Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* 1972) or “the use of information techniques, especially for informing the general public, with the aim of deceiving, concealing, or distorting facts.” (French dictionary *Le Grand Robert*)

French political writer Vladimir Volkoff, whose well-known work *Petite histoire de la désinformation* (1998), translated in Serbia as *Disinformation*, persistently examines the fact that “information itself is perishable goods”, and emphasizes that “we must be aware that anyone who has the ability to manipulate public opinion is tempted to turn approximate truth into shameless falsehood.” (Volkoff, 2001: 19) In society with increasingly diluted morals, this temptation is transformed into an acceptable act that is explained without ethical dilemmas. “I remember lunch, in 1982, if I’m not mistaken, during which the late Professor Pierre Debray-Ritzen, Jean Ferré, and I worked out word by word the following definition: ‘A technique that allows someone to provide general false information and thereby induce collective actions or the dissemination of opinions and conclusions desired by disinformants’” (Volkoff, 2001: 21) And Volkoff, who found that the term disinformation itself came from the Soviet Union after World War II, and what “denoted a practice used exclusively by capitalists to oppress and hold broad masses or general public under their thumb” (Volkoff, 2001: 20), he concluded that disinformation techniques “have become a true philosophy in the meantime”.

Then spin, as a product of the liberal Anglo-Saxon communication culture, is the legitimate child of another (already mentioned in the first chapter) philosophical trend. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, philosophical currents gave birth to pragmatism. The name was given by Charles Sanders Peirce, but only the work of William James *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907) marked the founding of the school that grafted onto English utilitarianism. James dedicated his book: “To the Memory of John Stuart Mill from whom I first learned the pragmatic openness of mind and whom my fancy likes to picture as our leader were he alive to-day.” As a product ultimately of the American mind, “pragmatism primarily appears as a method of solving the daily difficulties in which American cultural and social life has become entangled.” (Nedeljković, 1991: 259) For pragmatists, *the truth is* “only the expedient in the way of our thinking” and “truth is one kind of good, and not, as it is usually supposed to be a category distinct from good... And can we then keep the notion of what is better for us, and what is true for us, permanently

apart? Pragmatism says no, and I fully agree with it.” (James, 1991: 49-50). Bertrand Russell, “who spent a lot of time sitting in British prisons because of his socialism and pacifism, said that militant pragmatism was just ‘American commercialism’ and that was pretty well true.” (Nedeljković, 1991: 262)

James himself explicitly stated that “truth lives, in fact, for the most part on a credit system. Our thoughts and beliefs ‘pass’, until something opposes them, just as banknotes pass until someone refuses to accept them.” He claimed that truths are liable to “direct face-to-face verifications somewhere, without which the fabric of truth collapses like a financial system with no cash-basis whatever. You accept my verification of one thing, I accept yours of another. We trade on each other’s truth.” (James, 1991: 120)

The theoretical strive for pragmatism to “appear as a great reconciler of metaphysicians and anti-metaphysicians, irrationalists and rationalists, theists and atheists, materialists and idealists” did not bring any synthesis, not even eclectic summation, “but rather a shift of the problematics into a completely new dimension, into the realm of practical and successful”. (Grlić, 1983: 195) And what this means in real life can be seen clearly from the observation of James’s successor in the prestigious philosophy department at Harvard University, Ralph Barton Perry who, after the First World War, during the tumultuous twenties of the last century, stated that “the great world-historical division between the privileged and the unprivileged, and the growing power and assertiveness of the workers have turned attention to internal problems and caused a powerful rise in national conservatism, in America as elsewhere. And not by chance, this widely influential representative of American democracy begins his article on American consciousness by emphasizing and exalting the case of Hanson as the purest example of Americanism. “Mr. Ole Hanson, Mayor of Seattle (and Washington, noted by S.R.) has recently become” wrote Perry “a kind of national hero because of what he did in an energetic and completely American way.” (Nedeljković, 1991: 261-262)

How should we treat those who refuse to *belong heart and soul to the New Age*? “Some ideals are universal: to be honest, gracious, not to get drunk too much. But there are two principles developed by today’s America that are its own, namely: *Commercial Art* and *Practical Sense*”, written in the 1930s by American Nobel Laureate Harry Sinclair Lewis in the famous satirical work *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*. The new trade departs from reality. It does not sell good merchandise but enchanting illusions. “The grocery customer will often prefer a second-rate apple in a handsome wrapper to a first-rate one carelessly bundled in plain tissues paper. A motorist will stand for pretty bad gasoline if the gas station

employees wear handsome uniforms, greet the customer respectfully, and wipe off his windshield for free.” (Sinclair: 147) And a “practical sense”, when it comes down from philosophy to life, becomes the measure of all things. So, for Christmas presents ““what used to be a lot of unnecessary gifts for Christmas—like books, etchings, etc.—what is bought now? First of all,” Sinclair writes “there are many... suggestions for auto accessories... namely, tyre chains, tyre locks, radiator shutters, moto-meters, various antifreeze mixtures done up in handsome holly-decorated cans especially for Christmas” (Sinclair: 151), or something more romantic. A woman writes to her lover: “And Christmas is almost here. Perhaps you are thinking of a gift for me... Yet no greater jewel will I ever crave than that of your perfect companionship; nor gift would I ask more royal than the honesty of your own heart. Let your gift to me be something intimate... And I ask you... let it be practical... A place of beauty and fragrance... Something I have always longed for—that every woman has longed for. Something a girl would so gladly have from her sweetheart... or her husband... *A CEDAR CHEST*. Then the advertisement goes on to show pictures of the manufacturer’s line of cedar chests.” (Sinclair, 152-153)

### 3.

Even World War I allowed pragmatic America to “crush” the internal rebellion of Ralph Barton Perry, to impose itself as a world power when it entered the war in 1917 and brought “order” to the exhausted and devastated Europe, once and for all to dispel the illusions about democracy. The technique used to bring American citizens into the war was more than disinformation, although it was not yet called spin. Really, not many public relations agencies already existed. PR is the infrastructure of spin. And just as it was cynical for the people of the AT&T Corporation, who in 1903 aimed to persuade citizens to consume their goods and services and increase profits, designated their Boston Publicity Bureau (the first established bureau of a major organization for what would be called PR) to “educate the public”, so George Creel would definitely establish cynicism and hypocrisy as a part of that business, impertinently calling his committee the “House of Truth” whose goal was to take Americans to World War I. And there was not the slightest doubt that everything was used to ensure that the “House of Truth” [from its official establishment on April 14, 1917 by Executive Order no. 2594] produced endless rivers of half-truths, conscious omissions, clear threats, patriotism-shaped subversions, projected hatred. All available capacities of the “independent” press, all potentials of the emerging advertising industry, university knowledge, secret services, the Hollywood

“motion picture” industry, big business, small businessmen; acting skills and theatrical knowledge were used to create a fantastic network of hundreds of thousands of *Four-Minute Men* speeches that were tailored for an ordinary, respected man in his community to pose the toughest questions to his fellow citizens and provide “convincing,” well-thought-out answers in just 4 minutes, as theater people knew that a full concentration of listeners lasts for about 4 minutes; artists, photographers, writers, informants, old and young were engaged, all to produce an instant “new way of thinking”. “Never before in history,” wrote researchers Charles and Mary Beard, “had such a campaign of education been organized; never before had American citizens realized how thoroughly, how irresistibly a modern government could impose its ideas on the whole nation.” (Ewen, 1996: 119)

And the war was “sold” to the Americans. Many members of the committee, named after its leader George Creel, have made progress in American public life. Creel’s work became a “new force” of society. “The evil spirit”, as believers in democracy would say, came out of the bottle and the “preoccupation with the need to adjust public relations and the search for techniques on how to achieve this adjustment were also transferred to the post-war period,” as Stuart Ewen would conclude in his work *A Social History of Spin*. “Education about war” brought “mix of sensibilities—a greater friendliness toward big business and increased attention to the importance of molding public opinion—animated the lives of a growing class of American intellectuals as they moved from war service back into civilian life.” (Ewen, 1996: 126)

#### 4.

Truth be told, it must be stated here that, regardless—or perhaps because of it!—of the fact that “American practical philosophy” knows that “truth is nothing more than success, that truth is whatever individually, particularly, and generally succeeds”, and that the measure of “American consciousness” and “Americanism” is the principle that “success is the only proof of everything, ability, truth, objectivity, reality” (Nedeljković, 1991: 250)—American humanistic science was not able to create the scientific foundations for a great revolution. But non-pragmatic Europe—which has been “suffocating” under the obligations of centuries of thinking and abhorred the banality of techniques—was creating new knowledge. Among American intellectual circles at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two Frenchmen were very popular: Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde. Le Bon’s study *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (French: *Psychologie des Foules*; literally: *Psychology of Crowds*) (Translator’s note)



(1985) was read as a handbook for working with the masses in America. American President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) constantly kept this small book within arm's reach and greatly desired to meet the author. His wish came true in June 1914.

Le Bon foretold that “while all our ancient beliefs are tottering and disappearing, while the old pillars of society are giving way one by one, *the power of the crowd* is the only force that nothing menaces, and of which the prestige is continually on the increase. The age we are about to enter will in truth be *the era of crowds*.” (Le Bon, 1896: 9) The force of the crowd is blind, and someone must lead and direct it, someone who will understand its nature, which can be done if it is known. The crowd is intellectually inferior and seeking for—individuals, leaders, groups. The crowd is to be directed. “Astonishment is felt at times on reading certain speeches at their weakness, and yet they had an enormous influence on the crowds which listened to them, but it is forgotten that they were intended to persuade collectivities... An orator in intimate communication with a crowd can evoke images by which it will be seduced. If he is successful his object has been attained, and twenty volumes of harangues—always the outcome of reflection—are not worth the few phrases which appealed to the brains it was required to ‘convince’” (Le Bon, 1896: 69) Le Bon showed the limitations of the power of reason and the unsuspected power of hidden forces, the imagination that needs to be discovered. He drew attention to the image. When addressing the masses, images are more powerful than words. It creates stronger associations. “The images evoked in their mind by a personage, an event, an accident, are almost *as lifelike as the reality*.” (Le Bon, 1896: 69, *italic* S.R.) For those who will engage in PR work, it is crucial: “To know the art of impressing the imagination of crowds is to know at the same time the art of governing them.” (Le Bon, 1896: 74)

Gabriel Tarde, a kind of self-taught provincial sociologist, gained importance over time. For our purposes, we will consider the insight of Marko Marković, Ph.D. from the French Sorbonne University. Responding to the question of the Western “media onslaught” against “democratic” nations, PhD Marković asked the interviewer: “Who do you think triumphed among the great sociologists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?... Some would say that it was Marx. You may think of one of his critics.” These initial associations are difficult to refute, but PhD Marković said: “No. The winner was the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904) ... He studied imitation and social mimicry. Initially, imitation was a mostly positive concept for him. A child develops through imitation. And the wider the circle of people around him, the greater the number of examples to imitate, the healthier and more successful the imitation. Of course, imitation must be subject to control and guidance until

maturity.” However, Tarde would realize that collective imitations can be misused. The main instrument of this, according to Tarde, is “the role of the press in social life and its impact on the masses”. He understood “its great power that had to constantly grow”, its ability to create “one enormous, abstract and sovereign crowd,” which he would call “public opinion”. (Marković, 1994: 9)

Tarde distinguished between “the audience” and “the crowd” in the *Opinion of Crowds* and firmly argued: “Unfortunately, all collectives are alike in one thing: their sad propensity to be inflamed by envy and hatred. For crowds, the need for hatred corresponds to the need for action. Enthusiasm does not take them far; but giving them an object of hatred means opening the way to their essentially destructive action.” PhD Marković explains that “Tarde knew that the power of the press could inflame the ‘audience’ of one newspaper, turning it into a crowd: ‘To discover or invent a new object of hatred intended for the public is one of the safest means for a man to enter the ranks of journalism kings. In no country, in no period, has apology been as successful as slander.’” (Marković, 1994: 9)

Once it was established that Le Bon and Tarde’s “laws of the crowd” were accurate and useful insights into the essence of the public, and when the means of controlling and directing the energy of the masses were discovered, the *elite* would never abandon this weapon, and democracy would constantly lose its fundamental meaning. Its principles, freedom, attractiveness would become—tools of manipulation.

## 5.

The magical impact of the press, as “the mother of all revolutions,” was on the masses said Victor Hugo. Before the French Revolution, newspapers were popping up like mushrooms after rain. They were read in all layers of society, and even minimal literacy was sufficient. “There was an explosion of new publications, with at least 250 newspapers founded in the last six months of 1789. Different papers targeted different audiences, including peasants [to whom *La Feuille villageoise* was addressed]. These informative bulletins were often small, but the *Gazette nationale* supported the large format of English newspapers ... Jeremy Popkin said...that the daily press was ‘indispensable legitimizing the new legislation of the Revolution by bringing the process to the public.’” (Briggs, Burke, 2006: 138-139).

The press injected “the magic” into words like *liberty, justice, fraternity, equality, nation, state, citizen*<sup>2</sup> when they were used in verbal

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<sup>2</sup> In French: *Liberté, fraternité, nation, patrie, peuple and citoyen* (Translator’s note)

communication—“a time of vigorous debate, speeches were held in the National Assembly and in political clubs, which were open in Paris and other cities”, and then it spilled over into the masses where “rumors became even more important than usual when a new series of dramatic events occurred”. (Briggs, Burke, 2006: 139) Writers of *A Social History of the Media*, Asa Briggs and Peter Burke stated that “the Revolution can be described as a long-lasting political theater, often ‘dark’ due to public executions of Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette and later of leading revolutionaries such as Danton and Robespierre, which were its most dramatic scenes. Public celebrations were also held in Paris (especially in the large open space of the Champ-de-Mars) or in the provinces: the Festival of the Federation, for instance, or celebrations of the sovereignty of the people, the Supreme Being, and Reason. The painter David was the conceptual creator and choreographer of some of these celebrations. Their large scale (viewed from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they resemble the Nuremberg Rally or May Day parades in the USSR) expressed the new democratic values of the time, as thousands of people were allowed to participate... The conscious use of media in changing attitudes can be described as propaganda.” (Briggs, Burke, 2006: 140-141)

This kind of social impact in the modern era, although secular and anti-ecclesiastical in many aspects, was adopted from the activities of the Roman Catholic Church which systematically dealt with “the propagation of Christianity”. The term took on negative connotations in the Protestant movement because these techniques of the Catholic Church were seen as hostile actions by them. “During the French Revolution, the term was adapted to politics. The revolutionary journalist Camille Desmoulins (1760-1794), for instance, compared ‘the spread of patriotism’ with that of Christianity, while the royalists in exile denounced the ‘propaganda’ of the Revolution. The new word referred to a new phenomenon. Although the use of images and texts as a means of shaping attitudes has been present in human history for a very long time, self-awareness and the scope of a revolutionary media campaign were something new... French media had a necessary role in both eliminating old and creating new traditions, attempting to create a new political culture without a church or king. It is no coincidence that the phrase *opinion publique*, came into circulation at this time, just like the term ‘propaganda.’ In contrast, the infamous guillotine became part of communication language, whether referring to the machine that printers used to cut the edges of paper or an attempt to end parliamentary debates on a topic. (Briggs, Burke, 2006: 141)

One Frenchman who visited America during the final stages of the American struggle for independence, when he saw how often Thomas Paine’s pamphlet *Common Sense* was reprinted, said: The American

Revolution would never have succeeded without newspapers. In general, it is a fact that in the United States “in 1800, there were 178 weekly and 24 daily newspapers.” (Briggs, Burke, 2006: 138) Otherwise, there were already 42 different newspapers in the American colonies in 1775 and some of them “supported revolutionary attitudes by describing the horrors committed by British soldiers. Over time, they created national political culture (as in England during the Civil War) and participated in creating a new imagined community that defied the British.” (Briggs, Burke, 2006: 137) All of this is part of the usual preparation for social change. Because it’s biblical knowledge: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1, 1-5)

When Russia was shaken by the 1905 Revolution, the hunger for news also elevated the press in a way adapted to the Russian conditions. Newspapers became an important feature of peasants’ life in Russia from 1906 to 1907. Here is an announcement from May 1906: “Literally, there is no village from which the same cry has not been heard: Give us newspapers! According to the statistics department of the Moscow provincial *land* administration, from the responses of 700 informants from 700 villages of the Moscow province, it turns out that newspapers and magazines arrive in 79% of the villages, with 2-3 family editions per village.” The newspapers were read aloud and the entire village listened to the news. Here is the announcement from the newspaper *Zemlja* [*The Earth*] (May 10, 1906): ‘Paul, the peasants of a village in the Yuriev District of Vladimirsky guberniya (province), turned to a literate man who read newspapers to them during the long winter—do not plough, do not mow, just read and tell us the news and we would do everything for you’. Paul also read newspapers during the harvest conveyed their content to his fellow villagers, who thanked and praised him.” (Kara-Murza, 2015: 277) People in revolutionary times await guidance, and in peaceful times, these guides impose themselves on them.

## 6.

Ivy Lee was remembered as a symbolic figure in the PR profession. After a brief journalistic career at the *New York Journal*, the *New York Times* and the *New York World*, he opened a public relations agency in 1904. This is not a “secret press bureau,” he declared. “All our work is done in the open. We aim to *supply news*.” Advertising agencies also supplied news, but Lee did not mean that. It was about specific news related to specific cases. And how did they choose the news that would be *supplied*? Well, by publishing exactly the news that someone

paid to be *supplied*. Despite this minor defect, Lee also explained that they “guaranteed” high level of: *Seriousness, Credibility, Influence!* And promised to “present only topics of real interest, phrased so as to attract the attention of both editors and readers—never sensational, never libelous, always accurate, always trustworthy, always readable”. (Ewen, 1996: 76) So, one spring afternoon in 1914, he was sitting in his office, reading the newspapers and it seemed to him that this would be just another ordinarily quiet day when John D. Rockefeller walked in. But why would Mr. Rockefeller be concerned with *supplying* news?

John D. Rockefeller and his Standard Oil caused “one of the most dramatic conflicts between capital and labor in history” on April 20, 1914. Police, who were sent to “reason with” the strikers who had been fighting for a dollar more in a pitiful tent colony in Ludlow, Colorado, since September 1913, killed three women and eleven children of miners on Easter 1914. “In the holes dug to protect the unfortunate from rifle fire, women and children perished like rats in a trap set on fire,” described “the Ludlow Massacre” in the *New York Times* on April 21, 1914.

As is often the case with conflicts between nameless paupers and the most powerful people—for whom the capitalist state is like a coordinator for carrying out their historical mission—the US Commission on Industrial Relations immediately began its session. John D. Rockefeller Jr. “denied any involvement in this event”: “There was no massacre in Ludlow. The conflict began as a panicked battle for life by two small units of the militia against the entire tent colony...” “A whole century later, the world will be faced with such scenes—unarmed police protecting the sanctities of “law and property” and poorly armed poor people who, in reality, have nothing to eat: that’s what happened according to Rockefeller, and according to the logic of these scenarios, “well-paid agitators sent by the union” got involved. The logic of democracy of the rich is that every organization, except theirs, is suspicious and any payment not coming from them is the work of conspirators and enemies of the system. In order to keep this anti-common sense paradigm in society and to prevent the story of a specific massacre from disturbing the people, the richest man turned to the owner of a “news engineering” agency because, at that time, these masters who created “different reality” had not been called PR consultants yet.

Regarding the “Ludlow Massacre”, Lee immediately began burying the newspapers with a series of circulars entitled *Facts Relating to the Colorado Strike for Industrial Freedom*. From June to September, every four to seven days, “truths about the case” were sent to ministers, editors, teachers, businessmen, and others. One of the pieces of evidence was a press clipping that unequivocally proved that the “editorial sentiment” of the newspapers in Colorado was mostly against the strikers.

“The only fact neglected in the report is that the editors who were the subject of the investigation all worked for newspapers that were controlled by coal companies”. (Ewen, 1996: 79) It was also “factually” stated that union activist Mother Jones, an 82-year-old woman, was a “prostitute who ran a brothel”. (“Never sensationalistic, never libelous, always serious, always truthful, always readable.”)

Ivy Lee then “found” a pattern that would become a classic tool in this business. The tool of all time. “Another bulletin offered an authentically couched report from Helen Grenfell, identified simply as the ‘Vice-president of the Colorado Law and Order League’”. And her contribution convincingly proved that the shooting in Ludlow was initiated by the strikers and that the bullets fired at their tents were a mere incident. However, “the report did not mention that Grenfell was not, in fact, a witness to the events in Ludlow and that she was the wife of an official with the railroad whose company profited from transporting coal in Colorado”. (Ewen, 1996: 76)

Nevertheless, it was an extraordinarily difficult case, so in January 1915, the State Commission on Industrial Relations conducted an investigation, and Ivy Lee got the opportunity to explain his theory of truth in his own words to Commission President Frank P. Walsh.

*Walsh:* Mr. Rockefeller had told you to be sure and get the truth?

*Lee:* Yes.

*Walsh:* How did you go about it?

*Lee:* By the truth, Mr. Chairman, I mean the truth about the operators’ case. What I was to do was to advise and get their case into proper shape for them.

*Walsh:* You got your information entirely from them, then?

*Lee:* Yes.

*Walsh:* When they gave you newspaper clippings purporting to tell certain facts, did you ask them whether they knew they were true?

*Lee:* I did not.

*Walsh:* Did you ask them from what newspapers they were taken?

*Lee:* I really cannot remember. I believe so, Mr. Chairman.

*Walsh:* Did you know that their attorney owned one of the newspapers...?

*Lee:* No...

*Walsh:* You were out there to give the facts, the truth about the strike?

*Lee:* Yes, the truth as the operators saw it. I was there to help them state their case. I was to help them get these facts before the greatest number of people likely to read them.

*Walsh:* What personal effort did you ever make to ascertain that the facts given you by the operators were correct?

*Lee*: None whatever. I had no responsibility for the facts and no duty beyond compiling them and getting them into the best form for publicity work. I took the facts that Mr. Welborn gave me on his word. I have no reason to believe that word was not given in perfectly good faith. (Ewen, 1996: 79-80)

7.

This is indeed the essence of the PR perspective on the matter, but the “father of PR” was a man of greater knowledge and authority. Edward Bernays also liked to connect his work with the work of Walter Lippman, even though they were two different paths. Lippman is one of the greatest names in the history of journalism, not only in America but also an intellectual. Bernays, on the other hand, is a leading “master of manipulation”, a connoisseur of skills. In 1922, Lippman published a classic work *Public Opinion*, and made it clear that in modern society, democracy without manipulation and the “invisible hand” of control is impossible. He provided evidence for eternal dilemmas about whether democratic governance is possible after the Athenian agora at all. He added evidence that, in a more complex world and a more diverse division of labor in late capitalist society, a human being could not use so much information rationally and effectively ... “A citizen cannot form a true public opinion. Public opinion is either created or it is a phantom at the national level—in any case it is not the work of a citizen supplied with knowledge and involved in the broad process of thinking... His sharp criticism shocked many people who disagreed with his arguments—the most famous was the case of John Dewey, who soon published the book *The Public and Its Problems*”. (McAllister, 2012) The Lippman-Dewey polemic is a typical exchange of views in American public opinion within those coordinates, and even today debates continue about which of the two democratic thinkers was right, and who was proven right over time. People mostly trusted Lippman. Because, “before the war (the First World War, noted S.R.) progressive intellectuals had espoused the Enlightenment dictum that humans—at least those from the middle class—were essentially rational and capable of evaluating information and then of making intelligent decisions. In the context of the Committee on Public Information (Creel’s mission, noted S.R.) ‘public opinion’ became something that is set in motion and created; the ‘public opinion’ was now seen as an entity to be manufactured, not just understood.” (Ewen, 1996: 127) And this was precisely what the book published in 1923, titled *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, promoted. The author Edward Bernays, who, like Lippman, had experience with the Committee on Public Information, had just started to

distrust the capabilities of citizens in a democracy, but the intellectual level of this work could not compete with Dewey's alluring thought. However, precisely the shortcomings of that book would become its greatest strength.

"Lippman treated public opinion on a purely theoretical basis. He never came down to do anything to change it. He spoke as a sociologist discussing the caste system ... abstractly. And I was surprised by that. Because he was a journalist". (Ewen, 1996:159), Bernays would say many years later when he had already been proclaimed the 'father of PR.' While Lippman was "dying in the beauty of writing" and delivering brilliant discussions to the public, Bernays embarked on the production of (semi) manuals such as *Crystallizing Public Opinion* or *Propaganda*, as titled in his other work. Freud's nephew, who would rush to Uncle Zigy's in Vienna with a box of top-notch Cuban cigars if he needed help, explained the difference between advertising and PR. To illustrate this, he took bacon for example—to enhance the sale of bacon. (Ewen, 1996: 165) Old-style advertising agencies would shout at the top of their lungs, encouraging consumers to 'eat more bacon'. Eat more bacon because it is cheaper, tasty, and provides reserves of energy for hard work. However, according to Bernays, the effect is short-term and weak. As soon as the advertisement is withdrawn, the customer forgets it because he/she is occupied with new advertisements. The one who knows to use "the principles of mass psychology" will approach the human subconscious. How? The modern publicists will pay doctors whom people trust to explain to their patients that it is "wholesome to eat bacon" and the quality of bacon is of little importance, because "a mathematical certainty will show that large numbers of persons will follow the advice of their doctors", because someone who does all this understands the psychological relation of dependence of men upon their doctors". (Ewen, 1996: 165) Therefore, they are not selling goods, but the credibility of authority that is the base of society's trust in important values.

## 8.

When in the 1950s the novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* by Sloan Wilson appeared—a bestseller sold in two million copies, and in 1956, a movie with Gregory Peck was made—America still felt the fear of so-called *of popularization* (as it was then called PR and advertising). PR wizard Ralf Hopkins, "a man whose influence is felt in almost every home in America, every home which has a radio or television set; this is a man who without ever seeking personal fame has been behind almost every *public-service* advertising campaign which has taken place in the past twenty years" (Wilson, 1959: 293), was ready to create his successor



from a talented thirty-year-old, but he refused it for the sake of his principles. Today, it looks like a fairy tale: *Once Upon a Time...*

Tom Rath is indeed in a feverish search for money—to change the house, to provide for his children’s education—but war heroes, even in chaotic peace, cannot abandon their moral compass and soul. That money is neither the most important nor all-powerful, they have been taught in the harshest schools where life itself has no price. A man who had to kill an eighteen-year-old man in German uniform to get his fur coat and thus save his own life, could not easily embrace the moral code of the “man in gray flannel suit”. “I really don’t know what I was looking for when I got back from the war, but it seemed as though all I could see was a lot of bright young men in gray flannel suits rushing around New York in a frantic parade to nowhere. They seemed to me to be pursuing neither ideals nor happiness — they were pursuing a routine. For a long while I thought I was on the sidelines watching the parade, and it was quite a shock to glance down and see that I too was wearing a gray flannel suit.” (Wilson, 1959:367)

When he decided to start working at the Federal Radio Association (TV was still in its infancy) for a better salary, he stumbled upon the “Mental Hygiene” project. “Do you know that more hospital beds are occupied by the mentally ill than by all the cancer, heart, and polio patients put together?” (Wilson, 1959:60), Hopkins told him, knowing this was the right opportunity. And PR operation could begin. “Good Lord, he thought, are they going to sell mental hygiene like cigarettes?” (Wilson, 1959: 246), wondered naive Tom Rath in front of the Congress of Physicians in Atlantic City. Ironically, PR wizard obtained approval for that project with a speech full of genuine and naive hope, which Tom had just written.

PR is a large-scale operation. Spin must flow naturally like sea waves on a sandy beach. To achieve this, you need the right people first, a guarantee that the job is of unquestionable credibility. The more socially harmful the job, the greater the guarantee must be. “Begin by asking about a dozen people to form an Exploratory Committee”, Hopkins ordered. “Choose the people we’ll eventually want as trustees. For labor, Bill Krisky. For a Catholic, Fred Bellows. For a Jew, Abraham Goldberg. For a liberal, Mary Harkins. For a hard-shelled businessman, I’ll do. For a Democrat, Pete Cronin. For a Republican, Nat Higgins.”

- “How many is that?”
- “Seven,” Tom said. He was taking notes furiously.
- “All right. For a Negro, Herbert Shiw. For radio and television, I’ll do. Sam Peterson for newspapers. Ted Bailey for mass circulation magazines. We should have an intellectual! Make it Harold Norton, up at Harvard.”
- “That’s eleven,” Tom said.

- “What are we missing? Oh, somebody from the movies. Ross Pattern.”

The Committee would meet at the Hotel Waldorf—Astoria. What is missing? Expertise! And “Now an advisory medical panel. Make it seven members. The heads of all the major medical associations and fill up the rest of it with the best psychiatrists—make sure you don’t get the crackpots.” (Wilson, 1959: 298) Crackpots cannot immediately understand what is being discussed and they are unpredictable. Once you secure yourself against them, you can start “selling” mental hygiene.

While preparing for a therapy, ordinary America seems normal: still, it is 2:1 (that is, the ratio from the novel) in favor of opening a new public school despite the anti-campaign of landowners; in this America, judges still cared for the survival of endangered marriages with undisguised affection; that America, without false horror and with respect, faced the war crimes of its soldiers, who, if the rules in the PR-world devised “joint criminal enterprises” applied to their show-down with the Germans and the Japanese, would have taken all the famous generals and strategists to the dock in Nuremberg, for example, where they would have received longer sentences than General Krstić or General Lazarević in The Hague, and even good old Roosevelt, despite his illness, could have ended up like Slobodan Milošević.

In America, where the Government is a PR project, the people are infected with PR truth, and judges follow PR law, all of this sounds like a bitter joke. Because the first among those in the “gray flannel suit” had a diagnosis (from the same doctors with whom he developed “mental hygiene” for America): it is about “severe feeling of guilt and that his constant desire for work was simply an effort to punish and perhaps kill himself. The guilt complex was probably based on a fear of homosexuality, psychoanalyst had said.” (Wilson, 1959: 213) And when an American warrior so bewildered by the peace of America, a paratrooper who killed seventeen people—including his best war friend by mistake and sired an illegitimate son in the grim suburbs of Rome in 1944—despite all this, he refused an offer that one doesn’t refuse, to prepare to lead a “new campaign”, the PR wizard suddenly turned and faced him. “Somebody has to do the big jobs!” he said passionately. “This world was built by men like me! To really do a job, you have to live it, body and soul! You people, who just give half your mind to your work, are riding on our backs!”

“I know it,” Tom said. (Wilson, 1959: 342)

Thus the victory of the warriors turned into Pyrrhic victory.<sup>3</sup> Four decades later, James Twitchell, who also read *The Man in the Gray*

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<sup>3</sup> A *Pyrrhic victory* is a victory in which the person who wins suffers so much that the victory was hardly worth winning. (Translator’s note)

*Flannel Suit*, would write... “Quite the reverse—this view of public relations and advertising has created an even greater desire for me to be a part of it. If Madison Avenue really works as these authors have claimed, and then this is exactly the place for me.” (Twitchell, 1995: xi) The civilization of “gray flannel suit” could not be stopped by moral principles and concern for society. Warriors who knew the horrors in which PR drugs could only dull the pain but not eliminate it were erased from the memory of generations that the PR industry had prepared to “think only about the future.” The PR civilization has permeated the continent and the world. Is the path to a new war open?

9.

Edward Bernays found the best description of the spirit of PR in Napoleon’s words: “Circumstance? I make circumstances!” (Ewen, 1996: 167) PR advisors correctly understood “the spirit of the times” when it became clear that the envisioned ideal of an “informed citizen” had already been enshrined in the mausoleum of democratic dreams, and that citizens could only consume pre-digested information turned into news, spiced up, tailored, sewn, patched, and packaged. Reality, if raw information is considered as such, had already been subjectivized and interpreted. On this topic, Lippman wrote unforgettable pages in *Public Opinion*. It was time for Bernays to finally remember to extract news from *reality*: they were already “simplified and dramatized”, directed by the publisher’s thought to “influence instincts”, so a skilled man with certain interests and knowledge concluded that *the news* could only be created tied to his *own ideas*. Such news, unrelated to reality, would be no less convincing. “In order to appeal to the instincts and fundamental emotions of the public... the public relations advisor must create news around his ideas... He must emancipate ideas and develop them into events that will be immediately understood and can attract attention just like the news itself.” (Bernays, 1923:171)

How to explain the motive and horizon of a man who understands that the time has come for total social engineering? Professor Marvin N. Olasky, after talking to Bernays, claimed that this was his view on religion. “Bernays’ fundamental faith is a lack of faith in God,” Olasky explained. “He saw what he called in our interview ‘a world without God’ rapidly descending into social chaos. Therefore, he argued that the social manipulations of public opinion advisors were justified as long as human creations could affirm skillful social control and ensure society’s salvation... Management behind the scenes is necessary, not only for personal gain but also for the salvation of society.” (Tye, 2002: 98) And when a person becomes God, then he does not have to adhere

to God's order of things, but can establish his "divine" order uncontrollably. Bernays "promoted cigarettes, which he suspected were deadly, at the same time he was promoting national health insurance." (Tye, 2002: 98) For the needs of his client, the *United Fruit Company*, he endeared bananas to Americans, explaining how healthy they were, but when the producers of healthy fruit in Guatemala chose a left-wing government for themselves to have a better life, he led a war campaign in which "Jacobo Arbenz Guzman was demonized, as Saddam Hussein would be half a century later so that American opinion would believe that it was a war against tyranny. The real gain of that ruthlessly led policy (it was) – the *United Fruit Company*, whose banana -republic was threatened by the new left-wing government of Guatemala". (Tye, 2002: viii) When there is no God, perhaps it is normal that people are no longer brothers, that morality is "in the mud", that the Truth is the shadow of a long-deceased beautiful girl, and Justice is a blind woman whom we have secretly pitied for centuries. Democracy is part of the business policy of large corporations. Indeed, one of Bernays' contemporaries (Nikolai Berdyaev) called it "Satanocracy", but he came from the East.

Democratic society is a "controlled chaos" and the best controller for it (and citizens must be happy to receive the "best one") is the "invisible", "soft" hand of an engineer that Đuro Šušnjić would describe as "fishermen of human souls" (Šušnjić, 2011). For Bernays, propaganda is one of the most important social activities. He wrote that "the only difference between 'propaganda' and 'education', in fact, is the point of view. The explanation that we believe in education. The explanation that we do not believe in propaganda". (Tye, 2002: 97). Thus, the rooted world in which public relations managers, advertising strategists, and architects of calculated spectacles rapidly produce concepts of public discourse and then entire episodes of history.

## 10.

Although the (increasingly) powerful PR community may spend a lot of money to present their greatest skills and themselves as an honest little girl who only passed by a brothel once, the result will not be that great. The following is a confession of an important writer of a *successful Bible of public relations*: "Citizens quite often find in media reports the terms 'PR', 'public relations' and 'flak' when it comes to oil spills, toxic leaks, corruption in city councils, dirty political games, and the like. Media rarely links public relations with positive stories about organizations and their achievements". (Cutlip, Center, Broom, 2006: 32) Weak human beings must accept many Big Lies, but they cannot yet celebrate "liars". While they spend their bonuses after successful

“operations’, the rest of the citizens are desperately grasping at straws. “Books like *PR! A Social History of Spin* and *Toxic Sludge is Good for You*, in the name of clients and objectives of questionable value, provide selective post hoc analyses of the activities of public relations agents. There is little demand for books that talk about the well-done job of public relations professionals, in the name of clients and objectives that deserve public support”. (Cutlip, Center, Broom, 2006: 32)

However, the PR business has succeeded in separating one of the most successful PR managers of the last century from itself with a sharp cut on a global scale. When foreign correspondent of the Hearst newspapers, Karl von Wiegand visited Joseph Goebbels in 1933, he saw Bernays’ *Crystallizing Public Opinion* in his library. Bernays “established principles, practices and ethics of the new profession” in that book. (Tye, 2002: 111) Goebbels, as an extraordinary eclectic, combined Russian revolutionary and American propaganda. For a man who read Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy ‘obsessively’ and who considered himself a revolutionary eager to destroy what had destroyed him, the appearance of Sergei Eisenstein’s film *October* (1927) in Berlin’s cinemas was just another great lesson: “So, this is a revolution. Much can be learned from the Bolsheviks, especially in propaganda... But ingenious artistic solutions can be ineffective... even counterproductive, but it is not engaged and brought under total control. Goebbels’ genius (“the evil one” as it is said, the author’s comment) could not overlook that the solution had already been found: American advertising. Goebbels had the best of that world as a role model: Coca-Cola! From the manufacturers of non-alcoholic beverages in Atlanta [he learned] that advertising must permeate all areas of life, that it must be total.” (Reljić, 2011: 87) Nevertheless, after 1945 only he was credited with repeating a lie a hundred times to turn it into the truth.

“While scientists are still debating to what extent the Nazis used Bernays’ works, there is no doubt that Goebbels used almost identical techniques to those used by Bernays.” (Tye, 2002: 111) It was an attack on the subconscious. Wilhelm Reich, a psychoanalyst with experience working in working-class environments in the 1930s in the war for human souls against Goebbels, wrote that “practice teaches us that the masses of these ‘non-political’ people can hardly be induced to listen, but they will slowly be led to mystical phrases of a national socialist who will not talk too much about economic interests”. Reich saw in Nazi propaganda the use of “means of loyalty and mysticism, that is, sexual libido means” by which trust is gained, “not because the National Socialist program impresses him more than the Communist one, but because in the leader’s lecture and his ideology, he experiences a momentary relaxation of constant inner tension because he can thus translate

his conflict into another form and thus resolve it, even making him see a Communist in the fascist, a German Lenin in Hitler.” (Reich, 1981: 210, italics S. R.)

American advertising also uses “frequent repetition of the same pattern,” as Erich Fromm will remind us. These approaches are irrational in every propaganda. When politicians ‘sell’ themselves to voters as Reich described—then Fromm, who set himself the task of describing the “causes of the fascization” of some societies in Europe, can conclude: “Like the effect of advertising upon the customer leads to the feeling of surrender”, and the methods of political propaganda “tend to increase the feeling of insignificance of the individual voter”. It seems that “the clear and rational appeals to his thinking are rather the exception than the rule in political propaganda—even in democratic countries”. (Fromm, 1969: 126)

When manipulation techniques are produced, in a moral framework and with “faith in God,” they can be used for the worst things, and when stripped and carried as limitations only by the power of the user, it is difficult to imagine the extent of inhumanity. “Cleverly using Jews as scapegoats and Hitler as the embodiment of justice, manipulating media about the Nazis’ success on the battlefield and concealing extermination campaigns; [Goebbels] spread unprecedented power of propaganda in the state, just as Bernays advised in *Crystallizing Public Opinion*”. (Tye, 2002: 111) Edward Bernays, who knew how to answer and explain everything, did not engage in a debate on this issue. It was only in his autobiography in 1965 that he admitted that he “was ‘shocked’ to see his book on Goebbels’ shelf. But I knew that any human activity can be used for the benefit of society or abused against it. Obviously the attack on the Jews in Germany was not an emotional outburst of the Nazis, but a deliberate, planned campaign.” And Edward Bernays was inadvertently pulled into it.” (Tye, 2002: 111)

Even Bernays’ older colleague, Ivy Lee, who had already published that *Declaration of Principles* for the ‘new profession’ in 1906, a personal adviser to John Rockefeller Younger, was ‘involved’ Goebbels’ system. He worked for I.G. Farben which was again closely connected to Standard Oil through major contracts. As it was carefully written in that Bible of ‘successful public relations’, Ivy Lee “advised the cartel after Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany and the Nazis took control. Headlines in the press at that time made a sensation of his work—‘LEE ADVISES NAZIS’ and ‘LEE PRESENTS HIMSELF AS HITLER’S PRESS AGENT’. Although he did not receive money directly from the Nazi government, Lee had been receiving an annual fee of \$25,000 plus expenses (a large sum at that time) from IG Farben since the beginning of his engagement in 1933, until the company terminated the contract

immediately after his death in 1934.” (Cutlip, Center, Broom, 2006: 115) However, an old Lee was a man stuck in the past. He held himself as a being who still feared ‘God’s punishment’ a bit. Due to the fact that “when journalists in Baden (Germany), after the news of his work with IG Farben was published, reached out to him, he withdrew into himself and refused to issue a statement.” (Cutlip, Center, Broom, 2006: 115) Moral of his successors, of course, would never allow a PR manager to admit a mistake and not to mention blame. There is no such resource that should not be used. No intellectual responsibility can appear as a limit. The only limit is the budget that the agency has at its disposal.

## 11.

Spin is a total manipulation in a society where “God is dead” (Nietzsche), which tolerates democracy as a necessary evil (Bernays, 1928) and where Being has come to face the ultimate option: “There is only one truly serious philosophical problem—suicide. Deciding whether or not life is worth living is to answer the fundamental question in philosophy”. (Camus, 1989: 15) The modern totality of manipulation reaches the proportions of a propaganda addiction. Jacques Ellul noted that the ‘sobering up’ of German society in 1945, directly ‘detoxed’ from strong Goebbels propaganda, was painful and dramatic. Americans faced the same feeling after being exposed to propaganda doses from Bernays and society during the war, and after victory was declared (Ellul, 1965). “The lie in politics” (Arendt, 1994) is manufactured in constant doses, arriving at every place at all times. “Consensus engineering” for the preservation of social *status quo* directs the development of modern technologies as well. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, man has abandoned his desire to explore space. The project of this era is to “be digital”; the “intellectual act” is a “tweet”; the main party and the most active social life is on “Facebook”. Cultivated speech is rapidly retreating before an increasingly raw image. The magic word is “the image”. In the most massive written communication, justified by speed, grammatical structures, capital letters, and logically precise messages disappear. In the communication of contemporary beings, the universal abbreviation “OK” reigns.

Zamyatin’s idea of a blind force on behalf of which executive power implements technology has descended to Earth. Orwell’s cry in front of the iron curtain of Newspeak, the Western spin industry pushed the East in the 1950s (and this was probably the largest spin action ever, greater than the Berlin Wall, Iraq, FRY) so now some groups of marginalized experts who have retained the memory that in these societies once lived strange irrational beings called “intellectuals”—would whisper

that Eric Arthur Blair (Orwell's real name) did not refer only to the Soviet Union. Today, it is clear that the mind that invented *collateral damage* far surpasses Stalin's achievements, which, of course, is not surprising—this society is led by *progressivism*. "I make progress every day in every way," (Kusturica) on the road that my pragmatic and immoral thought has taken me. *Progress* does not tolerate lagging behind in anything.

"Human progress down to the seventeenth century was natural and spontaneous and was in no sense the result of any collective effort to realize a conscious goal of racial and cultural advancement" (Barnes I, 1982:65). And later "more than 99 per cent of man's existence upon the planet" science and rationalism between 1500 and 1800 "changed the stream of consciousness" and the goal is not the sky, but it is taken from 'other worlds' that were not available for alive man. "The ancient Jews, who adhered to the doctrine of man's 'Fall', logically believed that perfection was to be found in the past rather than to be sought in the future. should be sought in the past and not in the future. Classical writers in a sense had similar beliefs. They adhered to the dogma of descending from the golden age. Among the Greeks and Romans, the concept of the cyclical nature of human development was even more widespread. Culture would rise to a certain level and then decline to roughly the same level that existed at the beginning. Then the process would start again, the circular movement would repeat itself. Christians adopted the Jewish concept of man's 'fall,' combining it with the pagan view of descending from the golden age... The state of bliss will be reached only in the world on earth. The Last Judgement and the end of things earthly was, according to the Christian view as stated in the Book of Revelation, to be preceded by unusually horrible and devastating earthly occurrences." (Barnes I, 1982: 65)

The world of progress, cynically, was raised on the Renaissance revival of great achievements, primarily of Greek and Roman culture. And the Enlightenment is, in fact, the center or the node of the New Age. And whatever the consequences of that consciousness—even two world wars—there was enough enlightened arrogance and the inertia of civilization to focus on the "bright future" that arises from that fall. Spin is the soul of that progress.

*Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer, Adorno 1989) is a warning message that has only reached intellectual levels. Although the citizens of the New Age knew very little about Francis Bacon or Descartes, they united "in decrying the authority of the past. Bacon had contended that the moderns were superior to the ancients and suggested that utopia might be secured through applying science to human problems". (Barnes I, 1982: 65) Nevertheless, the problem with the idea of progress is that,



since there is no higher authority and it does not hold to examples from the past, it cannot formally separate 'good' from 'evil', 'justice' from 'injustice', 'truth' from 'lies'. Criteria are established by power relations (which is not historically new), but since there is nothing above Man, no higher being or measure of tradition, then any ruler whose arguments are the strongest forces at that moment can feel like a god and make divine decisions. Thus, in the world of socially legitimized manipulation, the quality of what is called spin is determined by bare power. So what is the difference between Edward Bernays and Joseph Goebbels? The difference is in the fact that the first one was on the side of the winner in 1945.

But the allure of the 'paradise on Earth' project is rapidly fading and the agony of the future is already being felt. It seems that putting on black glasses before the obviousness of the cycle in capitalism cannot solve problems. On the contrary, it only accumulates them. As it had already happened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and for what the solution was the Great War. And what about Timothy Garton Ash's selective memory at the beginning of this text regarding the significance of Orwell's warning? It is a sign that the winner no longer feels as secure as before. And that it is time to include explanations and contraindications in the prescription for spin, a remedy for the quickest healing just until yesterday. In previous prescriptions, this was not present.

Translated from the Serbian by  
*Jovana Stokić*

## **“THE DRAGON” AWARD OF THE MATICA SRPSKA**

MIODRAG RAIČEVIĆ

### **IN MATICA, WITH ZMAJ**

Reverend Father, the honourable Presidency of Matica Srpska, respected Zmaj Award judges, ladies and gentlemen...

Today, on this ceremonious occasion, I am honoured to receive the award named after Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, on the 197<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Matica Srpska, which gives me an immense feeling of satisfaction and, above all, pride. Matica has put its centuries-old stamp on these feelings by singling out my book and awarding it this prize—the most significant among the Serbian people. I am thrilled to be in your midst today, dear brothers and sisters! Kindly overlook my enthusiasm, as I am thoroughly savouring my journey to Novi Sad and my present moment. As a writer familiar with Matica, I am fully conscious of where my soul and heart reside.

Zmaj’s work is of such significance that among all those who finally got their hands on a school desk, there is not a single person who didn’t learn by heart at least one of Zmaj’s poems. I heard his first poem, and the first poem in general, from my father Veliša. It was “The Little Horseman”. Everyone knows it! My father learned it back in elementary school in Sotonići, in Crmnica, the pride of Serbia, as Njegoš says in “The Tower of Đurišić”. I can still hear him today, reciting the poem to my brother Slavko and me before bed. When he would get to that “giddy up” part, he would sway us a little, and we would drift off to sleep.

Later, of course, I also met the sad and serious Zmaj, so to speak. The family tragedy that befell him has no counterpart in Serbian literature.

Despite this, he continued to fulfill the task he had set for himself. But, everyone is more or less familiar with this.

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I was truly astounded by Nikola Tesla's admiration for Zmaj. These two great Serbs shared a mutual recognition and admiration. Tesla held Zmaj in the highest regard as the greatest Serbian poet. In 1897, the two giants met in Belgrade. In honour of Tesla's arrival, Zmaj crafted a moving poem that left the inventor in tears and compelled him to kiss the poet's hand. When he returned to America, Tesla translated several of Zmaj's poems, and they became the first translations of Serbian poetry in America.

WORDS OF WELCOME FOR NIKOLA TESLA  
UPON HIS ARRIVAL IN BELGRADE

Belgrade is very jubilant today  
with its genius, shaking hands  
opening a heart that's filled with joy  
to the Serb renowned in many lands.  
Though once again you're on your way  
our rendezvous brief, and like no other  
and since you could no longer stay  
carry our warmth as brother to brother.  
Our leaflet will realize and feel  
its every vein from its own tree.  
The electricity will forever enable  
(the electricity of our hearts)  
our connection with no wire, with no cable.<sup>1</sup>

“The greatest result in poetry is achieved when the poet succeeds in surprising the reader with something familiar. A poet's hope: to be, like some valley cheese, local, but prized elsewhere,” said Auden at one time. Now that I am approaching my twilight years, I realize that I was right about everything if we exclude the mistakes I made.

The poems in the book *About the Things Homer Missed* are snapshots of my past life and some of my current interests. These are all sensations with which I grew and developed as a poet. I was a child of my times.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.teslawave.org/node/155> , translated by Zeljko Sulaver, Lillian Beltaos and Lydia Emanuel

The closing section of my “Homer” contains poems dedicated to my mother, written by a repentant soul. The mother’s heart is the essence of poetry, a vital realization to be acknowledged. Often we don’t even see how that big heart glows like a halo above our heads. Unfortunately, we often find out too late. Unlike a mother’s heart, which understands on time—and forgives, forgives, forgives...

I will never forgive myself for not kissing my mother’s hand each time I returned home. Once this was the custom, but rare today. A man never seems to understand what that kiss generates in his mother’s heart, and that what it generates is meant for him.

When my mother died, I cried as I had wanted to for a long time.

“The role of the eyes is not to look but to cry,” says Cioran.

A man constantly waits for something in his life—his life passes in waiting! And when what he was waiting for arrives—he freezes, because he realizes that it is not what he had hoped for; that what he has been waiting for has come for him.

Dear friends, scholars and admirers of art, brothers and sisters, I don’t have big wishes—one needs to be uplifted to big flights, and I don’t have those wings anymore. The only thing I want today is to dream and write about it, until I wake up.

Finally, I would like to thank my good friends from the bottom of my heart. There are some, among you, without whose kindness there would be neither this book nor me among you today.

Once again, I would like to thank the Matica srpska, Zmaj-Jova, the esteemed judges, and you, dear friends.

I thank God for smiling upon me and employing my idle hands, taking me back to what was, and still is, my life—books and writing.

(Speech at the presentation of the Zmaj Award delivered at  
the Ceremonial Session of Matica Srpska, 16 February 2023)

Translated from Serbian by  
*Persida Bošković*

JOVAN DELIĆ

## “SNOW COVERS EVERYTHING BUT MEMORIES”

With its numerous quotes and mottos, and an occasional dedication, Miodrag Raičević's book *About Things Homer Missed* (O stvarima koje je Homer propustio) is extremely dialogic. The dialogue between poetry and global culture starts in the book's lobby, even before the reader dives into the poems. Our first encounter is with a short auto-poietic quote from Czesław Miłosz (“Ars Poetica”):

I have always aspired to a more spacious form  
that would be free from the claims of poetry or prose.

Raičević adopts Miłosz's principle, applying it to most of the poems in this book. Granted, there are also brief poems composed in concise, at times elegantly rhymed and structured verse.

Miloš Crnjanski and Rastko Petrović, Serbian avant-garde poets, had already blurred the boundaries between poetry and prose more than anyone else, and much earlier and independently of Czesław Miłosz, which led to the prosaicization of poetry, especially in the case of Rastko Petrović, and the poeticization of prose, especially in the case of Miloš Crnjanski, but also Momčilo Nastasijević. Hence, Raičević's prosaicization of poetry has quite a long and very significant tradition in Serbian literature, while Czesław Miłosz provided the encouragement and direct stimulus. Thus, the first—Miłosz's—quote in the book concerns the relationship between poetry and prose, i.e., matters of verse and rhythm, but also the presence of a lyrical narrative. A good number of Raičević's poems have an emphasized lyrical narrative, sometimes even an entire short crypto story, which corresponds to this kind of relationship between poetry and prose.

Crnjanski is not mentioned here without reason. It may be that Ithaca entered Raičević's poetry through Homer, or Cavafy and Ritsos, but Miloš Crnjanski—and Raičević knows this well—published his *Lyrics of Ithaca* in 1919. The metaphor “In my heart, I hear the gnawing of a mouse”, which we find in Raičević's poem about a mother's passing entitled “There Are No Other Angels”. Not to diminish the significance of the inspirational dialogue with Greek poets—above all Cavafy—we must not overlook Miloš Crnjanski, all the more so because he is a poet of deep melancholy, and Raičević alludes to him with a toponym (Ithaca), and a lyrical hero (Odysseus), and a metaphor (gnawing of a mouse in the heart). All this is well thought out and set up in the book so that throughout the poems we hear the hum of different poetic voices in the dialogue.

Miloš's “more comprehensive form” is reminiscent of Eliot, who saw the future of modern poetry in the long form, and whose poetic principle Raičević also quotes and “adopts”:

Simplicity and deep feelings make for good poetry.

That sounds so primal and ancient, coming from a poet who has been the personification of modernity for decades. This book was written in the light of that principle, especially its final garland, which thematizes a mother's death.

Another introductory note concerns the title of *About Things Homer Missed*:

Isaac Porphyrogenitus (...), probably the emperor Isaac I Komnenos, who, it is assumed, ruled from 1057 to 1059, and then abdicated the throne and retired to a monastery, wrote a tractate in prose *About Things that Homer Missed (...)*, with which he wanted to supplement and complete Homer's work. We have no such ambitions.

So, our poet has no ambition “to supplement and complete Homer's work”, which creates an ironic and parodic relationship both towards Porphyrogenitus and Homer, but he nevertheless supplements and completes the work by reactualizing both the *Odyssey* and Ithaca, like Crnjanski, and making them a part of his world and his time, thereby paying homage to Greece and its classical and contemporary poetry and beauty. It looks like for Raičević, as once for Crnjanski, the *Odyssey* represents the greatest work of world literature, and Odysseus its greatest tragic hero and archetype that marked Serbian 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century of world literature in prose, and now it has emerged once again in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The first poem “On Death and Early Awakening” (O smrti i ranom ustajanju) immediately announces one of the main themes of this book—the theme of death—and shows Raičević’s mastery in combining this theme with irony and poetic humor. Humour is one of the enduring characteristics of Raičević’s poetry. Still, in this book, Raičević combines humour with heavy melancholy, and with this combination of humour and the theme of death, the poem gains depth, originality and universality.

Lyrical narrative—as if taken from Raičević’s beloved Gogol—is built on anecdotes:

Sherwood Anderson enjoyed an excellent martini with olives on board a cruise ship, but Anderson managed something many others didn’t: he swallowed it all, the martini, olive and toothpick. That, my brothers and sisters, cost him his life.

Sophocles was not so lucky: he choked while eating grapes.

By making these two bizarre deaths humorous, Raičević universalizes these two “anecdotes” about death, thus making death ubiquitous and always ready to provide a man with a humorous surprise, no matter how well-known or famous he is, and the use of onomatopoeia enhances the humour:

(...) Death, we should also mention,  
Always surprises us with some grape, a martini in which –  
Splash—a toothpick is swimming. And when you’re not thinking  
about it,  
Death is thinking about you. (...)

In the poem “The Ghana Region” (Okolina Gane) the key point is laughter:

My love, I’m leaving you my clogs:  
They’ll make too much noise when I  
walk on clouds. (...)

As she looks at old photographs, the thought of death prompts the main character of the poem to gain profound anthropological insights—that weeds grow near the human heart, and that we, humans, in our pursuit of something big, overlook the charms of small things and moments, which are too important for a normal life:

We keep forgetting the small, sweet moments,  
waiting for something big and important to happen.  
And we forget. We forget!  
And then death surprises us. Oh, come on!

It is no less a revelation that

Earth is doing its job better than we  
ever did. (...)

The conversational tone and colloquial rhythm give charm to many of Raičević's poems, making them livelier and wittier.

Poems dedicated to deceased friends: painter Milan Tucović and poets Novica Tadić and Miodrag Miš Tripković, concretize the close presence of death among our closest friends and peers: death is here, among us; it chooses and takes, one by one, the best among us.

The suggestive and somewhat mysterious poem "Lights in the Hills" (Svetla u brdima) is dedicated to Milan Tucović. Its mysteriousness is announced by the questions in the first verse paragraph: what are they telling us and whose lives are they hiding "in their flaming hearts", those tiny and persistent lights in the hills?

The lyrical subject is in the plural form—*us*—and includes the speaker and the one to whom the poem is dedicated. That lyrical *us* used to identify with those tiny lights, but they continued to shine persistently even when that lyrical *us* left them and went to the city.

The relationship to those lights is ambivalent: they are both near and far, like a memory; even so, they are something that the lyrical *us* has lost forever, and is searching for in the distance, in the hills.

The lights will not be extinguished from the memory of the lyrical *us* by the darkness of the night. Only now, those tiny lights are "just a shadow of something / that was promised to us, but never truly given". A deception that is fully experienced only through memories. But a persistent, albeit tiny, luminous, indestructible deception.

The poem dedicated to Novica Tadić is splendidly entitled using the demonstrative pronoun *This*: *this* is *that* unnamed and indefinite thing that follows and surrounds us. We are convinced that we are looking at it, but it is looking at us; we think *this* all our lives, without thinking that someone thought of it before us; we search for it in the fallen leaves, but someone has already found it or will find it. The point is completely Tadićean, with his smile, razor-sharp menace and blatant hostility. *This* and *that* is close enough that we can show it, but it is foreign, alien, unnamed and dangerous, no matter how much it hides behind a smile and cordiality:



That which you have smiled at all your life,  
is looking at you, also smiling  
welcomingly as if it has met you before  
showing its teeth, which are counting on you.

The smiling, menacing *that* lurks nearby. Raičević's writing demonstrated a shared appreciation for Tadić's poetics and grotesque style.

Raičević dedicated the ballad "Oh Narayama" to Miodrag Miša Tripković. It contains Robinson Jeffers' theme about the death of a deer: a wounded deer goes to die in a particular place, where deer go to die, their bones interlaced "under the leaves by the sparkling spring in the mountain". An old woman, originally a film heroine—which makes this poem intermedial—is taken by her son to a cave to die. In front of the cave, she will spread her quilt, sit down and wait for death under the falling snow:

The heart of peace and sorrow are one.

The point is in the essence of the poem. The old woman addresses her son standing in the distance, somehow invoking Rilke and his poetic vision of the adjacency of *beauty* and *horror*:

*Beauty* and *horror* are the same word here.  
What you see in your dream, my son, is daylight  
fading away. I will stay here.  
I have dreamed of this day for years. It's mine now.  
There is no other day aside from the day we die.

The old woman reduces her whole life to one day, the day of her death, especially if that day is dreamed of and conquered; consciously chosen. Did the old woman join the deer? Does her soul pant for God as deer pant for streams of water? Some stories and numerous archetypes are universal in nature. Mount Narayama shelters dying elders and deer.

This is predominantly a book about death—about the dead and the memories which are all that remains when the snow covers everything else. That is why this book evokes a profound sense of nostalgia for a bygone era, lost loved ones, and a profound melancholy. After so much death and love forever lost, man feels "alone and desolate", like the lyrical subject standing before his deceased mother in the morgue. As the book progresses, the feeling of sorrow thickens, reaching its climax at the very end, when the poem speaks of a mother's death.

The motif of forever separated lovers and the constant, futile longing for the reunion of their lips and shoulders runs unobtrusively throughout the book. The short poem “About the Stars” (O zvezdama) speaks about the lack of love even in astral spaces, among the stars:

So many stars live  
side by side  
for an eternity

Never with each other

They have such flaming bodies  
and such cold hearts  
where love comes  
only to die.

This poetry lives off memories and reminiscences. They are its source and its theme. The motto taken from Henry Rider Haggard for the poem “About Dry Leaves” (O suvom lišću) reads: “...for surely the food that memory gives to eat is bitter to the taste...”. This poem lives off comparing days that pass by in a flash with withered leaves:

Days that leave us so quickly,  
remind me more and more of withered leaves  
(ah, serves me right for being a poet).

Raičević notices that the comparison comes from poetry, that it can be associated with Branko Radičević, so he immediately, in brackets, makes an ironic deviation: “(ah, serves me right for being a poet)”.

The lights in the hills in the poem of the same name are both “near and far, like a memory”. Memory is by its very nature paradoxical and miraculous—near and far at the same time.

A cupboard, which my father often varnished, also comes from memory and agrees with the verse of Milosav Tešić in the motto: “(...) even run-down lives on—dear to the memory”. Melancholy pulsates around dear and lost things; the food that memories offer is bitter. Nor is the knowledge that memories bring any more comforting:

His mind takes him back in time, and he remembers his childhood.  
His father and mother, the house... Then he sees his small room  
clean, painted white, a desk piled with paper.  
He looks at a white sheet filled with tiny handwriting,  
and above it a young man with a hint of a moustache...  
Only then did he realize that he had not learned anything (...).

An entire country, which is a metonymy of two great civilizations—Ancient Greece and the Byzantine Empire—Raičević’s beloved Greece, has turned into a memory and how Cavafy sees and experiences it; the center of world culture and civilization, especially in art. Ancient Greece and the Byzantine Empire are just that; Raičević also sees contemporary Greece at its poetic peaks as such:

Just like every sunny day is bright  
my heart shines and blinds at the same time  
when I utter your name:  
Ἑλλάς! Ἑλλάς! Ἑλλάς!  
and all of you, says the poet, turns  
into a memory, here, where everything is old  
like the brows of Zeus (...)

Hence Odysseus as our double and contemporary; hence Ithaca as our homeland.

Lastly, the memory of the mother is a “candle within the soul”—“burns but glows”, and the memory of cold ashes in the stove of a once burning fire and the warmth in the house where there is no one to start the fire, is the only thing that evokes the good old days, and occasionally suggests a cold emptiness.

Memory is, therefore, a poetic strategy, but also the leitmotif of this collection, which, with wide-ranging variations, builds an entire associative treasury and forms a thematic and semantic field, enriching this splendid book of poetry with meaning and emotion.

No matter how much he ironizes loneliness as a poetic cliché, and literature that counts on lonely female readers, Raičević, despite all the irony, illustrates the danger and perniciousness of its presence:

...(Oh, loneliness, loneliness always brings sadness,  
like a mailman. And when you’re 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”; a brilliant humorist and writer who burned part two of his novel *Dead Souls*. Perhaps the act of burning his work is one more thing Raičević and Gogol had in common. In the poem “Without Solace” (Bez utehe) Raičević speaks about burning the poems from his youth, in the garden, where he never went again to light a cigarette. Raičević is very close to Gogol in terms of humour, satire, an affinity for the grotesque and fantastic, masterful use of anecdotes, and even the burning of his works.

Greece is Raičević's great love—that poverty of the country and richness of the spirit; that hearth of world culture which gave us the writing system and literature, the country that clothed us in Christ and history; the country that is a tear in the poet's eye, as described in the verses Raičević addressed to the Greek poet Cavafy at the beginning of the cycle about Greece and Ithaca:

Greece is the tear in the eye that sparkles forever, Cavafy!  
I cry when I leave Greece because I am leaving;  
I cry when I go to Greece because I know I will leave.

And at the beginning of the poem "Ithaca", the poet's heart "shines and blinds at the same time", like a sunny day, when he just utters the name Greece. The poem is a dialogue with Odysseus, whom the lyrical subject cautions not to regret the fate that has betrayed him. Penelope was waiting "for your heart to be an anchor among other / anchors on the beach". Penelope wanted a husband by her side, not a wandering hero.

The poem about Ithaca becomes a poem about the human heart:

Because when you leave, Greece takes from your heart only what you  
cannot carry—the heart is a light burden  
when you have it, and heavy when you don't

The end and point of the poem is in the sign of the connection between the heart and Ithaca:

And if, wherever you might be, you happen  
to lose your heart, come back to Ithaca-  
you will find it there.

Odysseus cannot find his lost heart outside of Ithaca.

Comparing the heart with bread is a priceless rarity. Raičević speaks about a risky and centuries-old theme, which can lead the poet into stereotypes and banality. He avoided that risk with extremely fresh, new and precise poetic images:

The heart does not beat from afar—it always has to be  
with you, under the armpit, like a loaf of bread, so you can hear it  
and it you; without that cooperative relationship  
there is no life for it or you.

Wasted years without Ithaca cost dearly and are paid bitterly; the big question is whether Odysseus even belongs to Ithaca after all his wanderings and travels:

...you will pay for what you have longed for  
all these years, which you have squandered coming back  
to Ithaca, thinking, alas, that you still belong to her.

Speaking on behalf of someone else, in their tone and voice, particularly that of Seneca, as he advises Nero on how to compose anthology poems, all while dripping with irony, is certainly no small task. Seneca is aware of Nero's poetic capabilities, but also of Nero's status and power, so he addresses him with big words and syntagmas, which in the context of the poem acquire an ironic meaning: *classical author, heavenly harp, greatest among the immortals*. A poet's verse is a *sepulchre* where he will rest after death, so Seneca advises him not to write verses which will restrict him in the afterlife and to "seek comfort in timeless verses". Nero became eternal, but not for his verses or great works.

The concluding garland of poems evokes the strongest and most heartfelt emotions, embodying Eliot's poetic ideal of blending simplicity with deep feelings. That garland of poems speaks about a mother—a mother's death—and is preceded by a tercet as a motto from the pen of Raičević himself:

The memory of you is  
a candle within the soul,  
mother—it burns, but glows!

The excellent poetic image of *candles within the soul* suggests the sanctity of the mother and motherhood, and the inner spiritual illumination—enlightenment—but also a burning pain that never heals following the loss of a mother. This "simplicity" and brevity are worthy of all praise and create one of the most beautiful images of motherhood, in which holiness, pain and inner radiance are united. It could hardly be more concise, or better.

Raičević hopes that he will "remember some beautiful / simple words" that he lacks to complete the discarded poem about the mother, written on already crumpled paper. The crumpled paper should be picked up, placed on the knee and ironed with the palm until it becomes flat so that it can be written on, just as Christ in a little church ran his palm over the dead mother's forehead and smoothed out her wrinkles. That is why the lyrical subject speaks to himself, that is, to his heart:

(...) Never crumple  
and throw away a poem about your mother, no matter how  
bad it may seem at the time.

If you do, pick up the paper,  
flatten it on your knee, add something,  
a fond memory, which will remind you  
of the days when she was alive. (...)  
(...)  
You'll see, it won't be bad.  
You'll see, my sad heart,  
it won't be bad at all.

And what you will add will be beautiful, simple words about the small things in life: about a mother offering her son a cup of tea with a trembling hand or napping, as she waits for him to come home.

Such simple and beautiful words are the ones with which the poet evokes a feeling of security in a home where the mother prepares dinner while humming an indistinguishable song. They arouse feelings of nostalgia and longing for that home, for the feeling of security, and for the mother who created that feeling.

Returning home is impossible, and it is especially impossible to meet and embrace those who made that house a home by filling it with warmth, security and a mysterious unspoken song. The nostalgia for the familiar warmth of home and the security of family evolves into a dense, profound sadness and a feeling of emptiness.

The former warmth of the home, with a fire, started with the wood brought in and placed at the bottom of the yard, so that the lyrical hero can roast chestnuts in the hot oven, was reduced to the memory of cold ashes “in a house where there is no one to start a fire”. All that remains are the stove, the ashes that remember, the wood, coldness and emptiness. The house is without its occupants, and especially without the mother who provided warmth and security, an empty house without soul and life, reduced to the memory of cold ashes—a space and a metaphor of cold emptiness.

This book is sealed with the mother's prayer and the seal of silence: it ends and makes its point with a short poem consisting of a motto and four short verses. The motto is from the pen of Raičević himself:

God is silence.

The mother's prayer is reduced to a “barely noticeable / movement of the lips”, without a voice, and an intimate conversation with God through silence. In the memory, the mother is also whispering to her son through that silence and the moving of her lips in silent prayer:

She said that a prayer  
is long silence  
and a hardly noticeable  
movement of the lips.  
“Snow covers everything but memories.”

(Speech at the presentation of the Zmaj Award to Miodrag Raičević at  
the Formal Assembly of the Matica srpska, February 16, 2023)

Translated from Serbian by  
*Persida Bošković*

## THE “INFINITE BLUE CIRCLE” LITERARY AWARD

MLADEN ŠUKALO

### OPENNESS AND STRUCTURE

(Marginal notes at the beginning of the novel *Roman delta*  
(*Delta Novel*) by Goran Petrović)

Encountering the first two parts of Goran Petrović's novel *Delta Novel*, titled *Papir sa vodenim znakom* (*Paper with a Watermark*) and *Ikonoostas sveg poznatog sveta* (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*) raises a multitude of questions for which I'm not certain if reasonably clear answers can be offered, whether it's even necessary for uncertainty to provide them. Before us, we have two narrative texts that, among other elements, share an identical beginning. I quote it:

If we have in mind the vastness of the world, then literature, everything that has been written so far, is merely a quote extracted in an attempt to explain the essence of humankind. A modest part of that quotation is *Delta Novel*, taken collectively and separately by its books. Only a man can be made of something that is not there, whether it is lost or never even existed. That's why there are no quotes in this privileged place; it actually follows when you turn the page...

A collective reading is not achievable because, for now, the entirety cannot be perceived, not even as an author's concept. Unless the search for quotes leads us there.

The reader, therefore, has two *distributaries* within the *delta of a river* whose size we are unfamiliar with. Judging by a series of inter-



mediary—leaning towards writerly rather than narrative—actions, temporal beginning, the starting point for the *Delta Novel* can be placed somewhere between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, thus on the eve of the Gutenberg era. I mention it mostly due to the author's designation of the phenomenon of books and literature, which seems to be the essence of writing, writing (perhaps reading) that flows into the *Delta Novel*. I believe that—in the context of Goran Petrović's previous poetic frameworks—the present moment, the moment of writing the text, is the ultimate point of inflow, the ultimate starting point. This raises the question of historicity as a unique dimension of the author's overall poetic determinations, as well as its connection to that which is fictional, which is the essential core of the story. Joanna II of Naples and Despot Stefan Lazarević are contemporaries, but their novelistic royal desires are set differently: she wants to ensure what is written, while he wants to ensure what is constructed, namely, depicted. The distributaries lead to the story of paper production, or rather, filling the newly created structure with delicate baldachins, thick feathers, eternal candles and icons that emit a divine light. However, the author does not claim to construct the story in a purely factual manner, as he is more inclined towards what folklore and legendary tradition have preserved. Therefore, in the constitution of the novelistic fabric, there is a unique interplay between historiographical and fictional, historical and non-historical materials that characterize the traditional historical novel.

However, unlike the easy recognition of temporality, spatiality is not easily comprehensible because the distributary *Paper with a Watermark* “flows” through medieval Italy, while *Iconostasis of the Entire Known World* begins and flows into medieval Serbia, where, in the set coordinates between Pest, Dubrovnik, Thessaloniki and Mount Athos, it strives to encompass all four corners of the world. What is it, except perhaps the Mediterranean spirit, that connects these two spaces?

Geographically speaking, the *delta* represents the mouth of a river whose *source* and *course* (not to mention *tributaries*, *rapids*, *cascades*, *waterfalls*, *ships*, etc.) are, for now, incomprehensible from a reader's perspective. But which river are we talking about? And what kind of river is this unnamed river that, for now, vaguely unites the Apennine and Balkan Peninsula? Perhaps it's a mythical vision that will become clear at the end of the author's writing project?

I believe the answer will be found when all the distributaries come together side by side. Or when they interweave through Goran Petrović's writing.

What's important is that the *story flows*, that it has its own *course*.

Petrović's titling of this work might evoke associations with the literary-theoretical concept of *a river novel* among critics. However,

I'm not sure if that could be of help in understanding the *Delta Novel* (as well as literary-critical interpretation) because the offered *distributaries* so far do not suggest that such an analogy is possible. And useful.

Therefore, the inevitability of foreshadowing metaphorization remains, which is often detrimental to interpretation. Even more so for a work that is the starting point for such a type of expression.

Printing or publishing (perhaps even authorial) have singled out two titular metaphors from real titles: *paper* and *iconostasis*. At first glance, it may seem that this is an attempt to examine the already forgotten semiotic definitions in criticism, in the pursuit of *verbal* (paper → word) or *iconic* (icon/iconostasis → image) forms that are woven into artistic expression. This simplified consideration may lose its fundamental grounding in the whole game of titling<sup>1</sup> conducted by Goran Petrović. And not only in the *Delta Novel*; it can be considered—if we look at the author's entire body of work—his poetic constant. Thus, *Paper with a Watermark* is composed of four named parts (unlike *Iconostasis of the Entire Known World* created in three parts) divided into numerous chapters. Each of them, along with the title, features a certain quote from the text as a variant of aphoristic summary of the content related to the written part of the text (it should not be forgotten that Joanna II leads “a tenth of the brethren ‘of the book’” on her expedition to Amalfi, and that one of the key characters with Despot Stefan is the “teacher” Constantine of Kostenets<sup>2</sup>). The interesting aspect of this approach is enhanced by special emphasis on individual paragraphs within each chapter, thereby taking on the titular function. Such highlighting of external aspects of the text generally does not disturb the reader's position, although it raises the question of whether Petrović, with such actions, diverts attention from the content or indirectly compels us to read the way he desires. The reader seems to be marginalized; his invocation in the simplicity of the story is not necessary. But this does not mean that the author's play is excluded, i.e., his playfulness with all aspects of the material he uses in constructing the text.

What fascinated me the most when encountering Goran Petrović's *Delta Novel* belongs to the spheres of historical-typological analogies, which, to some extent, following the Russian theoretician Vladimir M. Zhirmunsky, were advocated by Dragiša Živković and Radovan Vučković in our region. Generally, I am not inclined towards this methodological pattern because it seems to me that such “appending of literary meanings”

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<sup>1</sup> Process of coming up with titles for something, such as books or other works of art. (Translator's note)

<sup>2</sup> Constantine of Kostenets, also known as Constantine the Philosopher, was a medieval Bulgarian scholar, writer and chronicler, who spent most of his life in the Serbian Despotate. (Translator's note)

often depends on the volume and type of readings that interpreters have at their disposal. For example, the novels *Paper with a Watermark* and *Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, with their metaphorical starting points of paper/books and icons in the building, could be connected to Victor Hugo's novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. The action of this work is set in the 1480s, nearly a century later than the period Goran Petrović deals with. In other words, medieval spirituality could be a common thread for illustrating how authors from different cultures and different times relate to the same themes. However, I am not referring to Hugo here for that reason. An integral part of the novel is an unusual chapter titled "This Will Kill That", which expands within the text with the explanation "The book will kill the building." Therefore, it is possible to establish an analogy between Petrović and Hugo's work, but only on a metaphorical level, although I do not believe that the French giant was even within Petrović's field of vision during the writing of these two distributaries.

I also don't believe that another author from the novelistic sphere could have been a possible creative reference for him. I'm referring to Umberto Eco. He could be interesting for establishing an analogy with Goran Petrović, especially since the plot of Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* is set in the pre-Gutenberg era, specifically in the early decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

However, Eco did not come to my mind because of the mentioned novel, but rather due to his somewhat forgotten studies from the 1960s: the first one is *The Open Work* (1962), and the second one *The Absent Structure: Introduction to Semiological Research* (1968; this work has been published in our country under the title *Kultura, Informacija, Komunikacija* [Culture, Information, Communication]). It's not so much his considerations within these works that caught my attention but rather the symbolic values that indirectly imposed themselves with their titles on the spirituality of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It's about *the open* and *the absent*. It seems that the approach to Goran Petrović's novels *Paper with a Watermark* and *Iconostasis of the Entire Known World* will be quite different if these metaphorical guidelines are followed. It's difficult to say what the real correspondence of these two concepts is in the context of Petrović's work. From the previous marginal notes, it can be inferred that the domain of *the open* is clear, while the understanding of *the absent* still remains too vague. Nevertheless, the most important thing of all is what the future structure of the *Delta Novel* reveals.

JELENA MARIĆEVIĆ BALAĆ

## HALO OF THE STORY

Goran Petrović published two novels, *Ikonoostas* (*Iconostasis*) and *Papir* (*Paper*) in 2022, which, along with the latter, constitute “the ‘Delta Novel’, taken collectively and separately by its books”, as stated at the beginning of the novel *Ikonoostas sveg poznatog sveta* (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*). Poetically and stylistically, Goran Petrović is persuasive and recognizable. The chapters are carefully structured and each begins with an almost gnomic point, which functions as a “hawk” in front of Boccaccio’s novella and provokes interpretative attention. Sovereign storytelling, rich imagination and the creation of an authentic novelistic world confirm that *Iconostasis* deserves the reader’s attention in the broadest sense.

The jury decided to award the prize to *Iconostasis*, considering that, in addition to indisputable literary qualities, it establishes a refined dialogue with the opus of Miloš Crnjanski. Namely, since the theme of migration and its specific symbolism are key topoi in Crnjanski’s opus, icons settle in Goran Petrović’s work, creating the impression of a strong semantic connection between the Serbian people and icons. In the story “Ikona koja kija” (*The Sneezing Icon*) by Milorad Pavić, it is said that the place of someone who moves never remains empty, which in the context of Petrović’s novel means that the Serbian people, even if symbolically present, continue to exist through cultural, material and immaterial legacies in those places they were forced to leave under different historical circumstances. Therefore, the sentence written on the starry paper preceding the first section and the first chapter of the novel: “Only a man can be made of something that is not there, whether it is lost or never even existed,” can be examined in this context. It becomes a universal key to reading the novel. In that context, it is essential to point out the fate of the icon of the Unknown Saint, which has

gone through both Calvary and healing, retaining the right to existence and a place in the sun, precisely because the fact that it has ever been an icon, protects it: “How to consecrate an icon of a saint whose identity is unknown? Because an icon is not an icon, even when it has an inscription if the Church has not confirmed it... However, it has already been one once, which can be interpreted as being an icon forever...”

Throughout the novel and following the journey of the icon of the Unknown Saint, the reader cannot help but wonder about which icon is being referred to, especially since this question remains unresolved until the end, which is, based on her martyrdom, entirely realistic and literally legitimate. However, the reader can sense that the fate of this icon is, in fact, the fate of his own people, the Serbian people, who had their gold stripped from the halo by thieves and symbolically deprived not only of their sacred aura but also of their connection with God because gold on icons represents the divine light that connects humans with God. Nevertheless, by the mere fact that this icon was a part of the iconostasis and that the novel bears the title *Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, significant markers emerge, through which the author potentially suggests how this unfortunate and desecrated icon can be restored to its former divine light.

The iconostasis, as a matter of fact, is an altar partition that separates the altar from the nave and the history of the Old and New Testaments as an open book of Christian faith teachings is depicted on it. Each icon on the iconostasis has its designated place and contributes to the Story that the iconostasis mediates in this way. The story that is on the iconostasis is a sacred story, just as Goran Petrović calls his novel *Iconostasis*, aiming to return the story to the sacred time, namely, to restore the halo to the icon of the Unknown Saint. If, therefore, the story transcends the profane realm, it renews itself and, at the same time, rejuvenates the one who reads it. Also, the one who is engaged in hesychasm<sup>1</sup> and prays over the icon of the Unknown Saint can catch a glimpse of the spiritual eyes of the icon, and then, it won't matter who the saint on the icon is, because the reader-hesychast will realize that he\she is a part of that icon-collective. The act of writing and reading this novel implies the abolishment of historical time because everything has already occurred and continues to happen in cycles of sacred time.

For something like this, it is not merely power but predisposition or the will for transparency that is necessary, an opening of the spiritual,

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<sup>1</sup> *Hesychasm* or “the tradition of inner stillness,” consisted of meditative practices designed to calm the mind, purify the passions, and develop skills of absorption. These practices of self-transformation and self-transcendence, such as “wakefulness,” “inner stillness,” and “the Prayer of the Heart,” have been undeservedly forgotten. (Translator’s note)

namely, eyes of the mind and heart. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the author chose to set the plot of the novel in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, during the rule of Despot Stefan Lazarević, and to shape the striking character of the perceptive Dovolja, who has the gift to see more and broader in comparison to ordinary people. The reader, in relation to him, is someone who has insight into what has historically taken place in the meantime, from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, but Dovolja's example shows that one should look further and broader than the usual and thus transcend all limitations, walls, and ephemeral aspects of earthly life. In order for the Story to be holy again, for the icon to reclaim its celestial glow, and for the people to regain their faith and connection with God, it is enough to be like Dovolja, to have the will and determination for it, to introspect and recognize oneself in one's own people.

Translated from the Serbian by  
*Jovana Stokić*

MINA ĐURIĆ

## ICONOSTASIS OF THE STORY IN *DELTA NOVEL* BY GORAN PETROVIĆ

Before *Papir sa vodenim znakom* (*Paper with a Watermark*) (Laguna, 2022) and *Iconostas sveg poznatog sveta* (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*) (Laguna, 2022), the first two *courses* of contrapuntal segments of the symphonic literary project *Delta Novel* by Goran Petrović, there is an intriguingly inexhaustible hermeneutic anticipation. This anticipation ranges from recognizing the proximity of intertwined poetic dialogues with predecessors, the choice of Pešić's architectural (de)construction of mythological spaces, or Pavić's freedom of stretching the recipient's traces through historiographical-metafictional imagination, to the revelation of the essence of each reader's desire for what literature should mean in the modern world. The dedication of the creative endeavor towards the meticulous expression of the boundless text, in the branching metamorphoses of what lies between *Paper* and *Iconostasis*, already sketched as the merit and future modes of story transformation, unfolds in the longings of readerly anticipations through the weaving of literary symbolism of duration "[f]rom here, as far as one desires" (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 6), with enriched insights into how the farsightedness of words can encompass everything "[i]n width and height" (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 58), in the realization of the continuous endeavor to precisely, through such setups of unceasing interpretations of meaning, establish how "[it] would be good to know where we stand" (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 162). The unprecedented trust in the comprehensiveness of the power of literature, the strength of the legacy of readership that nourishes its expectations, an author's<sup>1</sup> unwavering commitment to seeking the

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<sup>1</sup> In a literary context, the person who constructs or creates a novel is often referred to as the "author" or "the novelist". These terms are used to describe the

finest narrative plan within the variations of the overarching epic of identity and belonging in storytelling, and through *Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, as the second course of Petrović's *Delta Novel*, offers an evident prolongation of the final cadence like a key semantic signal of continuity security to the textual connection that will, like some of the most prominent metaphors, probably uncover other signs of writing, traces of creative action, impressions of words into cultural origins that chart the unity of the realms of literature and embodying what has always been "tentative, foremost, centrally important, yet also subsequent and eternal." (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 13).

Andrić's inclination towards the beats of storytelling as a life-giving means of shaping the contours of history and individual existences in Petrović's work is mediated through the virtuosic intellectual concerns of Constantine of Kostenets<sup>2</sup> with an unextinguished desire to discover "[...] which word comes from which side of the world, whether it is accepted or languishes, whether it sparkles from above or emerges from the depths, whether its shadow falls to the left or to the right, what adorns it [...]" (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 27), but only in cases when, like while teaching Dovolja, as well as subsequent transcribers and readers, all "[...] come back with full hearts once again" (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 29), with an awareness of the essence of the text, and "[...] the multiplicity of words [...]" it is achieved only when it is "[...] sown in a timely manner with a broad hand movement [...]" (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 30). In such trust in the essence of storytelling, intertwined with subtle criticism of the vanity of the literary craft or the pride of literary particularity of those "[...] who cannot separate their gaze from their own words," and who "[...] are most often sentenced to much worse" (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 34), Petrović devotedly carves an *iconostasis* of stories, whose grandeur lies in the continuous permeation of knowledge in nearsighted reading, but also in the feeling of the transparency of farsighted interpretation of the script. If the idea of transforming the metaphor of life through the structure of a temple—"Why in the world is there no temple so great that when a person steps into it through the narthex and walks through the nave, he/she only reaches the iconostasis at the end of his/her life?!" (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 36-37),

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individual responsible for crafting the storyline, characters and overall narrative of the novel. That is why there is a parallel between "neimar" (Arabic word for an architect or a builder) and "author" and it lies in the concept of construction and creation, since both roles involve the act of conceptualizing and bringing something into existence. (Translator's note)

<sup>2</sup> Constantine of Kostenets, also known as Constantine the Philosopher, was a medieval Bulgarian scholar, writer and chronicler, who spent most of his life in the Serbian Despotate. (Translator's note)



the necessity of literature, along with the foundations of literary interpretation, particularly marks the *iconostasis*, its power to be an irreplaceable anchor for the farthest-reaching thoughts and the most profound hopes mediates a story that continuously travels through the grandeur of spheres and delineates the spaces of (meta)physical whose greatness is measured, in fact, by the sublime design of the narrative.

The marvelous migration of icons laden with narratives through encounters and conflicts of landscapes, carries both enthusiasm and trepidation in the translation between intermediaries, the quest for the truth of what can be heard through different layers of resonance, the unraveling of documents in the pursuit of that which is decisive, in the atmosphere of decisions and perplexities of Stefan Lazarević, in the construction and refinement of the tradition of transcribing in the Manasija Monastery,<sup>3</sup> it shows how the ideas of delineating atlas of cultural heritage belonging are precisely given through the nurturing of stories as the rampart of the past and the seal of spirituality. As much as the *Iconostasis of the Entire Known World* is anticipated by multilayered announcements from the *Paper with a Watermark*, the *Iconostatic* reminiscences of the poetics of *Paper* are shown in the plans of continuous memories of the whole they represent and in the touches that can be continuously recreated by fragments of chance, creating an unbreakable bond between the protagonists who write and interpret: “The writer and those he described, whom he shaped in words, usually meet only then, during writing, for just one day or one night, and then everyone has their own life. Often completely incompatible” (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 102-103). To *iconically* await within literature all that is yet to come in the intertwining of (un)foreseen skills of creators and interpreters as protagonists, while containing within it an *iconographic* abundance of the past clearly represents the virtue of trust in what is, in Petrović’s work as well, embodied in the literary incarnations of the totality of the *Delta Novel*, implying the creative and receptive outcome, “we will see” (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 113).

With leitmotif phrases, including musical and medical ones, Petrović’s work is shaped through the anaphoric rhythm of narration, occasional humoristic arabesques, towards the poetic figurativeness of the subjects that inspire writing, driven by the aspiration to create an

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<sup>3</sup> The Manasija Monastery also known as Resava is a Serbian Orthodox monastery known for its medieval manuscripts and historical significance. Despot Stefan was a great patron of art and culture. During his reign, the *Resava School of Transcription* was founded in Manasija. Its main founder was Constantine the Philosopher who established the famous orthographic school in order to correct errors in the literature made by numerous translations and incorrect transcriptions.

*iconostasis-like* universal story world in which “[t]ales and songs about them [...] will grow, overflow, it will be one single bread and one single cup of wine that will nourish everything, for anything else no one will know, even if they remain forever hungry” (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 166). When “[...] words and letters are the finest kind of stitch” (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 178), the mystery of the saint on the icon, “[...] for whom no one knows who he is” (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 182), reflects the miracle of a story that rushes towards resolution in storytelling greater than any personal capacity, in the need to transmute knowledge through the optimum of the highest quality “[...] hair for brushes [...] as if created [...] for embellishing the first words with vine [...]”, which will delight the scribes in Resava [...] (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 186) and the farsightedness of the best interpretation required by the ruler of the Despotate in the awareness of the significance of hermeneutic revelations of a story that, even if it doesn’t reach him in his lifetime, will “[...] be useful to someone [...] after us, once and for all” (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 195). Such storytelling stewardship creates an *iconostasis* from the measure of *the entire known world*, which also gains a metapoetic evocation of fractals and many of Petrović’s past and, it seems, future books.

And what could be more fitting and desirable from culture and literature than to feel, through someone’s “[...] story, like we are greater” that is, for the one who speaks, to be reshaped into the emanation of storytelling through a “feeling” which is, in all respects, and also in one’s own being, “more extravagant” (*Iconostasis of the Entire Known World*, 14). In that moment of the story, to utter a Faustian *duration*, transposed into the visuality of the *iconostasis* as a gathering of hope and excitement towards the security of the dedicated repetitiveness of that *duration*, in the knowledge that it will be recapitulated a few more times, perhaps, in the poetic desire of Petrović’s stories of the *Delta Novel* to equally halt and gather times and spaces while multiplying them, probably represents one of the most intimate sanctuaries of being and storytelling, both for the storyteller and the audience in everything that art signifies. If literature can be Petrović’s *iconostasis of the entire known world*, then fragile human aspiration has something to triumphantly boast about the boundless impermanence of the gifts of anticipated beauty, as well as something to defend against unrelenting apprehension of the judgment of futile duration.

Translated from the Serbian by  
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**WHERE IS THE SOURCE OF  
THE DELTA NOVEL?  
or  
AN INTRODUCTION TO  
GORAN PETROVIĆ'S ANGELOLOGY**

**ABSTRACT:** Through the prism of the “delta novel” genre that Goran Petrović introduced in his two new novels *Papir sa vodenim znakom* (*Paper with a Watermark*) and *Ikonostas sveg poznatog sveta* (*Iconostasis of the Known World*), we look into the motifs of angels and angel feathers. These motifs establish a connection with Petrović’s previous works – the novels *Atlas opisan nebom* (*An Atlas Traced by the Sky*) and *Opsada crkve Sv. Spasa* (*The Siege of the Church of Holy Salvation*), the collection of short stories *Bližnji* (*Our Close Ones*), and notes in the book *Pretraživač* (*The Search Engine*). The different functions that these motifs have in the respective works are analyzed, and suggestions as to their role in the composition, and especially in providing the basic idea in these literary works are given. This paper makes an assumption that, through the motif of the angel and the feather, the source of the delta novel began even earlier in Petrović’s oeuvre.

**KEY WORDS:** delta novel, angelology, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

At the end of 2022, two long-awaited novels by Goran Petrović, *Papir sa vodenim znakom* and *Iconostasis of the Known World*, were published. The writer pointed out that he had been writing the novels for 22 years and that they are part of a larger cycle that will include “more than ten, but less than a hundred books”.<sup>1</sup> So these two novels, which have already caught the attention

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<sup>1</sup> Interview: “The story always behaves like water”, *Večernje novosti* (10/11/2022), [novosti.rs](https://www.novosti.rs): THE STORY ALWAYS BEHAVES LIKE WATER: Writer Goran Petrović on two new novels *Papir* and *Iconostasis*, which were presented at the Book Fair, Accessed on January 16, 2023.

of the readers and received approval from reviewers,<sup>2</sup> constitute just the beginning of a larger cycle which is to appear in the years ahead. Petrović himself defined the announced cycle of novels, in terms of genre, as a *delta novel*, thus invoking the well-known literary theory concept of the river novel in his poetic aesthetics, while at the same time distancing himself from it. The river novel is characterized by the presentation of “broad movements and social shifts”,<sup>3</sup> often following the history of a family, best embodied in Serbian literature by Andrić’s literary vision in *The Bridge on the River Drina*, which “provides a broad fresco of a society with all the contradictions and conflicts of individual and collective, historical and fateful”.<sup>4</sup> The delta novel, as our writer intuitively carries with it an epic torrent that will gain its momentum through several centuries of storytelling (from the 15th century to today), but in addition to the main stream, it also includes subsidiary stories and smaller rapids in the story-telling that will lead to a common end in its final estuary.<sup>5</sup> What kind of end? – that is something we can only guess at this stage. As the writer has announced, the third novel, which is to be expected in the current year, will envelope the novels *Paper* and *Iconostasis* in its course, while each subsequent novel will provide new links to subsidiaries of Petrović’s story.<sup>6</sup> However, each novel will also represent a separate whole that can be read as a stand-alone work, independent of the other novels, and, thus, in the order chosen by the reader.<sup>7</sup> It will cover different eras, spaces and events, which will, naturally, influence narration, language and style.<sup>8</sup> This is what makes the key difference in relation to the well-known genre of river novels. Nevertheless, Petrović winks at us, we will be able to read special meanings only if we follow the novels’ natural current and read them in the order of their appearance.<sup>9</sup> A river delta at its mouth is “constantly expanding due to river sediments”,<sup>10</sup> and its structure is additionally made up by alluvium that every stream brings. Bearing in mind the sediments of his own writing, but also those of literature in general, Petrović provided an explanation of sorts about his innovation in the area of genre and poetic aesthetics in a *privileged place* in his novels, in the short statement that opens *Paper* and *Iconostasis* as a

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<sup>2</sup> The novel *Iconostasis* received the “Endless Blue Circle” award of the Matica Srpska for the year 2022. The novel *Papir* received the “Belgrade Winner” award for 2022. Both received the award of the Vuk Endowment for Art.

<sup>3</sup> *Dictionary of Literary Terms* (ed. Dragiša Živković), Romanov, Banja Luka, 2001, p. 718.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 718.

<sup>5</sup> TV show, *In Detail*, RTS, from December 3, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Dictionary of the Serbian Language* (group of authors), Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 2011, p. 250.

motto. We suspect that this auto-poetic expression will also mark the novels that are yet to come.

If we keep in mind the size of the world – then literature, everything that has been written so far, is just a single quote in an attempt to explain the essence of the human race. The delta novel is a modest part of that quote, both taken collectively and book by book. Only man can sometimes do things that are not there, whether they are lost or never existed. That’s why there is no quote in this privileged place of the book; it actually follows when one turns the page...<sup>11</sup>

In this quote, the writer provides us with several important poetic signals. He sees his work as a part of an *Alexandrian library* of the world, in which his opus, both collectively and individually, through his delta novels, constitutes just a quote “singled out in an attempt to explain the essence of the human race”. Thus, his novels are statements that attempt to (re)construct the essence of human existence through several themes that artists are forever preoccupied with. In this work of literary and human cosmogony, texts intertwine, summon, unite, cancel and illuminate each other, both in Petrović’s delta novels as well as in the literature of the world. A long time ago, Umberto Eco left the door ajar to the concept of “open work” in world literature, Pavić later introduced it into Serbian literature, and Petrović, it seems, gave it a literary (re)birth through the delta novel. Let us not forget the fact that delta, after which the river delta also got its name, is the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet, named after the Semitic “dāleth” meaning door,<sup>12</sup> which in his literary works Petrović not only leaves open for his readers, but also invites them to add their own knowledge and literary experience to the text, since, as said earlier, the quote “actually follows only when the page is turned”. Thus, in anticipation of the new books that the author has promised us and prompted by the novels *Paper* and *Iconostasis* we can look back at Petrović’s earlier works, and point out the connections that exist between them, and, perhaps, hint at the possibility that the delta novel began its flow much earlier.

Petrović’s oeuvre is marked by several constant motifs that move from work to work and, depending on their literary purpose, change their role and function in the text. Thus, these *migratory motifs* sometimes have the role of leitmotif, elsewhere they provide the basis of the novel’s compositional structure, serve as the binding material of the narrative, but in all the works in which they appear, they form the ideological backbone of the story. It is with these motifs, the most important of which are those of *angels* and *feathers*, that the spiritual vertical of Goran Petrović’s creativity is emphasized. It is

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<sup>11</sup> Goran Petrović, *Paper with a Watersign*, Laguna, Belgrade, 2022, p. 5; Goran Petrović, *Iconostasis of the Known World*, Laguna, Belgrade, 2022, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Γ. Μπαμπινιώτης, *Ετυμολογικό λεξικό νέας ελληνικής γλώσσας*, Κέντρο Λεξικολογίας, Αθήνα, 2011, p. 337.

also interesting to find that these motifs often have a special relationship not only to other works by Petrović and works from Serbian and world literature, but they also have a unique relationship between one another.

Petrović introduced the motif of *angels* into his literary world in his first novel, *An Atlas Traced by the Sky*, by reminiscing about the story of the Tower of Babel from the Old Testament. Throughout the narrative of the Tower of Babel, which is formed as an apocrypha, the theme is the hunt for angels “because of their soft feathers”.<sup>13</sup> This statement signals how the relationship between angels and people was broken – because of a feather, as the other privileged motif in Petrović’s later work. We recognize the crypto angel in the character of Luzilde, whose name carries the potential of light,<sup>14</sup> as one of the basic features of an angel, and who, throughout the novel, balances on a thin line between dream and reality. “She is the indicator which shows when the state between those two ontological levels of consciousness is disturbed”.<sup>15</sup> Following the traditional representations of angels, Luzilda, or Lucy, is elsewhere dressed in white, with bare feet, moving through the air “like a dandelion puffball”<sup>16</sup> “as if she does not possess the slightest hint of weight”.<sup>17</sup> More importantly, the image is complemented by a description of her movement – “she slowly stood up straight and walked, as if she had found that mythical path that connects heaven and earth”,<sup>18</sup> alluding to the angels’ mediating role between heaven and earth. That mythical path is the Cosmic Tree, the *axis mundi*, which is another recurring motif of Petrović’s prose.<sup>19</sup> The Cosmic Tree is one of *the different modalities of the sacred as contained in the very structure of the World and cosmic phenomena*<sup>20</sup> and is occasionally modified by the motif of the Tower of Babel<sup>21</sup> as another manifestation of the axis of the world. A branch from the Cosmic Tree creates a path through which communication is achieved between the higher and lower realities of heaven and earth and is a pathway for angels, or for shamans whose potential is also

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<sup>13</sup> Goran Petrović, *An Atlas Traced by the Sky*, Laguna, Belgrade, 2019, p. 157.

<sup>14</sup> Lux meaning light, day, light of life... (Κούβελας, Βασίλης Αριστ, Ετυμολογικό και ερμηνευτικό λεξικό της λατινικής γλώσσας, Μακεδονικές Εκδόσεις, Αθήνα, 2002, p. 500).

<sup>15</sup> Jana Aleksić, *Opsednuta priča (Poetika romana Gorana Petrovića) (A Story Possessed (the poetic aesthetics of Goran Petrović’s novels))*, Publishing House Official Gazette, Belgrade, 2013, p. 257.

<sup>16</sup> Goran Petrović, *An Atlas Traced by the Sky*, p. 185.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>19</sup> The Cosmic Tree appears, in addition to the novel *An Atlas Traced by the Sky*, also in the novels *The Siege of the Church of the Holy Salvation*, *The Corner Shop ‘the Lucky Hand’*.

<sup>20</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* [translated into Serbian by Zoran Stojanović], Publishing House Zoran Stojanović, Sremski Karlovci – Novi Sad, 2003, p. 145.

<sup>21</sup> In addition to being a theme in the novel *An Atlas Traced by the Sky*, the Tower of Babel is also at theme in the story *Our Close Ones*, and it becomes transformed into stairs, i.e. into Jacob’s ladder.

inscribed in Luzilda's image. Albeit moving in the realm of dreams, angels leave their feathers on that path as a pledge of the existence of a higher reality. The unlocking the multiple layers of meaning of this picture is done with the help from the princess of light Luzilda's alter ego, Gabriella, by way of pseudo-quotes which shed additional light on the story. Bearing in her female name the disguised name of the archangel of the news of the annunciation, Gabriella's burning at the stake is another testimony of the tragic misunderstanding between the upper and lower worlds. People, weighed down by the burden of wrath, are not able to recognize the angel before them just as the *sons of man* were not able to recognize the new Messiah—Christ.

And too amused by the anticipated sight of death, the crowd did not notice that the thick smoke above the square, by some whim of the wind, formed the shape of a white figure of an angel with spread wings, curly hair and long, long eyelashes<sup>22, 23</sup>

Nevertheless, confidence in a positive outcome is given at the very end of the novel by thematizing *the portal of the Smiling Angel*. The image incorporates the folk belief that angels are the guardians of the gates of heaven,<sup>24</sup> and its builder, symbolically named Adam, gives hope that the door between the worlds will remain open. The floating portal “despite weighing over twenty tons”<sup>25</sup> and swaying in the Byzantine winds “as if lighter than a feather”<sup>26</sup> plants the seed to a great theme about the floating building that Petrović will include in his next novel *The Siege of the Church of Holy Salvation*.

The motif of the angel in *The Siege* is again given a privileged role. Namely, the structure of the entire novel rests on the hierarchy previously taken from the work of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, so each of the novel's nine chapters is named after an angelic order – seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, virtues, powers, principalities, archangels and angels.<sup>27</sup>

Angels actively participate in people's lives starting from the first “book” in which God's grace is celebrated with the song of the six-winged seraphims (Holy, holy, holy is the Lord) [...], to each subsequent book where the themes are: the coexistence of monks and angels (Book Two – Cherubims), the possibility of

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<sup>22</sup> Eyelashes in angels denote the ability “see God's view” (St. Dionysius the Aeropagite, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Dela, Publishing House Miroslav, Belgrade, 2009, p. 48).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>24</sup> Slovenian mythology (Encyclopedic Dictionary), editors: Svetlana M. Tolstoj, Ljubinko Radenković, Zepter Book World, Belgrade, 2001, pp. 6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Goran Petrović, *An Atlas Traced by the Sky*, 273.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Biljana Turanjanin, “Intertekstualno raslojavanje romana Opsada crkve Sv. Spasa (in the context of the Bible and medieval literature in teaching) (doctoral thesis, script), Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, 2014, p. 66.

understanding them (Book Three – Thrones, Book Four – Dominions), angels' closeness to human nature (Book Five – Virtues), their compassion and help to the human race (Book Six – Powers, Book Seven – Principalities), the enemy's realization that good can be defeated only by breaking the contact between angels and humans (Book Eight – Archangels) and, finally, recognizing the angelic image in the living image of man (Book Nine – Angels).<sup>28</sup>

The angel feather has a special role, as a combination of two privileged motifs of Petrović's prose, and as one of the main engines of the narrative in *The Siege*. The angel feather, which "inside itself hides poetic and theological implications of the relationship between literature as a being and God as a being",<sup>29</sup> connects all three tributaries of the story. It is used to write the unfortunate Constantinople chronicle of the Latin conquest, and serves also a tool in the important work of ensuring the survival of words, history and literature. It is a symbol of the Byzantine cultural environment which is introduced to Serbian lands, together with the quill, by the most significant personality of Serbian spirituality, Saint Sava. At the end of the novel, it gives hope that a reborn man will enter *the life of the next century*. The angel feather, as a symbol and novelistic motif, keeps the temple high in the air, connects the fragmented parts of the story and symbolizes the pledge of survival of the Serbian people. The role of angels in *The Siege* is thus complex and multi-symbolic. Not only is this motif the "basic building block"<sup>30</sup> of the novel, but the hierarchy of angelic orders also reflects the philosophical-theological thread of the literary text based on the cataphatic theological thought by which man comes closer to knowing God. The figure of the angel "as the most transparent, while at the same time the most porous—literary creation"<sup>31</sup> is the intangible matter which makes up the novel on different levels—plot, composition and idea.

Petrović returns to the character of the angel in the collection *Our Close Ones*, in particular in the story headlining the collection. In this story, we see an angel in closer contact with a man than was the case in *The Siege*. Jacob, who lives on the ninth floor,<sup>32</sup> is transformed like in the well-known biblical story of the ladder which leads from earth to heaven and on which angels

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>29</sup> Đorđe Đurđević, "Angelološka struktura narativnih svetove iz perspektive narativne teologije" ("Angelological Structure of Narrative Worlds from the Perspective of Narrative Theology"), in the Proceedings: *ROMANI GRAD: 50 godina Romana o Londonu, 100 godina Uliksa (THE NOVEL AND THE CITY: 50 years since A Novel of London, 100 years since Ulysses)*, Kragujevac, (ed. Dragan Bošković, Časlav Nikolić), Kragujevac, 20022, p. 176.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Đorđe M. Đurđević, "Figura anđela u književnosti (Problem naučnog pristupa književnoj angelologiji)" ("The Figure of the Angel in Literature (the Problem of Scientific Approach to Literary Angelology)", *Koraci*, year LII, Vol. 10-12, 2018, p. 113.

<sup>32</sup> Referencing again the nine orders of angels.



ascend and descend, and which the namesake of Petrović's hero, Jacob, son of Isaac,<sup>33</sup> saw in his dream. The angels moving up and down the ladders represent continuity or discontinuity between the heavenly and spiritual dimensions of man.<sup>34</sup> Following the biblical subtext, the writer modernizes it, and the ladder becomes the staircase of the highrise building—a contemporary Tower of Babel—in the deconstructed text. On this journey, which is a “pilgrimage through the inner regions of the soul”,<sup>35</sup> Jacob's companion is an unusual old man who “seems like he was all made of something rustling”,<sup>36</sup> whose white of the eyes “was cloudy, as if it had been watching over an endless sea of trouble and misery for centuries,”<sup>37</sup> and whose wrinkles “seem not to have come from old age but from constant, painful spasms”.<sup>38</sup> During the long nightly ascent, the roles of the two “accidental” companions change. Instead of helping a lost friend to find his home, Jacob begins to feel the stranger's unexpected help in finding his lost self. “He couldn't explain, but he sensed, he was almost sure – that *he*, without his bent companion, would feel lost”.<sup>39</sup> The end of the journey also means the end of Jacob's transformation, i.e. the deification of the hero who, in growing closer to God, begins to feel his companion as close family and finally sees him for what he is through an epiphany which closes the story. “Somewhere at the edge of vision – the rustling breaths turned into rustling feathers, that hump dissolved into a pair of large wings”.<sup>40</sup> The angel appears as man's closest friend, his helper and guide through the difficult process of questioning and transformation, which is not unlike the hierarchical structure of *The Siege*. Both texts reveal a gradual transformation that leads to the Lord through personal improvement. On this path of deification, by the grace of God, angels are the helpers of man. Apart from the biblical subtext in the story, we also recognize the reflex of the *Paradise Ladder* by John of the Ladder, which was constructed on the basis of the Old Testament model. By imitating Jacob's ladder, through thirty lessons to monks, John of the Ladder tried to form a kind of spiritual scale through which “the soul gradually frees itself from the earthly and ascends to the heavenly”.<sup>41</sup> That is why, apart from the biblical subtext, the story certainly references the well-known fresco of the heavenly ladder,

<sup>33</sup> The Book of Genesis, 28, pp. 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Gorgievski, *Face to face with angels: images in medieval art and in film*, McFarland&Company, Inc, Publishers, Jefferson, North Carolina and London, 2010, p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> Jana Aleksić, *Opsednuta priča (Poetika romana Gorana Petrovića) (A Story Possessed (the poetic aesthetics of Goran Petrović's novels))*, p. 339.

<sup>36</sup> Goran Petrović, “Close Ones”, in: *Unutrašnje dvorište (The Inner Yard)*, Laguna, Belgrade, 2018, p. 216.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>41</sup> Dimitrije Bogdanović, “Predgovor” in: Sveti Jovan Lestvičnik (“Foreword” in: St. John Climacus), *Lestvica*, Svetilo, 1999, p. 7.

which the monks ascend with the help of angels, while demons try to knock them down from their heavenly ascent. Petrović returns to this image in the short story “Our Close Ones” because he developed the story in a different way than in the novel *The Siege of the Church of Holy Salvation*. First of all, in *The Siege*, the writer paints a clear picture that originated from Genesis, but got its final image and form through the Ladder of Saint John.

The fresco painting depicted old and young monks struggling to ascend. One of them, with a calm expression on his face, was on the very top step, dignified. Many others were climbing. And some were only taking the first steps at the start. Sneering devils were flying around the ladder, tugging at the monks’ robes, trying to knock them down. And although the majority held fast, steady, some were saved by only one hand from falling into temptation.<sup>42</sup>

The author introduces the fresco from the Žiča Monastery and the characters depicted on it into the plot of the novel on equal footing with the other heroes. A blow to the painted hand of a monk from the fresco will break the elbow and hand of Dohiar Danilo and decisively separate him from the brotherhood. Thus, the painted figure is not only a work of art, but, in Orthodox dogma, it represents the “living presence of a painted saint”.<sup>43</sup> One more time will Petrović return to this painting in another of his works. The last time was in the story “Bogorodica i druga viđenja” (“The Virgin and Other Visions”), also from the collection *Our Close Ones*. The hero of the story has various visions (not delusions), most often of the Mother of God, but also of other biblical stories, in which the vision depicting “devils flying around the ladder of heaven with unabated ferocity and tired angels of all nine orders” takes the stage once again.<sup>44</sup>

It is clear that the writer is preoccupied by the thought of personal achievement and development as well as by the role of angels on the path of self-knowledge. From the biblical text, through the philosophical and theological reflections of the Pseudo-Areopagite, to the *Ladder* as a literary inspiration and an inspiration for a painting, Goran Petrović depicts a “ladder of virtue”. This scale of spiritual progress is presented today, just as it used to be in the past, as “‘mental’ (noetic), but also ontological because it deifies, changes qualitatively”.<sup>45</sup> This “idea of active spiritualization”,<sup>46</sup> as Bogdanović calls it, was strongly present in the Serbian Middle Ages; it is especially

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<sup>42</sup> Goran Petrović, *Opsada crkve Sv. Spasa (The Seige of the Church of Holy Salvation)*, Narodna knjiga – Politika, Belgrade, 2004, p. 68.

<sup>43</sup> Stamatis Skliris, “From Portrait to Icon” [translated from Greek by Stanimir Jakšić] in *Beseda*, No. 3-4, Vol. 2, p. 223.

<sup>44</sup> Goran Petrović, “Bogorodica i druga viđenja” (“The Virgin and Other Visions”), *Our Close Ones* in: *Internal Yard*, Laguna, Belgrade, 2018, p. 314.

<sup>45</sup> Dimitrije Bogdanović, *Studije iz srpske srednjovekovne književnosti (Studies from Medieval Serbian Literature)*, SKZ, Belgrade, 1997, p. 305.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

dominant in the spiritual movement of Hesychasm, and today, in the works of Goran Petrović, it is manifested as possible and desirable. The role of angels in this is crucial.

The *Search Engine*, a book of reviews, short essays with lyrical and narrative elements<sup>47</sup> “questions the forms of the contemporary meetings and the collision between traditional and modern patterns of culture”.<sup>48</sup> The reason for writing is most often scenes from everyday life that serve as a trigger for analyzing the depraved reality thinly veiled through the humanist prism of Goran Petrović. Already in the second essay “Gledano” (“Seen”), the motif of the angel appears as a basic motif that characterizes the entire book. The theme is a series of moving images that are framed by the window in the narrator’s study which allows us to follow his view – from lower to higher scenes. First he describes the wet earth, which “seems fed up with everything, including us and our lack of care”,<sup>49</sup> then the view rises to some children playing, glides over passers-by, and shifts to a nearby building and its terraces, only to stop at a new, larger building under construction and a man on a crane who “seems to have gotten lost in the sky in his human arrogance”.<sup>50</sup> Each of the descriptions is not only a testimony of what has been *seen* objectively with our eyes, but also what has been *observed* subjectively from the inside. The application of pretend incidental strokes of random images that gradually rise into the heights testifies to the still vertical orientation of man. However, the goal of this ascent has been lost; in Petrović’s earlier works, the goal represented the desire for deification and becoming closer to God. Everyday life has caused man not to climb the ladder of improvement in order to reach God, but instead, it has led man, in his human arrogance, to see himself as the new builder of the Tower of Babel, leading him, thus, away from the Lord. Therefore, the angel in the story is just a simulacrum—an image without essence.

And the endless heavens, they are playing with a balloon in the shape of a stylized angel, a balloon whose string was released by someone’s hand at the Serbian Warriors Square, while only a hundred meters away, where, I know for sure, a hunchbacked vendor, called Bukva, obtrusively offers deftly inflated balloons on the spot. And while a child, at the Serbian Warriors Square, is probably crying and pointing his finger towards the sky, the stylized angel slowly rises, higher and higher, towards the festive blue sky. I don’t know why, but looking at him from my window, I almost cry too. Wondering, even though I know very

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<sup>47</sup> Mileta Aćimović Ivkov, “Pisac u svom vremenu: zapisi Gorana Petrovića” („Writer in His Time: Entries by Goran Petrović”), *Tradicija i fantastika u delu Gorana Petrovića (Tradition and Fantasy in the Works of Goran Petrović)*(Proceedings), Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 2021, p. 79.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>49</sup> Goran Petrović, “Gledano” (“Seen”), *Pretraživač: zapisi (The Search Engine: Entries)*, Official Gazett, Belgrade, 2017, p.8.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

well that angel-shaped balloons can't see anything, wondering what he, a plastic angel of sorts, sees down here – from such distance.<sup>51</sup>

The image of the angel is freed from its rich symbolism, and thus, emptied and unencumbered by the weight of meaning floats through air as the image of a child's balloon. While the narrator senses the child's grief over the loss of the toy, he himself feels grief because of the lack of essence that only the heavens can bring to human life through the medium of angels. Therefore, the narrator imprints onto the simulacrum of the angel its original meanings and symbolism "wondering what he, a plastic angel of sorts, sees down here – from such distance". Then the narrator, in his other notes about modernity and "accompanying" observations, uses that view from above, trying to view the events around him through the perception of a *higher* truth and to point out modern sins, most often through (fairly blunt) irony. It is clear that the narrator is painfully aware of the chasm between higher and lower reality, but also within man himself.

The call from above is still open, but the human refuses to respond, making communication between the two worlds impossible. The breakdown of man's contact with God, which deeply preoccupies Petrović, is best thematized through the story "Dopuna" ("Refill"). It is narrated in the light of modern communication with mobile phones. The event that the writer describes places the readers in familiar situation – having to pre-pay, i.e., add credit to his mobile phone. The presence of a higher reality in this common action is indicated by the representation of the face and wings of the White Angel from the famous fresco in Mileševo Monastery on the front of the refill card. While trying to refill his credit, the man notices that there are letters instead of a number underneath the card's protective film – somebody's name and last name. Despite noticing this peculiarity, the man still decides to continue the well-known procedure and, like many times before, calls the voicemail. However, the voice that answers is not a mechanical voice. "Quite the opposite, it was somehow barely audible, bordering on a whisper, but rather warm and intimate, like it hadn't repeated the message a million times to a million unknown persons. Like it was talking to him and only him, by name and last name".<sup>52</sup> Only then, after repeatedly typing in the secret pin does the man realize that the mysterious voice keeps repeating his own name and last name! The subtext, one more time, is the character of Jacob from the Old Testament, whom God is calling: "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine".<sup>53</sup> The man, however, remains deaf to the *bright voice* of God and stays immune to the Dučić-like and anthropological yearning for the Maker *to call us by our real name*. He simply stops communication by hanging up and returns to his every day life, rendering

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Goran Petrović, "Dopuna" ("Refill"), *Pretraživač: zapisi (The Search Engine: Entries)*, the Official Gazette, Belgrade, 2017, p. 69.

<sup>53</sup> Isaiah 43:1.

the angel's mediation barren. Man by his own will renounces the heavenly presence which could have been a soteriological *refill* for survival in this world.

In the novel *Paper*, however, the writer makes a striking turn, by portraying angels in an entirely different way. The plot of the book with which the delta novel opens is set in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in the Renaissance ambience of the Italian town of Amalfi, known for its famous paper. The writer incorporates the nonchalant spirit of Boccaccio in his expression, but also in his relationship to sacred motifs such as, among others, the motifs of angels and the Virgin Mary. In this novel, Petrović problematizes everything that has been the credo of his writing until now. Perhaps the reason for this is the narrator's submerging into the Latin culture as well as into the 15<sup>th</sup> century as a time of change and transformation. As the narrator in Petrović's work is always adjusted to the theme and close to the character, so in the novel you can feel the speculation typical of classical antiquity and skepticism that dominated the spirit of Italians during the Renaissance.<sup>54</sup> This skepticism is clearly reflected in the narrator's rhetorical questioning of the miraculous help from the saints. "Perhaps the Church, not only of the Western 'inclination' but of every other as well, could be a little more careful when discussing who to canonize. This, of course, applies to other religions as well".<sup>55</sup> Just as a reminder, *The Siege* describes the conflict between the Latin and Byzantine civilizations during the Fourth Crusade with the narrator clearly backing the eastern side and, in his assumed role of the Constantinople chronicler, thus, championing all values of the Byzantine cultural circle. In the novel *Paper*, such an antithesis does not exist, and the events related to the Italian area are discussed from the Latin point of view. Nevertheless, we will find a contrast if we dive into the course of the delta novel in its entirety and look for answers by comparing the novel *Paper* with the novel *Iconostasis*. Thus, thematizing the same time period in Italy and in Serbia, the writer contrasts Queen Giovanna with despot Stefan Lazarevic. Giovanna is portrayed as a dissolute ruler who spares nothing to indulge her pleasures, while Stefan is portrayed as a figure of spirituality, chivalry and the written word.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, the relationship to sacredness in the first novel is also posed as a problem. The church of the *Western inclination* is embodied by Christ bowing his head on the cross.<sup>57</sup> Angels are anthropomorphized, and instead of signifying the entry of the holy into the world, they are personified by the human feeling of fear. Everyone retreats, even saints and angels, before the force of the problematic queen who does not hesitate to desecrate the church with her own or other people's blood.

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<sup>54</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* [translated into Serbian by Milan Prelog], Graphic atelier "Dereta", Belgrade, 1991, p. 274.

<sup>55</sup> Goran Petrović, *Paper with a Watermark*, p. 92.

<sup>56</sup> Stefan Lazarević and his time period were the backbone of one tributary in the novel *The Seige of the Church of Holy Salvation*.

<sup>57</sup> Goran Petrović, *Paper with a Watermark*, p. 109.

It is one thing that the saints retreated cowardly, but also the angels on the supporting columns and arches of the dome now moved further away, up to the very top, under the dome of the church... Two-three white feathers landed on the marble floor, probably fallen off during their flight to the place they deemed safer...<sup>58</sup>

We can also see that the motif of the angel feather, unlike in *The Siege*, does not play a significant role here. The symbolic potency of the feather as a truth to be revealed<sup>59</sup> is abolished, and it represents only the paradigm of an easy life without meaningfulness. The irony is extended through the story of the Strasbourg Cathedral where the bronze angels above the portal are shown as a mere attraction for the masses. Every trace of sacredness has been stripped from them, every possibility to help a person or deliver a heavenly message removed. The novel, in fact, conveys amazement by the literalization and banalization of both angels and other saints, and we cannot escape the impression that this is due to having the story set in the burlesque playfulness of the Renaissance as well as in the perspective of Western civilization, which is always presented as a problem in Petrović's oeuvre.

See what you can arrange with those angels, ask them to once in a while, at least on holidays, circle around the bell tower once or twice, people will be happy, children will be happy, and the angels will stretch their wings a little, they won't be afflicted with pain in their backs in later years...<sup>60</sup>

A plot twist is delivered in a similar way in the novel *Iconostasis*. While talking about the furnishing of despot Stefan's new palace, the narrative includes a story about the pilgrimage of icons which set off on their own to Belgrade from Mount Athos and the Hilandar Monastery. As in the previous novel where statues and frescoes "came alive", here we see that new life is breathed into icons, which is not a novelty in Serbian religious thought and tradition. For example, the legend about the icon of the Three-handed Mother of God, who becomes the abbess of the Hilandar Monastery by coming to the abbess's throne herself. Petrović applied this Orthodox belief that the icon is indeed a real existence of something painted in *The Siege* not only to the representation of angels but also of saints. So, to prevent him from falling, Abbot Grigori is supported by St. Constantine and Helena in their painted version. Another direct inspiration for the story of the journey of icons in the novel *Iconostasis*, Petrović might have found in *Život despota Stefana Lazarevića* (*The Life of Despot Stefan Lazarević*) by Constantine of Kostenets, who is also one of the main heroes of *Iconostasis*. Namely, when describing the death of the despot Stefan, this Bulgarian teacher writes:

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, pp. 92-93.

<sup>59</sup> Τζ. Κούπερ, Λεξικό παραδοσιακών συμβόλων [μετάφραση από τα αγγλικά Ανδρέας Τσακάλης], Πύρινος Κόσμος, Αθήνα, 1992, p. 552.

<sup>60</sup> Goran Petrović, *Paper with a Watermark*, p. 102.

This scene appeared before our eyes: inside the great city church, venerable icons flew up in the air and, behold, it was just like in the act that will take place at the time of the second coming (of Christ): the Empress or the Mother of God and John the Baptist on either side of the figure of the Savior, and icons of the twelve apostles – six on each side, as it should be – which we thought fitting for the glory of the city and (for its) protection. And this happened at the hour of death, alas.<sup>61</sup>

In the novel *Iconostasis*, the icons have their own will, needs, and human characteristics which their prototypes, most likely, had during their lives. They, like people, go through different experiences, and some, yet again in their second holy life, perish. Sometimes they garner respect, and sometimes hatred. We encounter the motif of angels in this novel as well, in a completely innovative way. Describing the return of the icons to Mount Athos and their various individual destinies, four icons that decide to return flying through the air are specifically described. The painted saints, just like other icons, are not named, but they differ from the others because there are angels, “nine each”, depicted above the heads of these saints.

Besides, the painted angels were certainly not of the more mighty and powerful ones. More precisely, they were not of the higher orders in the angelic hierarchy. These were not the famous seraphims with as many as six wings, huge cherubs with many faces, thrones depicted as speeding wheels... Nor were they considerable dominions, or those shouldered ones they call virtues, or the mighty ones they call powers... They did not even belong to an order of principalities, not even archangels... They were just ordinary angels. Painted on icons. Which means that they were not particularly big, like the same angels that are painted in some church dome. In fact, they were no bigger than dragonflies, which even the lightest of streams carries away, or which the breeze knows how to sweep and twist, while to the mountain wind they are as important as stray chaff for threshing oats in the valley... So it is quite certain that, however much they helped, no matter how much they were united in the “nine vows”, such weak angels certainly could not guide the saints to the Mount Athos.<sup>62</sup>

We see that in this work as well, Petrović followed the hierarchy established by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite. However, unlike in *The Siege*, in which the angelic hierarchical structure is the basis for the cataphatic theological thought as the subtle ideological carrier of the work, in the *Iconostasis* the angelic order loses its strength and purposefulness. True, the hierarchy still exists, the biblical representations of angelic ranks are observed, but their purposefulness and the grace that is expected from God’s envoy as

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<sup>61</sup> Constantine of Kostenets, *Život Stefana Lazarevića, despota srpskoga (The Life of Despot Stefan Lazarević)*, Društvo za srpski jezik i književnost Srbije, Belgrade, 2007, p. 86.

<sup>62</sup> Goran Petrović, *Iconostasis of the Known World*, pp. 136-137.

man's helper are missing. Even by emphasizing the appearance of angelic *non-matter* ranks (six wings of seraphims, multiple faces of cherubs, thrones like speeding wheels, considerable dominions and shoulders of power), the Pseudoareopagitian idea of their symbolism is betrayed; their symbolism was the reason for giving us these representations "so that, in accordance with the measure of our strength, we can proceed from the most holy, as indicated by them, to the simple one with no sensory image".<sup>63</sup> The apocalyptic image from the *Book of Revelation to John* is reversed and the four angels at the four corners of the world<sup>64</sup> are no longer the masters of the winds. They are only "weak angels" who cannot influence events and are carried by the wind along with the icons. Such a change occurs due to the inversion of the motif that exists in the relation of the heavenly to the earthly hierarchy. In his two works *The Heavenly Hierarchy* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Pseudo-Areopagite writes that the earthly organization should imitate the order that exists in the heavenly spheres, and that the ultimate goal of mimesis is deification—"conforming to God and uniting with him".<sup>65</sup> This is precisely what Constantine of Kostenets testifies to when describing the structure of Serbian despotism; he records how Stefan Lazarević arranged his state according to the angelic structure recounted by Pseudo-Areopagite.<sup>66</sup>

Right away, from the very beginning so to speak, did he plant his beautiful garden: he (appointed) some to manage affairs, others to be his bodyguards, which was the most trusted (internal) rank. A second rank also (existed). And a third, external, so that the third would be with the second, and the second with the first, almost like the ranks of angels; (this is), in fact, where one could see the reflections of the Areopagite. Because God also gave earthly authority to people according to his own image.<sup>67</sup>

The perfect arrangement of the microcosm of the Serbian state, and especially of the capital *of the seven hills*, Belgrade, is conditioned on the dedication of the ideal ruler, despot Stefan, who is "similar to a seraphim".<sup>68</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, p. 12.

<sup>64</sup> *The Book of Revelation*, 7,1.

<sup>65</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *Dela*, Miroslav, Belgrade, 2009, p. 55.

<sup>66</sup> This statement confirms the medieval belief according to which the ruler transfers the grace received from God to his fatherland "just as the divine knowledge of angels, of which Saint Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite, speaks extremely vividly, is transferred from higher to lower ranks of angels." S. Protić, "Uticaj spisa Dionisija Pseudo-Areopagita na razvoj vladarske ideologije Nemanjića" ("The Influence of the Writings of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite on the Development of the Rulers' Ideology in the Nemanjić Dynasty") in *Dela: (Corpus Areopagiticum)*, St. Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, Šibenik, 2012, p. 264.

<sup>67</sup> Constantine of Kostenets, *Život Stefana Lazarevića, despota srpskoga (The Life of Despot Stefan Lazarević)*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p. 54.



The angelic nature of the Serbian ruler and his position in the Serbian state is emphasized, not only by comparison with the highest rank in the hierarchy, but also with a series of other details that describe the Serbian ruler, knight and poet. “No one ever looked into his eyes”<sup>69</sup> because he was like “the sun among the stars”,<sup>70</sup> someone who “supervised, appointed and illuminated”<sup>71</sup> It is because of a ruler like this that his capital, the “grand White City” is “similar to Zion in Jerusalem”<sup>72</sup> and that the inhabitants are worthy of such a residence. Serbs are brave, merciful, bodily clean and sociable, thus, the quill of the scholar Kostenets established life in Serbia to be “like the church of God”.<sup>73</sup>

In the novel *Iconostasis* Petrović reverses this view of Serbian reality, and by inverting motifs he deconstructs the idealized image provided by Constantine of Kostenets. Despot Stefan is still a virtuous ruler, an endower; by inscribing the cross in the circle as the starting point for the construction of the Manasija Monastery, he is also the creator of a sanctified space. In his personality, Stefan sublimates the highest values in the creative imagination of Goran Petrović – spirituality, chivalry and art. Thus, the character of the despot, which was conceived as early as *The Siege*, develops similarly to the same character in the literary work of Constantine of Kostenets. The split from the medieval subtext appears, however, in the description of the despot’s subordinates. Life in Serbia is no longer the “church of God”.

What kind of land is this, where even a saint stumbles?! What kind of land is this where a saint dares not arrive even for a second, or the gold from his halo would be scraped off? What kind of land is this, from which even animal hides try to escape? What kind of land is this in which the abbot refuses to receive an icon for lodging? What kind of land is this that betrays pilgrims, where villages are moved, abandoned digging sites stink, people extinguish burning stars?! What kind of land is this where a rock, a hard stone underneath soft, gentle moss – just pretends it won’t kill anyone?!<sup>74</sup>

It is clear that the schism is final when the holy icons decide to turn their backs on Belgrade since there is no virtuous life there. The connection between the heavenly and earthly hierarchies is broken because people failed to conform to the icon of God and the human world does not mirror the angelic order. “The Areopagitic divine hierarchy, which had absolute otherness as its key, as its cornerstone center, collapses and twists, making the self not only its center, but also its origin”.<sup>75</sup> This is precisely why not even the angels

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, pp. 31-32.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>74</sup> Goran Petrović, *Iconostasis of the Known World*, p. 174.

<sup>75</sup> Đorđe M. Đurđević, “The Figure of the Angel in Literature (the Problem of Scientific Approach to Literary Angelology)”, p. 118.

are able to help either the saint or man. The ladders that lead from earth to heaven are destroyed and the contact between angels and people broken: as long as faith is only a superficial decoration, angels “are of no more importance than stray chaff.”

Petrović’s artistic thought indicates that the deep estrangement of man and the departure from his true endemic nature can be overcome by establishing a renewed contact between angels and man. The way out of the anthropological crisis lies in the understanding that Man has his true role not in the present moment which directs his actions, but in his relation to eternity, since “the meaning of all of us is not that we should exist only here and today, and not there and tomorrow”.<sup>76</sup> In this touch between angel and man perhaps we can find an answer to the enigma called the delta novel because we sense that the graceful figure of the angel which links Petrović’s works, is actually a messenger of God and, at the same time an emissary of the writer, as he guides us through the labyrinth of an unusual imagination; and we can conclude that in order for us to survive in eternity we need their support because “when there are no angels, everything becomes more dilapidated, and cannot last even throughout the lifetime of a single person...”<sup>77</sup>

Translated from Serbian by  
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<sup>76</sup> Goran Petrović, *Iconostasis of the Known World*, p. 29.

<sup>77</sup> Goran Petrović, *Paper with a Watermark*, p. 95.

## ON SKEPTICISM AND STOICISM IN A SENSITIVE POETIC VOICE

Miodrag Raičević's book *O stvarima koje je Homer propustio* (*Of Things That Homer Missed*), Gramatik, Belgrade, 2022

After a long hiatus, the poet and novelist Miodrag Raičević (1955) is back with a new book of poetry, *Of Things That Homer Missed*. (From the time he entered the literary scene until the end of the first decade of this century, Raičević published several poetry collections *Osjećajne pjesme i jedna konjska* (*Sensitive Poems and a Horse Poem*), 1984; *Čarape u travi* (*Socks in the Grass*), 1987; *Debele devojke* (*Fat girls*), 1990; *Gore glavu visibabo* (*Heads Up, Snowdrop*), 1993; *Muzini vetrovi* (*The Muse's Winds*), 1995 ; *Dlan & lopata* (*The Palm & the Shovel*), 2009—as well as five novels, under the pseudonym T. H. Raič.) If we were to single out at least two poetically representative collections, which make, at the same time, a remarkable contribution to the map of contemporary Serbian poetry, it would certainly be the collections *Heads Up, Snowdrop* and *The Palm & the Shovel*.

The title of Raičević's new book, as we learn from its epigraph, is the same as the title of a prose treatise by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, a Roman emperor and monk from the eleventh century, whose ambitions as a writer were “to complete and round off Homer's work”; Raičević, however, distances himself from such ambitions with irony. With that title, however, he underlines his poetic position at the intersection between *Homeric lyrical* world poetry, which is, in fact, Serbian poetry of this and the previous century, and the Homeric significance of modern lyricism qualified by introverted and contemplative as well as everyday real experience.

It is in the creative correlation between studiously revived experience and respectable literary culture that all the neuralgic points of human existence fluctuate in Raičević's book—ill-fated love, transience, illness, death—always from an unexpected experiential angle, and with a steady stoicism of an extremely sensitive poetic voice reminiscent of Andrić. By intertextually relating in numerous poems from the new collection, which is created from three units of unequal scope and diverse content, Raičević—sometimes

through quotes, sometimes by crypto-quoting, sometimes through allusions—activates an entire register of names, both literary and philosophical classics (Hesiod, Homer, Heraclitus, Sophocles, Aristotle, Seneca, C. Porphyrogenitus, Gogol, S. Butler, S. Fukuzawa, H. R. Haggard, A. Dumas, etc.), as well as those from the era of literary modernity and postmodernity (S. Anderson, H. Broch, R. Jeffers, J. Veselinović, Rilke, Cavafy, T. S. Elliot, Beckett, Sartre, Crnjanski, Cz. Milosz, S. Shepard, Y. Ritsos, A. Bosquet, B. Petrović, M. Tešić, M. Tripković, N. Tadić, V. Pavković and others), and the stars of the New Age culture (A. Warhol, J.M. Basquiat, J. Joplin, J. Hendrix, M. Tucović, Sonja Savić and others), while at the same time allowing himself to be guided by the irony of fate, by the congruence of sensibilities or the kinship of poetic motifs, and sometimes even by idiosyncratic revival of inspired insights and ideas. In other words, guided by the challenge of having to verify kinship with wide awake spirits facing the unrepeatability of every moment of life and the continuous “replay of dying”.

As I/we have already said (!), death, transience and love are the dominant themes of this book, often inextricably linked, except for the semantic focus of some of the works. The first thing that catches the eye is the stoic firmness, spiritual preparedness and openness with which this poet accepts the principles of thanatology and develops a poetic experience of death in several modalities—from irony of fate, through grotesque and a particular type of parody, to an epiphanic announcement. We encounter the first variation in the poem “O smrti i ranom ustajanju” (“On Death and Early Rising”), which opens with the theme of the trivial death of three world-famous artists, then continues with a description of the attention with which death constantly keeps an eye on us and ends with a premonition of one’s own death, embodied in a fantastic image of a mirror without reflection, in which “someone who has no name” will soon appear. The lyrical hero of the poem “O sreći u nesreći” (“On Silver Lining”), Sartre, who, according to a statement in the newspaper, “would like to die at the table, in some restaurant, to pull off the tablecloth as he falls and knock over the plate of soup”, wishes, in fact, for a grotesque death, while the parody poem “O mekom srcu” (“Of the Soft Heart”) elaborates further on Hermann Broch’s paradox that *only in the longing for death do we long for life*. An identical paradox by Branislav Petrović (*The little you have thought about death, is what you have lived*) was taken as the motto of the poem “O smrti” (“On death”), in which the poet’s perception of death and mortality makes him perceive the “world around him” as alien, “as something that never, never was”—his. Based on the Japanese film *The Ballad of Narayama*, the poem “O Narajami” (“On Narayama”), in which, in true Rilke fashion, the words ‘beautiful’ and ‘terrible’ are one and the same, ends with an epiphany that “there is no other day than the day that we die” providing thereby, in accordance with the all-familiar motif, a tone of lyrical heroism to Raičević’s ode on death.

The inevitable lyrical theme of transience, if we exclude a few poems where it touches on love or thanatological motifs, is directly represented in only two, albeit completely unique poems: an elegy reminiscent in tone of Heraclitus' elegies, "O starim fotografijama" ("On Old Photographs") which has a powerful disillusioned charge, and a lyrical and metaphysical lament, "O uvelom lišću" ("On Withered Leaves"), in which "the days slide down the Garmisch Partenkirchen-like slopes of time". From among seven love poems in this book, all different in motif and morphology, ("O kako to da nećeš da dođeš" ("Oh, How is it that You Won't Come"), "O nežnosti bez premca" ("On Tenderness Beyond Compare"), "O dvoje, od kojih se samo jedno seća raja" ("On Two People, of which Only One Remembers Paradise"), "O kraju svega lepog" ("On the End of Everything Beautiful"), "Prolećne vode" ("Spring Waters"), "Ljubav" ("Love"), "O Kadmu i Harmoniji" ("On Cadmus and Harmonia"), at least two or three have made a permanent contribution to Serbian love poetry. In the third poem mentioned above, a lyrical voice from a completely trivial everyday life, from a decade-long distance, verifies, almost mythopoetically, the Edenic intensity of his emotional devotion to his life partner. In "Spring Waters" a *memory of love* is revived in a melancholic tone with precise lyrical narration about the collapse of a fine, deep-rooted ritual of everyday intimacy. And lastly, solidified in the experience and universality of the love story between the famous mythical couple and the legendary founders of Budva, the poem "On Cadmus and Harmonia" preserves the elemental forces of the archetypal experience befitting the dramatic life-giving measure of the Mediterranean ambience.

Next, three evocative works ("Svetla u brdima" ("Lights in the Hills"), "O lastavicama" ("On the Swallows"), "O slepom koloseku" ("About the Dead-End Tracks")), leave a deep impression on Raičević's readers, both in terms of the peculiarity and symbolism of the motifs, as well as in terms of his artistic eloquence. And several poems from the shorter and final poetic cycle of the book—about his mother, about her death and her character—do not escape the readers' attention.

Classic *lyrical Homerism* typical of the small, yet important, second cycle of poems entitled "Ελλάς! Έλλάς! Έλλάς!" is characterized by an extremely ambivalent attitude towards the motif of Ithaca. Thus, in front of the poem "Ithaca" stands, as a motto, Cavafy's verse *Always keep Ithaca in your mind*, while its final verses, also addressed to Odysseus, read: "Should it happen anywhere on the planet / That you lose your heart, return to Ithaca—/ You will find it there!" However, in the poem dedicated to a well-known Montenegrin folk singer, the exact opposite advice is given to Odysseus: "Therefore, do anything / But do not return to Ithaca, because there, apart from / a few dead people looking back from yellowed / photographs, you will not find anyone" ("Tamo će je ležala" ("Where She Lay")). If anything from this cycle of poems—which, in addition to the above mentioned, also contains one primarily auto-poetic poem, and the one commented above about mythical lovers, and

the last one “O sardonskom osmehu” (“On a Sardonic smile”) – is a representation of Raičević’s new book as a whole, it is primarily the title phrase of this last lyrical segment. It most adequately symbolizes the poet’s emotional relationship to the overall thematic world of his latest collection.

Going one-by-one through all the individual titles, including several auto-poetic entries and issues of eminently poetic concern, let us focus a bit longer on the poem “O nebu” (“On the Sky”). It begins in a purely Aristotelian manner, with an ironic problematization of man’s “right to eternity” which does not apply to other zoological creatures: the hare, the raven, the viper, the thrush, the nightingale, the parrot... And continues by making a parody of the image of paradise as “God’s supermarket”, only to have the poet address us somewhat more rationally in the third part of the poem: “Rarely does one wonder / if the one who invented paradise / ever even saw paradise – many things are unclear / The story does simply not sound right. / But, if God so commanded / then the job has no faults. / Well, brother! But what if he didn’t?” From this questioning over non-questioning, the poet rushes to more lucid questions: “And what’s the point of death if it has no meaning?” / And what is heaven for, if life has meaning?” In the end, we realize that the entire series of rational ironic problematizations is in fact an expression of the poet’s rebellion in the face of his own emotional and existential deprivation: “What the hell is all this for, / if you and I are not together?” This rebellion, however, implies the need for love and harmony, which, paradoxically, equates the starting points between the rationalist-atheist and irrationalist-religious positions in terms of values. The poem “On the Sky” creates a spiritual dome to Raičević’s new collection on a purely humanistic plane. In the face of major traumatic issues such as existence, death, transience, loss or absence of love, the writer does not lean towards religious consolation, nor does he surrender to despair either. Despite having skeptical insights, he resists with the power of his stoic life and philosophical attitude.

Lastly, it would be appropriate to offer some acceptable answer to the question: Where and how to contextualize Raičević’s collection, whose title is obviously ironic, in light of the current moment of Serbian poetry? In this respect, it coincides with two aspects of *lyrical Homerism* present on our newest poetry scene. First, with the thematically classic aspect, but almost opposite in terms of value, as promoted in the book *Pev sirena (The Song of the Sirens)* by Mirko Magarašević (2018), to which the ambivalent experience of Ithaca in the penultimate cycle of poems in Raičević’s collection corresponds to some extent. And secondly, with that contemporary, thematically diverse real-life everyday reciting which is equal to Homer’s voice in terms of cultural irony, as presented in the book *Homer predgrađa (Homer of the Suburbs)* by Dragan Jovanović Danilov (2003), which to a certain extent corresponds to the other two thematically contemporary cycles of poems in the book *About*

*Things That Homer Missed*. Because the *things* that Raičević's Homer missed, Danilov's Homer managed to catch, making these books by the two poets culturally compatible in principle.

Marko PAOVICA

Translated from Serbian by  
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## A WORLD HEMMED IN BY WORDS

*Tradition and Fantasy in the Works of Goran Petrović*, edited by Olivera Kri-vošić, Library of Matica Srpska, Novi Sad 2021

The book of proceedings *Tradition and Fantasy in the Works of Goran Petrović* encompasses papers from the Roundtable held in Matica Srpska on November 18, 2021, on the occasion of the *Golden Book of the Matica srpska Library Award*. The recipient for 2021 was Goran Petrović and the award had been bestowed on the Day of the Matica srpska Library on April, 28, 2021. The structure and design of the proceedings reflect the atmosphere of these events because the collection of texts include the meeting minutes from the session where the winner was selected and photos from the same event, from the award ceremony and from the Roundtable. Eminent language and literature professors from the Universities of Belgrade, Novi Sad and Kragujevac, as well as prominent writers and literary critics from Belgrade and Novi Sad contributed to the collection of papers.

The notions of tradition and fantasy provide a conceptual framework for the papers. Tradition is understood to mean both Christian tradition and folklore, as well as the (post)modern tradition of Serbian literature, from all aspects of its application in Petrović's work. Fantasy, in this context, includes religious depictions, folklore performances, as well as magical realism and inclusiveness of dreams typical of postmodernism. The methodological pluralism of the papers calls for intellectual vigilance in the reading of the proceedings, and it is structured to contain several segments of interpretation: linguistics, form and style, themes and motifs, literary history.

It opens with the segment on linguistic interpretation. By analyzing the ideas which the writer, in his hat as an artist, presented at the promotion of the 19<sup>th</sup> volume of the *Dictionary of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts*, Rajna Dragičević claims in her paper "Goran Petrović o rečima i rečniku" ("Goran Petrović on Words and the Dictionary") that "both in his fantasy

images and images grounded in reality, one can detect both classical as well as the most modern linguistic, and in particular linguocultural theories”(14). She elaborates on his similarities with de Saussure, Vinogradov, Leontiev, Lakoff, Johnson regarding various aspects of the relationship between language and culture. In the paper “Rekurencija kao dominantni sintaksičko-stilistički postupak u priči “Bogorodica i druga viđenja”” (“Recurrence as a Dominant Syntactic and Stylistic Method in the Story “Mother of God and Other Manifestations””) Miloš Kovačević researches the role of recurrence (repetition of elements and patterns) in the development of the story’s structure. The author looks into “the artistic, aesthetic value as a reason to apply a certain type of recurrence method” (22). Kovačević investigates the role different types of recurrences play in the harmonization of form and content, in increasing semantic diversity and in highlighting important aspects of the story.

In addition to linguistic repetitions, motif repetitions in Petrović’s oeuvre are also a subject of study, both in the biblical and folklore-mythology registers. In the paper “Opsada crkve Svetog Spasa – Prelomni roman u evoluciji Gorana Petrovića” (“The Siege of the Church of Holy Salvation – A Breakthrough Novel in the Evolution of Goran Petrović”, Jovan Delić points out that, despite being a postmodernist, the writer “is not inclined to relativize values [...] for him there are high values that people defend and sacrifice for” (57). They represent identity, symbols. In addition to the non-material culture of the story, the highest value is the church as “the house of God and man, a miniature cosmos, the universe” (58). The Siege of the Church of Holy Salvation becomes a threat to “the center of the world” and “the symbol of independence of the Serbian people, the royal and imperial, as well as the church crown” (57). Delić emphasizes the importance of the novel *The Siege of the Church of Holy Salvation* to the international reception of Serbian literature and to its cultural self-determination. In the paper “Od folklornog đavola do Andrije Skadranina u *Opsadi crkve Svetog Spasa* Gorana Petrovića” (“From the Folkloric Devil to Andrija Skadranin in the *Siege of the Church of Holy Salvation* by Goran Petrović” Ljiljana Pešikan-Ljuštanović observes that the biblical symbolism in this novel extends to the negatively semanticized figures. The figure of the devil “matches the representations of the devil in the *Bible*, in medieval Serbian literature” (47). However, she concludes that the writer makes the associative network around Andrija Skadranin more complex by interpolating elements of oral tradition. He also uses original “ironic distancing by playing with figurative and literal meanings” (47). She suggests that the devil therefore “exists in two mutually opposed times: a historical and a mythical time” (47). Despite being an emanation of a folkloric archetype, his influence extends to figures that persist in clearly delineated historical time. Mythic timelessness is also observed in other works of Goran Petrović. In the paper “Poetika prostora bioskopa u romanu Gorana Petrovića *Ispod tavanice koja se ljuspa*” (“Poetic



Aesthetics of the Cinematic Space in the novel *Under the Peeling Ceiling* by Goran Petrović”), Nastasja Pisarev finds elements of magic and timelessness in Petrović’s description of space as it is “filled with artifacts which bring poetry and mysticism to his space” (87), including “a movie screen which opens into the infinity of potential worlds melting the fourth wall” (87), and, through the painting on the ceiling, “across the sky as an illusion of another immensity” (87).

The next interpretative segment sheds light on the literary-historical affiliation of Goran Petrović’s works to postmodernism. Đorđe Pisarev in the paper “Ishodišna situacija Petrovićeve *Sitničarnice* ‘*Kod srećne ruke*’: Pomeranje granica i fikcija” (“The Initial Situation of Petrović’s *The Corner Shop* ‘*The Lucky Hand*’: Shifting Boundaries and Fiction”) emphasizes the writer’s postmodernist preference for fiction and storytelling over avant-garde ideas about erasing the boundaries between art and reality (in favor of reality). This approach “helps the literary work reach a degree of freedom that, finally, frees it from a mimetic relationship to nature” (38), which as a consequence creates a literary world inhabited by “indigenous heroes and events that live in a special spatial and temporal continuum, a parallel world that has weight and integrity equal to the reality in which we live” (39). Following the same idea, in her paper “*Sitničarnica* ‘*Kod srećne ruke*’ ili priča u priči Gorana Petrovića” (“*The Corner Shop* ‘*The Lucky Hand*’ or a story within a story by Goran Petrović”), Milena Kulić points out that “Goran Petrović’s poetic aesthetics relies to a great extent on postmodernist conventions and highlights important ontological questions, above all questions of the story and storytelling” (90). Life is elevated to the level of art and the writer shows “that man, through his most intimate actions, is capable of existing both in real life as well as in a fantasy” (92). The act of reading plays an important role in achieving this parallel existence, so the open form of *The Corner Shop* ‘*The Lucky Hand*’ “creates a book that is dedicated entirely to the phenomenon of reading.” By reading simultaneously, there is a possibility for two readers who open the same book at the same time to meet. The story turns into a maze...” (92). The paper “Dan sreće *Kod srećne ruke*: Roman *Sitničarnica* ‘*Kod srećne ruke*’ (2000) Gorana Petrovića i proza Milorada Pavića” (“A Lucky Day at *The Lucky Hand*: the Novel *The Corner Shop* ‘*The Lucky Hand*’ (2000) by Goran Petrović and Milorad Pavić’s Prose”) by Jelena Marićević Balać explores postmodern features in Petrović’s prose on the level of theme and motif, focusing on the connection between the works of these two writers. The connection proves to be complex and layered, as Petrović “continues where Pavić left off, often discreetly discussing with him or expanding his imaginative perception as well as his reader’s perception” (46). At the same time, she observes, Pavić’s prose “functions as one of the hermeneutic keys which open up different levels of meaning in Petrović’s novel” (46).

The permeation of art and reality in Goran Petrović’s work is reflected in the writer’s preoccupation with current social issues. In the paper “Pisac u svom vremenu: Zapisi Gorana Petrovića” (“A Writer in His Time: Notes by

Goran Petrović”), Mileta Aćimović Ivkov explores the ideological, thematic and formal features of the texts, “notes”, included in the book *Search Engine*. The author finds that in his essays, Petrović “investigates with keen interest the expressions of contemporary meetings and the collision between traditional and modern cultural patterns [...] their dramatic and plunging twists and lowering of values” (69). By expressing his choice, the writer “highlights and affirms life, spirituality, beauty and measure” (69). The paper “*Ispod tavanice koja se ljušpa*, Gorana Petrovića, između književnosti i filma” (“*Under the Peeling Ceiling*, by Goran Petrović, Between Literature and Film”) by Zoran Đerić, explores the influence of reality on artistic texts at the level of form. The author reminds us of the importance of certain non-literary circumstances and of the shaping process itself to the final structure of a literary work. Elaborating on the genre called film novel and on Petrović’s collaboration with the film industry, Đerić claims that in writing this novel he “consciously reaches for cinematic means: montage and dubbing” (83). He also points to the fact that “an omnibus film, or even an entire film chronicle of a city and its inhabitants could have been made” (84) based on the novel *Under the Peeling Ceiling*.

The book of proceedings is bookended with the motif of words, considering that it begins with a scientific analysis of Petrović’s relationship with words and ends with an original text by the author himself called “Nepoznata reč” (“An Unfamiliar Word”). Picking up on the idea presented in the paper by Rajna Dragičević, this approach by the editor of the proceedings speaks to the dual possibility of looking at the concept of words. In a confessional, memoir-like manner, Petrović narrates about the process of his own literacy. At the end of the proceedings dedicated to this writer of important literary achievement, we witness his first encounter with words in the dining room of his neighbor Zaga, a Serbian language teacher, who worked with him even before he started school. This text, too, intertwines reality and aesthetics, because in parallel to learning how to read and write, Zaga’s husband “introduced the little writer to real life” (97) by driving him around town in his car. The boy’s first written words were thrown into Zaga’s fireplace, which the writer, in retrospect, understands as a prediction and a metaphor: “The work of a writer is unpredictable, one moment you are on fire, and the next you are nothing, just dust” (99).

The scientific contribution of the proceedings *Tradition and Fantasy in the Works of Goran Petrović* is reflected in the simultaneous analysis of individual aspects of this author’s work and the laws of his literary universe as a whole, thanks to the synergy of the

heterogenous approach by the authors of the papers. Petrović’s work is subjected to a linguistic sieve, investigated in the light of the greatest shrines in our culture, while at the same time taking his archetypal pulse. The proceedings *Tradition and Fantasy in the Works of Goran Petrović* provides a detailed and comprehensive presentation of this writer’s poetic aesthetics and

is a valuable contribution to the explanation of merits for the *Golden Book Award of the Matica Srpska*, as well as to the science of literature in general.

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## ABOUT HIMSELF AND OTHERS, THEN AND NOW

Goran Babić, *Vidno polje (Field of Vision)*, Laguna, Belgrade 2022

In this year that is drawing to an end, many valuable books have been published, some awarded and others not, some highly publicized and some unjustly overlooked. Belonging to this last group, if I have noticed correctly, it seems that *Field of Vision* by Goran Babić failed to receive the positive response by the readership it deserves—despite good reviews on its front and back covers. According to one, Babić is “a great writer, a wonderfully crazy head in which all our literatures are mixed with a unique one, his own particular brand of Yugoslav literature” (Miljenko Jergović). Another review states that this writer “is bold in his arrangement of short autonomous units—prose fragments about family history, his own poetry, photographs of the living and those no longer with us, descriptions of objects from the past, most of which are long lost, private letters, administrative and archival files—into one unique scene” that “presents us with a temporally wide, yet socio-politically intensive, dramatic historical context” (Drinka Gojković). A third encourages reading of *Field of Vision* by describing it as “a novel in which an entire life is reflected in literature, a unique summary of one life and a hundred books written in that lifespan” (Muharem Bazdulj).

However, the most beautiful and most complex lauding of the book and its author comes from Ante Tomić. His two sentences transcend literature in terms of importance and weight: “After being destroyed in every possible way by the heartiest of patriots, you should read *Field of Vision* by Goran Babić in order to understand two things. Number one, that betrayal is often the only choice left to an honorable man and, number two, that traitors are our best writers.”

Not vying for stronger but for better, Goran Babić left Zagreb for Belgrade, where he still lives today, in the early 1990s. It is a legitimate outcome of his resistance to Tudjman, the “Ustasha” support wave and the “Tudjmanoids”. His resistance also includes a refusal to make peace with those who, by breaking up Yugoslavia, also broke up the Serbo-Croatian linguistic unity. In the

poem “Moj jezik” (“My Language”), from the very end of the book, the poet says (February 26, 1995): “I write in a language as small as a button / I write in the insignificant / in the tiny Croatian language / which is, furthermore, so unlucky / that it does not differ from Serbian.” The poem is a fierce (self) accusation of the South Slavic world in which, in true spirit of the curse of minor differences, issues regarding both language and the Cyrillic/Latin alphabet become reason enough for “[...] one and the same miniature people / [...] to quarrel among themselves”. By highlighting, this time, only the statement that Croatian “is not different from Serbian”, from among a pool of bitter and intoxicating laments about the “small and insignificant”, “funny and dear language”, we draw attention to the very same recent message to “Croatian political linguists” that is contained the essay “Umrijeti u Hrvatskoj” (“Dying in Croatia”) (2018) by Slobodan Šnajder, who “would be willing to give up his position, which is so unpopular today, if somebody could translate the following Serbian sentence into Croatian: *Hrvatski i srpski dva su po svemu različita jezika*”.<sup>1</sup> Let us also add that Babić, despite his deep admiration for Krleža (with whom Šnajder shares the belief “that it is the job of ideals to be out of reach”), made a clear distinction between Krleža who wrote *Moj obračun s njima* (*My Reckoning with Them*) and Krleža who signed “Deklaracija” (“The Declaration”) thirty years later.

As the closest topic to language is the art of words, we would like to draw attention to the fifteen or so poems placed between the covers of *Field of Vision*, written and, for the most part, already published throughout the course of half a century. Exactly forty years ago, the author of this text, while writing reviews about *Noćna rosa* (*Night Dew*) (1979) and *Okus oskoruše* (*The Taste of Service Tree*) (1982), outlined a wider poetic background against which Babić’s poetry of that time came into its own. Despite the fact that almost everything is said in the headlining poem in the first-mentioned collection (“I grew bored of / writing beautiful poems...”), here is an excerpt from our review:

New poetry strives for the use of devices that are not primarily (or not at all) poetic devices—shock, irony, admonition, memento, protest and spite, explicit consent and explicit opposition, inexorable analysis and strikes of paradox, whims of exclusive privacy and exclusivity of categorical generalities. Thus, wrestling with the new reality of the world and the ghosts of surviving poetic conventions, this poetry finds support in the language and materials of everyday life, in the idiom of science and philosophy, in journalistic and administrative “styles”, and above all in “impure” poetic elements—such as anecdote, document, narrative and confession—which the “ontological radicalism” of dominant modern poetry refused inclusion in the space of the poetic until recently. The new *verismo* in its distinctly personalistic disclosure and expression of truthfulness, therefore, does not want to spare even the

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<sup>1</sup> “Croatian and Serbian are two different languages in every aspect”. The translation reads exactly the same in both languages. (translator’s note)

given truths of modernity, tearing both the poet and poetry away from the shelter of their comfortable immunity guaranteed by the protective charter of impersonality and autonomy.

However, the poems from *Field of Vision* are neither anthological nor a testament to the author's key poetic orientations and different phases. They are there, mostly, in the function of information and clarification relating to non-literary circumstances surrounding their "reception" in the centers of political power. Because there are few people today who remember how Savka Dabčević Kučar interpreted the poem "Gori li to Hrvatska" ("Is Croatia Burning") and its author, or how the poem "Što bi morao komunizam" ("What Communism Should Have to Do") was read by Josip Vrhovec, "one of the highest chiefs in Croatia of that time". As for those who only know Babić from his "explosive texts" from *Oko Magazine*, and from various interviews and performances at literary festivals, they should be directed to the poems in which Babić's public involvement through poetic and humanistic height surpasses all our political concords and discords. Such are, for example, vigils and lamentations on topics such as the Holocaust, Jasenovac concentration camp, Goli Otok prison, operation "Storm", NATO's aggression against the FRY— (when Vaclav Havel was among the signatories of the call for bombing), as well as his silent reproaches of our short and selective memory, carelessness and forgetfulness. On this subject, Bazdulj recently mentioned the poem "Field of Vision" after which the book was, quite intentionally, named. Here is the poem, in which facts seem to need no poeticization: "The rule read: / one who falls into the hands of the police / must endure for seven days / without saying a word / until the policemen leave him alone. / After that he can say / whatever he knows and whatever he wants. // Zaga Malivuk, a girl, a Communist Youth, / was brought to the execution site on a cart. // Following seven days of torture, / during which she betrayed no one, / broken, she could no longer walk. // And then Đinđić, fifty years later, / stole the streets from her (By the way, Mirko Tepavac too witnessed "of the bravest people he had ever met" in his autobiographical notes *Moj drugi svetski rat i mir (My Second World War and Peace)*, making a bitter point that, as a rule, they are all now forgotten, "both in this world and the next".)

The backbone of the colorful story is the poet's biography relayed through documents, articles, interviews and short stories about himself and others, as well as through one or two poems about his nearest and dearest. Our poet, born on the island of Vis in 1944, was named after Ivan Goran Kovačić. Only four of his relatives on his mother's side survived the Holocaust, while his father, a World War II veteran, was persecuted by "Croatian party ideologues (in other words— Bakarić)". The main addresses in Babić's life are Mostar, Rijeka and Zagreb, where he lived and worked for about thirty years before emigrating to Belgrade. These pieces of information would perhaps be superfluous were it not for the fact that this century's acceleration of reality erases, or alters, the memories of such

distant states and events, including Goran Babić's lively participation in the literary and socio-political turmoil of the SFRY in its last decades. He was, and remains, a "devout Yugoslav" and a believer in "socialism of Yugoslav colors", despite agreeing with Milan Kangrga's thesis that the left is collapsing because it is "three hundred years too early". His favorite people, most similar to himself, are Vicko Krstulović and his courageous Dalmatians from the battle of Sutjeska, the proponent of political unitarism Miloš Žanko, theater and film makers Lordan Zafranović and Stevo Žigon (to whom he dedicated a poem with the opening line "To life, because it is short, only passion matters"), and the poets Vladimir Popović and Franci Zagoričnik. A particularly memorable, and precious, segment in the book is dedicated to the memory of Ervin Peratoner, one of Babić's favorite teachers, whose public argumentation with the "most prominent Nazi heads" and their Ustasha followers cost him almost two years in Jasenovac concentration camp.

Drawing attention to the absence of posthumous recognition from the Israeli state and our domestic failure to remember a man who spoke bravely while "Europe remained largely silent", and the above-mentioned poem about erasing Zaga Malivuk from our collective memory, are just two of many examples of the poet's attempt to bring back into our field of vision unjustly unsung heroes and martyrs. Here, too, belongs the peacetime memory of the valiant author of the poem *Oči (Eyes)*, who was the only person to stand up for and successfully defend Babić from the leadership of the writers' association (led by Mirko Božić), who attacked his text "Strašno lice ništavila" ("The Terrible Face of Nothingness"), which, in turn, was a strong criticism of Maspok,<sup>2</sup> which the poet still today views as the root of evil from which "the country will not recover in the next hundred years". Babić reminds us that Vladimir Popović was "a pre-war prisoner, bearer of the Commemorative Medal of the Partisans 1941, and, most importantly, the author of the poem *Eyes*, which was included in all anthologies of modern poetry of that time. In short, this is what prevailed, I was no longer a lonely, evil individual. On my side was a legend".

If we have read carefully, the last word in the quotation above, and its adjective, is used only two more times in the book, next to two names bigger than Popović's—those of Tito and Davičo. Before we focus on them, it is worth reminding of the poet's close relations with the political leaders of the time, in particular with Bilić, Šuvar and Račan. This did, however, not save the last-mentioned from objective political judgement—because it was "Račan and his very unstable group of followers, followed by an even more unsteady group led by Špiljak" that allowed Tuđman's followers to reach top positions in the establishment. Babić did not refrain from mentioning "some unclear

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<sup>2</sup> The Croatian Spring, or Maspok, was a political conflict that took place from 1967 to 1971 in the Socialist Republic of Croatia.(TN)

issues” regarding “political murders in Serbia in the 90s”, and even less so from commenting on the disgraceful fall of Slovenia—referring to “the liar beyond compare, from the beginning until the end, Dimitrij Rupel”, as well as to “Kučan, Drnovšek, Janša and all the other not just criminals, but above all, traitors of their own national history”.

What about Tito? Goran Babić may be the last absolute admirer of his name and work among the intellectuals of the former Yugoslavia. His feelings and commitment are completely pure, with no stains. He even refuses to recognize criticism from the left side of the political spectrum, which has plagued Tito’s legacy for a long time. Here are just a few sentences from Mihailo Marković’s conversation with Sartre (in Rome in 1964): “He was very skilled, very capable. A brilliant leader. But there isn’t a rule he hasn’t broken. There is no alliance of questionable principles that he did not enter into: with Stalin, Churchill, the Pope, Arabs, Freemasons, Zionists... He has been very successful so far, but he has destroyed the huge moral reserves that gave the people strength for a long time. Outwardly, we are still very successful, but the big question is what will be our future with such divisions and such cynicism of the leaders.”

And Davičo? “Few writers writing in our language have been as slandered, abused and humiliated in every way as Davičo during their lifetime”, says Babić, who was and remains his friend, a friend from whom “he has learned a lot, and one thing in particular—a storm has to be faced”. From among the many “lies, slander and false accusations” that plagued the great writer, Goran singles out the “abominations originating from Dejan Medaković (about Davičo as a gangrenous tissue of Serbian literature)”. We do not know how Babić once managed to “reply” to Medaković via the daily *Politika*, but we do believe that the so-called dissident, the darling of the authorities and high institutions of both single-party and multi-party systems, before and after the October 5 coup, did not deserve a milder response.

Surprisingly, in his advanced age Goran Babić seems to be avoiding the ferocity of his old “explosive texts” in which he (as Ujević would say about Matoš) “perfected the Croatian swear word”. Now, while taking stock of his life, without giving up on his beliefs, both general and literary, he prefers to talk about friendships rather than conflicts. He delights the readers, in particular, with the memories of mutual sympathies between Raičković and Cesarić, as well as (especially to the author of this text) with a recount of the reconciliation between Davičo and Lalić, whose main characters, Mića Ranović and Lado Tajović, we loved equally in our youth. Subject to one non-negotiable condition, which is that they have to be persons of honor, Goran Babić is now also close with political opponents and creators with a different poetic orientation as well as with thinkers whose view of the world is foreign to him. In other words, with Mihiz, and Bečković, and Ćosić, and Tomislav Ladan, and Radovan Bigović. On the other hand, when meeting with former friends from the period of youthful rebellion, there seems to be more ash than fire now. After more than half a century, when he accidentally

ran into the most prominent leader of the 1968 student demonstrations, Vladimir Mijanović, nicknamed Vlada Revolution, “our conversation contained nothing. Neither conflict nor accord, only an awareness that life had passed by, that the believers in the Praxis School of thought and their opponents were gone, as were younger people [...]. There is nothing left, if we are talking about illusions”.

Equally distant from the legacy of the so-called cemetery lyricism and the (post)modern self-indulgent retorts on the topic of ultimate questions, in the concluding texts of *Field of Vision* Goran Babić stands face to face with the death of dear ancestors, with memories of departed friends and, lastly, with the uncertainty of a “banal thing, almost a trifle, the question – where will I be buried?” On October 31, 2015, in Jajince, at the place of execution of his ancestors on his mother’s side, he recorded the poem “Ilovača, lopata i vatra” (“Clay, Spade and Fire”)—a rosary of conjecture about the moment and manner the crime was committed, resolved by the inexorable and painful realization “that grass, / is grass, wild grass, / stronger than memory. / Stronger than oblivion.” And in the text “Saharana neznanog junaka Gorana Babića” (“Funeral of the Unknown Hero Goran Babić”) (February 2, 2016), the titular hero hesitates and broods and speculates—while recalling the funerals and burial places of Krklec, Krleža, Raša Livada, Novica Tadić, “one of the greatest Serbian poets of our generation”, and Darinka Jevrić, who “became a symbol of the survival of the Serbs in Kosovo”—about which of the Belgrade cemeteries he will be buried at, or whether he may be relegated to the one in Borča, called Zbeg, intended for “the poor and the runaways”.

Yes, “there is nothing left, if we are talking about illusions”. But what does remain is that which will outlive the poet, in the most beautiful sense of the word—three beloved daughters whose places of birth, Mostar, Zagreb and Belgrade, form a map and chronicle of his life path, a trail where the aforementioned hundred books remain; books whose shameful expulsion from Croatian bookstores and libraries cannot be permanent.

The eternal boy, “the crazy head of all our literatures”, Goran Babić, even without his former illusions, and with inextinguishable memories of so many sufferings of the innocent and the best, is not an apathetic melancholic even today, and he is definitely not a defeatist. It is also likely that he finds “the male cry”, which Isidora attributes to Njegoš’s and Rakić’s lives and creative attitudes and cases, alien. Along with two affirming statements, one by Vuk Karadžić and the other by Dubravka Ugrešić, which stand as the *Field of Visions*’s motto, Pablo Neruda’s life summary could also be added: “I confess that I have lived!”

Slavko GORDIĆ

Translated from Serbian by  
Milana Todoreskov



## REMEMBRANCE AND POETRY

Andelko Anušić, *Boli, boli me jako (It hurts me, hurts me a lot)*, Revnitelj, Niš 2022

The collection of poems *It hurts me, hurts me a lot* by Andelko Anušić, just like his previous collections of poems, represents a poem of its own kind, compiled of individual major-minor music sheets, joined together at semantic and emotional level. It is, therefore, not a heterogeneous collection of poems, composed of diverse and mutually distanced sequences. What is, nevertheless, essential to state is that this collection of poems—as oppose to previous ones—evokes all previous collections by this author, so it represents—in a particular manner—a retrospective of lyrical poetry by Andelko Anušić.

In his poetry, Andelko Anušić superiorly situates anthropological and spiritual identity of the Serbian people by being able to recognize the very source of his own pain. The poet discovers the sources of his pain not only within historical, or psychological, but rather within the crosscut of historical, psychological, and archetypal layers, i. e. within the etymological echo, which appears in the present tense. The pain torments him, but it also binds him to what is substantive. The man is where it hurts. This is not masochism. The precision required in order to find the measure between suffering and the substantive, points to danger coming from a wrong word, which can mislead to the chasm of masochism, on one hand, or into impassable hermetic worlds on the other.

At the vestibule of the collection, there is a cover poem, as its very title clearly states. At the very beginning of the cover poem, there is an evocation of a seemingly paradoxical piece of advice once given by Nikolaj Velimirović, which follows: *Suffer, yet sing!* The paradox of these words is that they, as if created through the process of electrolysis, enunciate what must be the spiritual imperative, i.e., they enunciate a whole, disassembled within the electrolytic reality. *Suffer, yet sing!*

What is this whole that needs to be reassembled through suffering and singing?

In the poem titled ‘Whose poet are you?’, the poet allows the reader into his magic space, where poetry is created, and unveils his poetic process. The first two verses: *I remember / I sing*, represent the poet, and the whole. The one who remembers and the one who sings. Remembrance does not only refer to the past. It is an active component of the present. This is the reason it is able to sing. This is precisely what is stated in the verses that follow: *I sing / because I remember*.

And what does remembrance stand for? A human life should be nothing else than the arrangement of what has passed, of which, of course, there is plenty more to come and which cannot be destroyed, without at the same time

destroying the entire humanity, which, on one hand, needs to be reestablished once more, and on the other, needs its completion.

Moreover, in the very same poem, Anđelko Anušić further explicates the notion of remembrance and of singing to the reader: *And remembrance is my heart, / my undrowsed eye / upon which I have seen and outseen / the naked and the dead / the dismembered and the seared. // The outcasts—in oblivion drowned.*

How is it even possible, *in oblivion drowned*? What kind of oblivion is that, which drowns? It is a self-oblivion, oblivion for others, it could be an oblivion for those who commit crimes, for those who forget. In oblivion, therefore, crimes are committed towards oneself and towards other.

However: *While I sing, I remember / and I remember, so I sing*, it is a process which disables oblivion, for then there can be no singing. He cannot sing, and not to remember at the same time, nor can he remember (remember himself), unless he tries to sing. This verb, sing, represents a metaphor in the opus of Anđelko Anušić. This verb is a notion superior to life. He says he remembered things gladly. The power of comprehensiveness that remembrance and singing possess, bring jubilation. Unification of what is past, embodied within remembrance, and of what is present, personified within the verb sing, activated within the present tense I sing, is what makes the poet Anđelko Anušić who he really is. Thus, he knows whom he represents, whom he speaks to, how to live, thus he knows who he is. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the poem-ending question is posed to yet another poet, and we have already stated that the poet is a metaphor of a superior life:

*Whose poet are you?*

Laid bare of any ideology, vowed solely to the truth, this question is not hostile, nor provocative. Firmly established within the truth, founded on remembrance and singing, it wants to—by posing the question—offer a possibility for others to reflect, which means that the question is initially posed to oneself.

In what other form of perceptiveness can one reflect upon the encounter between remembrance and singing?

The poem 'A boy from the column writes his first poem' brings various points of view to the notion of *columns*. The first person, sensitive to all those who observe him, notices and incorporates into himself all the voices speaking about him (if we wonder how come we have such a powerful apparatus for keeping our self-importance, even when we are not aware of it, or when we deny it, then probably even more so, the answer is provided within this poem). Sensitivity to words is our tragedy and our strength.

For some, we are a number (they do the *numbering*), they deal with numbers:

And those there, they do the numbering:

Three hundred thousand outcasts  
And I from my tiny Column testify:  
A million and a thousand and one undertaker  
Thread the path of the resurrected Čarnoje

Following this, yet another point of view, informs the lyrical subject he belongs to *the misguided*:

And there they say:

The misguided  
And then they amend:  
The expatriates  
They go to their own  
In search for a better life

Then they are *brigands*, who need to be dealt a final coup. Then they are *nomads*, in search for better pasture. Then *rebels, barbarians*. Then the Women in black and other humanitarians refer to them: *The displaced men, the displaced women, as well as children* (for we must pay attention to gender equality and children's rights), the infirm and those exhausted from the journey.

All these voices are being gathered by the first person and stored within, carried forth and along with what presents his essence. The pain is generated within the potential difference. In the poem 'Dream', the author paints brilliant pictures of pain, which connect the centuries and give the genesis of pain:

Beware, my son, of the age of forty-one.  
'Tis a spitten image of the age of ninety,  
which slouched through the yard  
in nineteen fourteen.  
And beware, you child,  
of each that is first in the century;  
beware of its spawn,  
for when its zeros zero in;  
some loiterers and shady characters  
do then their work,  
and evermore on a holy day.

And when such people are at work –  
crops bolter into weeds;  
tills rust and billow;  
like an early, frail willow.

And black helmets traverse the roads,  
while the decent hide in woods...

And black helmets traverse the roads, while the decent hide in woods. This poem is founded on the dichotomy between the loiterers and decent men, those with homes and hearths. *Some loiterers and shady characters / do then their work, / and evermore on a holy day*—this is the central part of the poem. Loiterers, later on in the poem, change into black helmets. The metonymy of black helmets traversing the roads, median lanes of the streets, evokes the ancient disagreement—one is taking the low road, the other is taking the high road. The loiterers, therefore, before turning into black helmets, do some work of their own. Not some general work for common good, but precisely as the poet says, *do their work*. Some work, undefined, and incomprehensible. In spite of all order and settled norms. Work, we know that much at least, is never one's own, but rather common, for *greater good*, as Dositej Obradović, a monk and an avid advocate of Enlightenment used to say. Or else, if not for common good, then in that case it is for common disgrace.

Apart from being loiterers, they are also *shady characters*. Shadow, in Jungian sense, along with the shadow that brings obfuscation in terms of characters and beings, dominating over consciousness about the greater good, demands from them to do their work in their own way. They attempt to settle their own disorder by establishing *their own* work. At that moment, they turn into black helmets. For they establish their own order contrary to the one that has been settled. Such order presupposes working on holy days, contrary to the established norms. Decent men do not toil on holy days, only loiterers do. What does it mean, anyway, to toil on holy days? There is some cruelty in it, in wishing to impose one's own new order. Holy day does not only stand here for an ecclesiastical holiday in calendar; that is a day which presupposes introspection, as well as working on oneself, instead working in the field. Black helmets, a metaphor for strictness and discipline, compensate the internal unsettledness, and absence of discipline of the one who does not introspect. A loiterer does not cultivate his garden, does not observe himself. The question remains as to why someone is not able to look himself in the mirror.

Further down the verses, in another poem, under the title 'Your work and your days', the poet problematizes the question of the notion *work*: *Do not tread without work / below the stars*.

Anđelko Anušić, as someone who is not a loiterer, leads his conversation with his giant predecessors, with the poets. These two verses cited here, at the vestibule of poem 'Your work and your days', summon Antun Branko Šimić and his introductory verses from the poem 'Admonishment': *Man, beware / not to tread so minute / beneath the stars!*

In Anđelko's poetic system, the admonishment is no longer pointed at higher causes—as with Šimić (not to tread so minute under the stars)—but at work that needs to be completed in order to become a Man. This work presupposes work in two spheres: *Sand in hand, song on the lips*. The form

of the word *song* used in the Serbian original (*ījescan*), invokes within this polylogue by Miodrag Pavlović his anthological and timeless text ‘Learn the song’. The archaic form of the word ‘song’, consolidates within it ecclesiastical form of poetry and musical composition. It is a higher form of poetry. Sand in hand, therefore, and song on the lips. In his seven denotation entities, as in the seven days of the Creation, the poet distributes tasks to men. At the end of the work and poetic process, hands are empty, and what remains is what represents the Poem is an eternal image to the Man.

Remembrance and poetry, therefore, complement each other in the spiritual and intellectual world of Anđelko Anušić and are superior to other motifs we find in the collection. On this road of poetry and remembrance, the poet in his reminiscence unveils his precursors, with whom he discusses very vividly. Reminiscence of authors and their works represents not solely a means of legitimizing one’s own poetic thoughts, but also an urge to realize a dialogue process in which our poet wants to participate, becoming thus, and exclusively thus, not only an active participant in the life of his people, but a majority owner of his own life.

Nenad STANOJEVIĆ

Translated from Serbian by  
Ivan Filipović

## REALITY AND PARABLES

Tibor Varadi, Protivnarodni osmeh (*An Anti-national Smile*), translated by Arpad Vicko, Akademska knjiga, Novi Sad 2021

Well-known words by Franz Kafka which speak of the relation between a parable and a man’s freedom: by following parables we shall turn into them and become free of all our everyday worries. If we observe parable as a metaphorical instructive story containing similes (such as widely known parable about the Doorkeeper from *Trial*), we can easily arrive at the question: why do we need metaphor in order to understand reality? Tibor Varadi might reply that in order to understand, we require only the reality itself, provided we sufficiently immerse ourselves into it, since the meaning has always been exclusively figurative! And that means parabolic, mediated through the works of figuration which never fails to capture documents of legal nature, exposed to both the known and the unknown, as well as to ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ interpretative pressures within various historical epochs.

Tibor Varadi has been writing his documentary prose for years now, basing it on his family's law office archive, which had been receiving files since the late 19th century, until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (before the book at hand, three other books had been published already: *Records and people*, 2015; *Road into yesterday*, 2017; *Once upon a time in Ečka*, 2019). Varadi's approach to archive has been exciting since the very beginning, for he deliberates on the conditions of its very construction, because for him this collection of texts from the family archive is not a mere static set of objects, but a set which—through writing and reconstructions—becomes a network of relations testifying about times, and about the people living in them, but also about problems and wrongdoings relayed through variable ideological modalities and casts.

Varadi's latest book, *An Anti-national smile*, is rightfully—as opposed to the first two books whose subtitle was *tales from a lawyer's archive*—labelled 'documentary prose, almost a novel', (on the trace of the previous 'documentary novel' *Once upon a time in Ečka*). The journey taken by documentary prose which leads it to novel is, it seems, a skillful Borgesian mastery of labyrinth of people and records, their mutual connections and motives, truths and lies, large and petty crimes and misdemeanors. They construct together an interesting vision of history of an everyday life. Literary portrayals of this so-called 'minute' history taking place under the conditions defined by 'the greater' history, is a true virtue of Varadi's latest book. What is at stake here, is a very astute depiction and documentation of times, with the addition of literary probability, as a grain of salt without which the reality would be pungent and indigestible. It would seem that legal documents, by virtue of their own logic alone, become literature—for behind them is an enormous, though unobtrusive writing effort, a framing accomplishment gilded not only with the author's erudition, but also with skepticism our own century had finally taught us. In this book, the archive opens on pages written around the 'exciting times' of the Second World War (Varadi himself was two years old at the time the occupation, which is why his memory had to be textual in every case).

'In 1941, things portrayed as probable were not the only ones taking place,' he remarks wittily. If, according to well-known words by Aristotle, poetry depicts more than it stands for, and history more than its individually parts represent, then documentary prose should attempt to build a bridge precisely between the individual and what truly exists—and what truly exists, as shown to us by the destinies of Emilija, Marija and Suzana, our heroines from records and novels, is not necessarily what has probably taken place in exactly such a way. What hides behind the frightening ideological smirks of the Second World War, unrelenting laws and leaden justice? Is it possible to find—behind the web of records, and police control, at the very vestibules of law—still entirely human 'expectations, hopes, disappointments, and conjec-

tures'? Fully aware it is not easy to live in interesting times, Varadi convincingly and, on occasions, movingly, affirms the right to everydayness as a human right.

*An Anti-national smile* is a phrase that most suitably depicts what truly lies within the foundations of one difficult, uncertain and dangerous epoch. This smile is the expression shown on the face of the priest Ištvan Čepčenji, observing the entering of the Red Army into Petrovgrad (as it was officially called at the time), or Great Bečkerek (its previous name, often still in use at the time), i.e., today's Zrenjanin. Denunciation perpetrated by his neighbor ensured he was convicted for a crime against the people and the state. This episode serves the storyteller to open something we—quite innocently—can call 'the people's problem'. A famous novel from the literary canon on the relationship between literature and law, Camus' *The Stranger*, in its second part, contains the words spoken to Mersault by the president of the court 'in a peculiar form'—that he would be decapitated 'in the name of the people'. And truly, appealing to the people is, as our storyteller shows, always slightly peculiar: 'In dynamic years, the notion of the people is always considerably simplified'. Interesting times are marked by stirring, delineated markings such as friend/foe, but those lines are, alas, changeable: 'It was not the first time that the notion of the people referred to those who observe things with jubilation. Those who have only dilemmas (and who just wave their hand) do not belong to the people and are standing on the opposite side'. It is a black-humor response from the center of the darkness to the great question of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, expressed in the famous Renan's work *What is a nation?* Now fully self-aware storyteller and archivist, deliberates on the conditions of truth in 'dynamic years': 'In the time of war, opinion is not calibrated to nuances. And the validity of such supposition is extended to sometime after the war'. In this 'almost a novel', therefore, regardless whether we read 'an anti-national smile', civil litigations because of swearing and cursing, unstable marriages, property-related proceedings or petty thefts, what we witness in the foreground is a 'straitjacket of national/anti-national' used on the already deeply sciatic back of reality. Lucien Febvre, the unavoidable scholar of everyday life, wrote that 'ultimately, everyday reaches its verdict'. The storyteller shows what takes place when court judges the reality, but also how everyday life survives, despite of everything, probably overcoming the instance of the trial 'in the name of the people' as well.

Varadi's style (quite rare in our literature, although typical with, say, Ivan Janković and his outstanding documentary novel *Kata Nesiba: a true and illustrated history of a Belgrade harlot and her struggle for constitutional rights*, 2014) intertwines two bodies of knowledge, the literary and the legal one, and they have a lot in common, not the least the emphasis on the rhetoric, perceived here as *dispositio* (a manner of rendition). Since his early essays, Varadi the jurist and writer, shows his particular sensitivity towards languages—

traversing between Hungarian, Serbian, English and German. He is capable of discussing language in the same manner as he is thematizing the phrase which, according to one German journal, marked the year 2021: *Alternative Fakten*. It does not come as a surprise, then, that an author devoted to the concept of documentary prose focused his attention to this particular expression which denotes a substitute of arguments based on facts with facts unprovable through observations. His target would also include expression such as *human capital* or *collateral damage*, but it is also humorous to see the moment when, like skeletons from cupboards, archaic expressions spring up from old records, such as ‘empower-an-attorney’ (meaning: provide power-of-attorney when persuaded to do so by the attorney himself), an expression which could easily return to the Serbian language these days, since it would certainly be capable of denoting numerous things. And truly, Varadi’s reader has been warned in due time, in the spirit of paradoxical ‘comfortable accountability’ (M. Nenin), which attests that in documentary prose, reality often overpowers decency.

Behind the thin veil of humor and rough straitjacket of law, the storyteller speaks of something else—it is a great theme of the nature of memory, in connection to the archive, but also to the regime of sensuality of the persons involved themselves. How can one tell a story made of ‘leftover chips and splinters of everyday’—primary to oneself—and then to the reader as well? A story which is to be vivid, interesting and credible; a story which is—in the words of Vuk Karadžić—‘worthy of telling, brother’. Or in the words of our storyteller: ‘Sometimes it comes to pass that records and documents turn back facts into memory. They also sometimes even expand memory beyond reality’. On a deeper plane, we witness that the book contains the clash of the world of law (Kafkian law, or otherwise), and the world of reality. What is the relation between the two worlds? After the war, the task of lawmakers was not an easy one, but they were guided by a firm belief in the future, which is not very common with people today, who live in the times after the utopia had ended, that is, following the collapse of faith that the world of tomorrow was going to be better, more beautiful and more just, less corrupted... According to Varadi, it is necessary to understand the regimes of ‘reality’, since we are never at a point in history which would be devoid of injustice (of which numerous inserted episodes testify, such as a seemingly innocent story about Pepsi and Coca-Cola at the Emory University in Atlanta). It is common knowledge that there is no objective procedure for resolving, i.e., overcoming, discord.

As the author has previously already discussed in the text (although not demonstrated): ‘in every mind devoted to justice, there lies an Antigone’. In the background of Varadi’s texts, there hides not only Sophocles, but numerous other authors as well, such as Shakespeare, Beckett, Ionesco, Henry James, Antal Szerb, or János Arany... Once this book has been read, its heroes and heroines, people from the neighboring streets—Gogolian ‘dead souls’, carefully carved from the rigid language of documents and bitter reality of an otherwise



grey world—begin to live within us, we also start to move into them, they participate in our lives, and we see our own reflections within their countenance. Thus, this ‘documentary prose’ accomplishes the effect of fiction (‘almost a novel’ or, possibly, ‘entirely a novel’), by creating a new world which possesses its own lawfulness, and whose murky forest labyrinths—labyrinths of signs of history and labyrinths of oppositions to history—invite us to find our own path.

Vladimir GVOZDEN

Translated from Serbian by  
Ivan Filipović

### COMPARATISTIC *COGITO* OF JOVAN POPOV

Jovan Popov, *Pojmovi, periodi, polemike. O nekim nedoumicama nauke o književnosti (Concepts, Periods, Polemics. On Certain Doubts of the Science of Literature)*, Serbian Literary Guild (Srpska književna zadruža), Belgrade, 2020

Jovan Popov, *Nekritički (p)ogledi (Metacritic (Re)Views)*, “Nikolaj Timchenko” Endowment, Leskovac 2021

For the book *Concepts, Periods, Polemics. On Certain Doubts of the Science of Literature* Jovan Popov received the “Nikolaj Timchenko” award. It is a nice custom for the laureate of this award to have a new book printed, so *Metacritic (Re)Views* soon appeared. The monographs are complementary and have similar concepts, so they can be considered as a complete scientific diptych. Furthermore, the cover of *Metacritic (Re)Views* features René Magritte’s *Forbidden Reproduction* (1937), an expansive gesture. First of all, the author self-ironically hints that, although it seems that the books from 2020 and 2021 are almost twins, they are not the same, because the self-critical starting point bans any reproduction or mere repetition. They are reflected like the young man from Magritte’s painting in a mirror that does not show his face, but the back of his head, provoking logical thinking and the ironic dimension of the painted representation.

At the same time, this painting can very precisely determine the nature of metacriticism, because the metacritic sees his back in the mirror along with the things that are usually not visible. The Belgian René Magritte was not chosen by chance, since the very centre of the book *Metacritic (Re)Views* consists of four chapters that cover the issue of thematology (“Thematology and Thematic Criticism”, “Poststructuralist Thematic Criticism”, “Critique of Identification by Georges Poulet”, “Thematology of Raymond Trousson”), the foundations of which were also laid by a Belgian, Georges Poulet and, as

he named it, the “Geneva School” of criticism (Poulet, Starobinski, Rousse, Richard). How important thematics is for Jovan Popov is evidenced by his exceptional thematic study *Duel as a Literary Motif* (2012).

The metacritical view also includes the illustration of the epoch, as a background seen in the mirror. Jovan Popov’s books reveal the crucial question of the meaning and essence of the science of literature, over whose sky the clouds of theory and philosophy have loomed, which is discussed more *in context* than directly about the literary work. The danger of handing over the science of literature to other disciplines, even if they were occasionally useful interpretive tools, lies in the frequent summarizing of similar conclusions regarding different literary works, thus their semantic simplification is implemented. If there is no fine differentiation, then it does not matter whether the critic has read what he is writing about or not. Hence, in this example, a kind of application of the principle of “banned reproduction” can be observed, i.e., the retraction from copying the same conclusions, which are more the image of academic superficiality, than the creation of new knowledge.

The problem is embodied in the chapter on the study *How to Talk about the Books we haven’t Read?* by Pier Bayard, printed in *Concepts, Periods, Polemics*. Pointing to the possibility that the “infiltration of postmodern relativism” has led to this, the author asks a logical question: “will non-reading and critical autism lead to the renaissance of criticism or to the death of literature?” A possible way out is hermeneutics, so Popov included in both books his critical texts of those interpreters he values the most and whose work can be considered an example of defending the science of literature, even if he does not agree with them in certain analytical views. For example, in *Concepts, Periods, Polemics* this is reflected in the third chapter of the third entity, under the indicative title “Hermeneutics of Passion”, where he writes about the book *Energy of the Sacred in Art* (2010) by Dragan Stojanović, and in *Metacritical (Re)Views* in the entire third entity.

Comparatistics is Jovan Popov’s main mental preoccupation, which he observes and examines as a discipline in synchronic and diachronic terms. The first part of the book *Concepts, Periods, Polemics* is devoted to the basic questions “Trouble with the name: what do we teach about when we teach general literature?” and “Doubts about genre”. Presenting all the complexity and possible problems from a historical perspective, the author points to personalities and good solutions that should be followed: “to bring a little more terminological discipline in the Cartesian analytical spirit of Svetozar Petrović to the humanistic pedagogical tradition embodied in the concepts of Bogdan Popović or Vojislav Đurić “.

If the *Readings of Uncertainties. Essays in Comparatistics* (2006) is a book of valuable comparative interpretations of literary works, two recent books represent a metacritical branch of those possibilities of comparatistics, which are outlined in the Introduction under the title “On ‘General’ Compar-

atistics and ‘Academic Eclecticism’” are exactly those books, because “the way out is therefore found in another type of limitation of action, one of which belongs to the spheres of theory and methodology”. In addition, the first entity “General Literature and the Problem of Translation” form a bridge with the books from 2020 and 2021, as it is complementary to the *Concepts*, but also to the third chapter of the first entity of *Metacritical (Re)Views* on the interpretations of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* in Serbian literary studies, which could not have been written without detailed knowledge of the tradition of translating Greek tragedies in our language.

The introduction to the book *Reading of Uncertainties* is also valuable because it indicates the specificity of “Belgrade and Serbian Literary Science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century”, which does not “have its own ‘school’”, but “generations of students of general literature formed in a pluralistic spirit”. “The approach of critical openness and restrained assuming and combination of ideas and methods”, which is called *academic eclecticism*, is characteristic of Sreten Marić, but also of Jovan Popov himself. The last chapters of the first entity of the *Metacritic (Re)Views* are dedicated to him (“Contradictions and Consistencies of Sreten Marić” and “Marić on Stendhal and Chateaubriand”), whom he says in the Preface that “appears to be the central figure of this work”.

Finally, we should keep in mind at least one more point of the aforementioned Introduction, which opens up an important level of Jovan Popov’s view of comparatistics. Namely, it is about the difficult-to-achieve “ideal of general literature”, which René Velek “described on the example of classicism”, and our author added: “with baroque it would probably be even more difficult, and with romanticism the most difficult, despite its relative density in time”. Not only is Popov the author of the study *Classicistic Poetics of the Novel* (2001), but he devoted the fourth and fifth chapters of the second part of the book *Concepts, Periods, Polemics* to further research of this problem (“Controversies of Classicism” and “Toward the Predominance of Classicism: On the Beginnings of Translation of Homer in French and Serbian”). Although it would be even more difficult with the Baroque, the author does not hesitate to devote himself to “Aspects of the Baroque” in the third chapter of the same entity, but also to grapple with what is representative of the “most difficult”, so we can anticipate the traces of the mental struggle with romanticism in *Metacritic (Re)views*, of course, most explicitly expressed in the chapter “Kostić’s *Book about Zmaj*: criticism of criticism and criticism of poetry”, although this can be anticipated throughout the entire book.

The aesthetic experience of reading both books in a short period of time is contributed by the symbolic continuation of *Metacritic (Re)Views* on *Concepts, Periods, Polemics*, which ends in “Hermeneutics of Passion” and enters into analytical nuances when it comes to the poem “Santa Maria della Salute” by Laza Kostić. The essay that the new book begins with is dedicated precisely to Laza Kostić, so it unobtrusively creates the impression of completeness.

The books are, therefore, mirrored like Magritte's *Forbidden Reproduction*. Also, Dragiša Živković and Jovan Deretić are significant for the observation of periodization in the first, and Slobodan Jovanović and Sreten Marić marked the second book. Three articles on the interpretations of Dragan Stojanović (“Hermeneutics of Passion”, “For the Culture of Happiness” and “Beauty, Nevertheless”) they fit together into a mosaiclike more comprehensive picture of our science of literature, which has produced significant, even outstanding results. In this sense, the names of Milo Lompar, Zorica Bečanović Nikolić and Adrijana Marčetić should not be overlooked, whose books were written about in the third part of *Metacritic (Re)Views* (“Subversive Classic Miloš Crnjanski”, “Crnjanski, a Foreigner in his Culture”, “Shakespeare between Theory and History” and “Historical in the Postmodern Novel”).

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Jovan Popov is “scrupulous in his selection” in many ways, which is in accordance with the principles he refers to and to which he refers. With him, there is no mere arbitrariness, but a dedicated rethinking of all (micro)aspects of scientific work: “That’s why there was no question of unnatural compression of various materials between the same covers, and even less forced completion of tasks that require months and years of work.” Rare self-criticism, along with several conceptually effective rethinking, produced interesting results. Magritte’s ironic perspective seems very successful. As he writes in the chapter “Georges Poulet’s Critique of Identification”, “in order for the spirit to succeed in enclosing *Cogito*, it must be identified with the ‘perceptive power that perceives itself’”, and the spirit that enclosed the *Cogito* apparently has been materialized on *Forbidden Reproduction*.

The “ideal of general literature” is impossible to achieve, but one should strive for it within the limits of one’s own knowledge and capabilities. Jovan Popov’s metacritical diptych is not just mere gazing at the constant “surreal” *ideal*, but the defense and restoration of faith in the science of literature and, within those frameworks, the creation of comparatistics.

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Translated from the Serbian by  
Ljubica Jankov

## IMAGE OF SERBS IN SLOVAKIAN LITERATURE

Zdenka Valent Belić, *Slika Srba u slovačkoj književnosti (Image of Serbs in Slovakian Literature)*, Matica srpska, Arhiv Vojvodine, Novi Sad 2022; *Obraz Srbov v slovenskej literatúre*, Slovenské vydavateľské centrum, Báčsky Petrovec 2021

Imagology is one of the disciplines of literary theory comparative studies in which science on literature is pronouncedly intertwined with other social sciences, such as history, political science, psychology or cultural anthropology. It is precisely this area that has been chosen by Zdenka Valent Belić as a departure point for her book *Image of Serbs in Slovakian Literature*. As hinted by the title itself, the attention is focused on the imagological analysis of the image of Serbs and other Serbian motifs in Slovakian literature, in the timespan from the 16<sup>th</sup> century up to present. In this context, the author traces which properties are rewritten and what role they take. The author also traces the frequency of their occurrence in individual timespans and attempts to comprehend how they changed what these changes in representation indicated. In parallel, she identifies the emblematic motifs of Serbian provenance (Serbian national myths) which consecutively occurred with Slovakian authors. She demonstrates how authors belonging to Slovakian literature mentally approach what is foreign (in this case, the representatives of foreign and Serbs and Serbian motifs) and how they interpret it.

Zdenka Valent Belić does not only attempt to describe individual types of relevant images, she also endeavors to explain them. Since the aim was to prove more frequent presence of images of Serbs in various periods of Slovakian literature and typological similarity of these motifs, and all this as an evidence of a long-lasting symbolical thinking in a specific cultural and literary contexts, one can ascertain that these analyses have unambiguously confirmed a relatively considerable presence of Serbian images and motifs in Slovakian literature, the continuity of their use and at the same time have noted down the phases of settling down of stereotypical contents, their nature and key aspects (e.g., far-reaching subordination to the ideology of the epoch, current at the time this work was written). The author also strives to provide not only a theoretic-methodological and innovational contribution to what have been the findings so far (by employing Serbian and other sources, which in her work represent an added value), but also to offer a new reading of selected texts from Slovakian literature, but above all, their new interpretative mutual relation.

The problematics is opened up by two chapters: first of all by the methodological one on imagology as a scientific discipline, secondly by the historiographic, which overviews the state of affairs of Serbo-Slovakian literary and cultural connections up to present (an integral part being also the defining methodology of imagological explorations the author undertakes within the frame of the observed topic on the material of Slovakian literature). The anal-

ysis takes into account factors such as the point in time in which certain work was created, the ongoing customs at the time, the dominant philosophical thinking, the social context and the aim of the work in question, genre conventions, status, meaning and function of the image, but also, readers' pragmatic and functionalistic perspective. On the basis of these elements, the author determines the theory of cultural and national stereotypes and her basic research perspective.

The core of this work comprises of six interpretative chapters mapping types of images of Serbs and Serbian motifs in Slovakian literature, as they appear in selected periods of literature and poetry, whose titles—from the literary history perspective—are slightly unharmonized: more ancient Slovakian literature, the period of emergence of the idea of Slovakian mutuality (i.e., the period of Classicism and of pre-Romanticism), the 'period of Štúr' (i.e., literary Romanticism, including the Romantic Messianism as well), second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (without poetological characteristic, but certainly pertaining to Postromanticism and Realism), the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature (all types and tracks), and finally, contemporary literature (concrete works published from 2005 to 2018). The time span and material are quite broad, although the author has chosen only a representative sample of Slovakian literature texts from selected timespans. The scope has so much breadth, since the author's ambition has been to document the explored images more systematically within a longer time span and in order to better comprehend the continuity. On one hand, this approach clearly enables a given occurrence to view diachronically, although this, on the other hand, leads to oversimplified interpretation of poetics of certain authors. Large time span simply does not enable a more thorough study of each individual topic, which is why Zdenka Valent Belić had to rely on more occasions on the authority of literary historians or critics, from whose formulations she has borrowed. This significantly connected to an individual work's less prominent locus, when in the context of literary-historical properties, more citations are provided from older works – the ones that are already surpassed (e.g., Andrej Mráz), without taking into account current studies which would prove to be more useful for the author's interpretation process (in particular, for example, studies of Slovakian Romanticism or research results by Slovakian literary historian Robert Kiš-Seman on Ján Kollár). This brings about certain asymmetry, since at the methodological level one employs current scientific literature, while when discussing literary-scientific properties, one employs older sources. Interpretative chapters, however, are ordered chronologically, although at times, this order (along with the interpretation's chronology) is not maintained. Zdenka Valent Belić, for example, provides the works of Rehor Uram Podtatranský before the works of Jonáš Záborský or Jozef Podhradský.

I maintain that the two ways of viewing Serbs at the time of Romanticism, thereby creating two image models (a Slovakian people, an independent people—autoimage, heteroimage) is all too innovative and interesting, and is also

a way to reinterpret a poem by Sladkovič *Milica*, to include the interpretation of texts by Jozef Podhradský *Leposava and her gallows or Novogradske comedies* of 1869 and *Luminous paths of rulers from the Obrenović dynasty* of 1898, a piece with singing by Albina Podhradska *Poor Mileva from Bosnia of our civilization in the year 1878*, and to use a concept by Pier Zanini on the ambivalence of borders when interpreting VHV *Milica Nikolić* (which I consider the most inspiring piece of work of the publication). A similarly adequate interpretative key has been found by Zdenka Valent Belić for the novel by Dušan Šimka *Gubbio* (a symbolic geography—symbolic division of the world—a symbolic evaluation of the Balkan ‘otherness’). More inspiring insights can be found in dramas by Vladislava Fekete or in the piece by Peter Pavlac *Einstein’s wife*.

Generally speaking, my evaluation of the book by Zdenka Valent Belić is that it represents a contribution of quality and interest to the problematics of the image of Serbs in Slovakian literature from the imagological point of view. The author has shown her ability to locate and apply the existing theoretical concepts, interpretative capabilities, as well as her skill to formulate her own genuine insights. By selecting and approaching this particular topic, she has shown that this area of research is also very appealing for further literary and scientific explorations.

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Translation from Slovakian

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## ON THE DESTINY OF THE SERBIAN LANGUAGE IN KOSOVO AND METOHIJA IN RECENT HISTORY

Mitra Reljić, *Identitet i integritet srpskog jezika na Kosovu i Metohiji (Identity and Integrity of the Serbian Language in Kosovo and Metohija)*, Matica srpska, Novi Sad 2022

The monograph titled *Identity and Integrity of the Serbian Language in Kosovo and Metohija* by Mitra Reljić, published in November 2022 by the Matica srpska, represents an outstandingly envisaged and exceptionally conceived scientific study on the destiny of the Serbian language and its speakers on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, within more recent sociohistorical circumstances, which the author has experienced herself and has been (and still

is today) their immediate witness and observer. As part of the constellation of brilliant authors who, through their imposing scientific and research work have already hugely indebted both Kosovo-Metohija region and the study of language, the author of this work Mitra Reljić has shown with this work once again how much attention, knowledge, enthusiasm and energy she applies in the writing process, not exclusively relying thereby on the vast existing literature and resources, but on her own—and in terms of Kosovo-Metohija circumstances, often very perilous—field observations.

The book titled *Identity and Integrity of the Serbian Language in Kosovo and Metohija* represents, at its core, a compilation of the author's scientific articles published between the years 2000 and 2021 in various journals and other proceedings, whose inventory, along with their relevant bibliographical data, are provided within the *Bibliography* chapter according to chronological order of their publication. More accurately, the book is, at appropriate places, interwoven with thirty-or-so scientific articles, partially or fully adapted and supplemented by the author to a smaller or larger extent for this purpose, relying mostly on the more recently dated literature, or using individual articles 'solely' as departure points for writing new, more elaborate studies. Such procedure, along with the insular nature of topicality of the included articles, are the very reason for the formidable number (over four hundred) of used references listed within the *Cited Literature* chapter, by-and-large dominated by works in Serbian, Russian, but also containing references in English, Bulgarian, Macedonian and Czech.

The monograph has 371 pages, and contains the following chapters: the already mentioned *Bibliography* (pp. 335–337) and *Cited literature* (pp. 337–359), followed by the brief *Preface* (pp. 5–6), concluding review in Serbian (pp. 319–323), English (pp. 325–329), and Russian (pp. 330–334), *Index* (pp. 361–367), and *Contents* (pp. 369–371), as well as the eight chapters of various lengths (pp. 7–317), i. e. chapters with various number of scientific articles (as their chapters) which, otherwise, have been classified into these chapters either according to their subject-matter analysis, or, according to social circumstances which initiated them. Such is the case with *Preface*, for example, as noted by the author herself, 'first part [...] is represented solely by the introductory study [...], while the most copious—second part—comprises six titles of various thematic areas' (p. 5). The essence of the problem dealt with in each individual chapters is also revealed by their very own (extremely carefully and accurately formulated) titles: 1) *Initial causes of the existential uncertainty and dissolution of the Serbian language in Kosovo and Metohija* (pp. 7–33); 2) *The Serbian language encountering the anarchy and powerlessness of the Western protectorate at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century* (pp. 35–96); 3) *Ethnonyms and linguonyms in the process of dissolution of the Serbian language and Serbian national identity* (pp. 97–156); 4) *On the origin and ethnonyms of Albanians* (pp. 157–167); 5) *On language policy and language*



planning (pp. 169–203); 6) *Obliteration of Serbian spatial identity* (pp. 205–235); 7) *On communicational behavior and linguistic attitudes* (pp. 237–260); 8) *‘Neither here nor there’: the Serbian language in the whirlwind of post-modernism* (pp. 261–317).

*Identity and integrity of the Serbian language i Kosovo and Metohija* begins with an introductory study of long-lasting historical processes which determined (as the author calls it) the subsequent ‘faltering’, followed by ‘dissolution’ of Serbian ethnolinguistic identity within the observed territory. This process of de-Serbization (i.e., de-Slavization) of the Kosovo-Metohija region, as pointed out by Mitra Reljić, has been going on continuously from the times of the Ottoman occupation, in two distinct manners: 1) by physical removal of the Serbo-Slavic population (through persecution and murder), and 2) by assimilation, i.e., through the process of Albanization, which was the final outcome of the population’s Islamization’ (p. 9).

The book’s second chapter is not only the most copious, but also thematically most diverse one. Various topics of six scientific articles included therein—‘The Serbian language in Kosovo and Metohija: images of suffering’; ‘The lexeme *escort* within the speech of Kosovo-Metohija Serbs at the turn of the millennium’; ‘Initial abbreviations in the Serbian-language press of Kosovo-Metohija during the initial years of the protectorate’; ‘The Serbian language within the system of verbal associations of the Kosovo-Metohija Slavophone population’; ‘The Serbian language and its dialects in Kosovo and Metohija today: conditions and perspectives’; ‘On destroyed written heritage in Kosovo and Metohija (on the example of one family’s partially preserved archive)’—are all thematically unified and initially conceived by the life of Serbian population and the language they speak under the conditions of Western protectorate.

In the following—third—chapter, the author draws attention to ethnonyms and linguonyms which came into existence during the process of ‘dissolution’ of the Serbian language and of Serbian national identity, representing them in five articles with the following titles: ‘From Arnauts to Kosovars: ethnonyms in the function of denying the identity of Kosovo-Metohija Serbs, from the Ottoman period until present’; ‘On the Goranski people and their language (Creation, ethnolinguistic status and perspectives of certain isolated groups in the Balkans)’; ‘The Serbian language as *the local or native language* of the Orahovac Albanians’, ‘The Serbian language as *Bosnian* in the Prizren-Šar Mountain region’; ‘The Goranski people—from a geographic determinant to an ethnonym’. The book also separately discusses, in its fourth chapter, the origin and ethnonyms of Albanians, particularly emphasizing thereby the insignificance of proving correctness of the two terms: *Albanians* and (or) *Shqiptars* (as is the title at the same time of the only article comprised within the chapter).

Issues of linguistic policy and of linguistic planning are the topic of the following, i. e. of the fifth chapter, the chapter which—through the three articles

it contains—discusses the following: ‘The state and perspectives of the Serbian language in Kosovo and Metohija in the light of linguistic policy’; ‘The effects of the Brussel Agreement on the status and corpus of the Serbian language’; ‘The Montenegrin language in Kosovo and Metohija—yet another offshoot of the three linguistic policies’. The fact of neutralization of the Serbian spatial identity within the southern province is discussed in the sixth chapter, and is illustrated by two concrete examples: (a) contemporary Kosovo-Metohija hodonymy, i.e., Serbian-language hodonyms in the north, and Albanian-language hodonyms in the south of the divided town of Kosovska Mitrovica, all in the articles titled ‘On contemporary Kosovo-Metohija hodonyms (sociolinguistic aspect)’, and (b) ergonomy of the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica, in the article titled ‘Discrepancy between the declared and real concern for the Serbian language (ergonomy example from the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica)’.

Chapter seven is dedicated to properties of communicational behavior of the Slavophone populations within the Kosovo-Metohija region, as well as to linguistic attitudes of its youngest part (in articles titled: ‘Certain idiosyncrasies of communicational behavior of Kosovo and Metohija Slavophone population’ and ‘Linguistic attitudes of children in Kosovo and Metohija’). while the concluding—eighth chapter—is aimed at identity and axiological redirection of Serbian society within the context of postmodern developments and globalization processes—also reflected upon the Serbian language, particularly upon the condition and perspectives of the Serbian language in the southern province (‘Linguistic manifestations of a distraught identity or mistakes in self-conception’); ‘Linguistic indicators of shifts on a plane of the axiological view of the world’; ‘On the language of (self)hatred in the discourse of alienated cosmopolitans’; ‘Standardization, localization, assimilation—reflexes of contemporary globalization’; ‘Unification and differentiation in the process of globalization (on the example of Serbian and other Slavic languages)’.

Bearing in mind not only what has been stated above, but the extraordinary complexity, actuality, as well as the (national) significance of the issue at hand, which is analyzed in this work to the utmost detail and with undisputed scientific and methodological foundedness, *Identity and Integrity of the Serbian Language in Kosovo and Metohija* by Mitra Reljić represents an exceptionally valuable and an utmost objective written source of not even a remotely envious fate of the Serbian ethnolinguistic identity in the more recent history within the Kosovo-Metohija region.

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Translated from Serbian by  
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**RADOMIR ANDRIĆ** (b. Ljubanj near Užice, 1944). Graduated in Yugoslav and world literature from the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade. He writes poetry and literary criticism; a journalist. Poetry books: *Sunce u vodenici* [Sun in water mill], 1967; *Večernji krčag* [Evening pitcher], 1969; *Karpatisko umiljenije* (s Vesnom Parun) [Carpathian meekness (with Vesna Parun)], 1971; *Šumska crkva* [Forest church], 1971; *Bunari Radoša Modričanina* [Wells of Radoš Modričanin], 1973; *Čavke postoje zbog slova Č* [Jackdaws exist because of the letter Č], 1977; *Pohvala smehu* [In praise of laughter], 1977; *Često rušena kuća: horske pesme* [Often demolished house: choral songs], 1977; *Svane li* [If the dawn breaks], 1978; *Neustuknica* [No retreat], 1980; *Nepokorje* [Disobedience], 1981; *Krila za visinu* [Wings for the heights], 1983; *Kakva počast* [What a tribute], 1986; *Pitalica sa Zvezdare* [A riddle from Zvezdara], 1987; *Pod zlatnom leskom* [Under the golden hazel], 1988; *Ispod snega* [Under the snow], 1989; *Vrata užičke realke* [Door of the Realka High School in Užice], 1989; *Kozje grozje* [Wild privet], 1990; *Zgon*, 1991; *Noćni plivač: ranije i novije pesme* [Night swimmer: early and new poems], 1992; *Vučica na prtini* [She-wolf in snowdrift], 1993; *Rujno* [Reddish], 1994; *Čarno dleto: bunari i rozete* [The magic chisel: wells and rosettes], 1996; *Gledalice* [Those who watch], 1997; *Rumunska ikona* [Romanian icon], 1997; *Ptičje mleko* [Bird's milk], 1997; *Isto i obrnuto* [The same and the reverse], 1998; *Izmišljotine* (s Goranom Babićem) [Inventions (with Goran Babić)], 1998; *Večera na savskoj lađi* [Dinner on the Sava River boat], 2000; *Jezni žednik* (izbor), 2001; *Beli izvor* [White spring], 2001; *Poleteše ptice lastavice* [Swallows took flight], 2005; *Zarno vitlo* [Golden winch], 2006; *Ka drugosti* [Towards otherness], 2007; *Pokretno ogledalo / Podvižno ogledalo* (dvojezično, prev. na makedonski Risto Vasilevski) [Moving mirror (bilingual, translated into Macedonian by Risto Vasilevski)], 2009; *Ključne kosti* [Collarbones], 2009; *Prepoznavanje samoće / Reconocimiento de la Soledad* (dvojezično, prev. na španski Silvija Monros Stojaković) [Recognition of loneliness (bilingual, translated into Spanish by Silvija Monros Stojaković)], 2010; *Sanopsis vode* [Dreamlike description of water], 2011; *U palati pravde samo pramen* [Only a wisp in the palace of justice], 2013; *Svikavanje na levitaciju* [Getting used to levitation], 2015; *Osim jedne stvari* (izabrane i nove pesme) [Except for one thing (selected and new poems)], 2015; *Poslanice drugom i drugačijem* [Epistles to the other

and different], 2019; *Mermerni lelek* [Marble wail], 2020; *Svojta iz Ljubomira* [Relatives from Ljubomir], 2021. Andrić has edited a number of books and anthologies.

**BRANKO ĆOPIĆ** (b. Hašani, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1915 – d. Belgrade, 1984) was a Serbian and Yugoslav writer. He wrote poetry, short stories and novels and became famous for his stories for children and young people, often set during the Second World War in revolutionary Yugoslavia. His works contained characteristic humour in the form of mockery, satire and irony. Collections of short stories: *Pod Grmečom* [At the foot of Mt. Grmeč], 1938; *Borci i bjegunci* [Fighters and fugitives], 1939; *Planinci* [Mountaineers], 1940; *Rosa na bajonetima* [Dew on the bayonets], 1946; *Sveti magarac* [Holy donkey], 1946; *Surova škola* [Cruel school], 1948; *Ljudi s repom* [People with tails], 1949; *Odabrane ratne pripovetke* [Selected war stories], 1950; *Izabrane humorističke priče* [Selected humorous stories], 1952; *Ljubav i smrt* [Love and death], 1953; *Dragi likovi* [Dear people], 1953; *Doživljaji Nikoletine Bursaća* [The adventures of Nikoletina Bursać], 1955; *Dječak prati zmaja* [A boy follows a kite], 1956; *Gorki med* [Bitter honey], 1959; *Bašta sljezove boje* [Mallow-coloured garden], 1970; *Vasilisa i monah* [Vasilisa and the monk], 1975; *Skiti jure zeca* [Scythians chase a rabbit], 1977. Novels: *Prolom* [Breakout], 1952; *Gluvi barut* [Silent gunpowder] (1957), *Ne tuguj bronzana stražo* [Don't mourn, bronze guards] (1958), *Osma ofanziva* [The eighth offensive], 1964; *Delije na Bihaću* [Heroes on Bihać], 1975. Collections of poems: *Ognjeno rađanje domovine* [The fiery birth of homeland], 1944; *Pjesme* [Poems], 1945; *Ratnikovo proljeće* [Spring of a warrior], 1947. Dramas: *Doživljaji Vuka Bubala* [The adventures of Vuk Bubalo], 1967; *Odumiranje međeđa* [The extinction of bears], 1944. Books for children: *U svijetu medvjeda i leptirova* [In the world of bears and butterflies], 1940; *Priče partizanke* [Partisan stories], 1944; *Pjesme pionirke* [Pioneer poems], 1945; *Bojna lira pionira* [Battle lyre of a pioneer], 1945; *Družina junaka* [A company of heroes], 1945; *Bajka o sestri Koviljki* [Fairytale about sister Koviljka], 1946; *Doživljaji kuma Torbe* [Adventures of godfather Torba], 1946; *Vratolomne priče* [Breakneck stories], 1947; *Armija odbrana tvoja* [Your defense army], 1947; *Sunčana republika* [The sunny republic], 1948; *Rudar i mjesec* [The miner and the moon], 1948; *Ježeva kućica* [The hedgehog's house], 1949; *Priče ispod zmajevih krila* [Stories from beneath the dragon's wings], 1950; *Pijetao i mačka* [The rooster and the cat], 1952; *Doživljaji mačka Toše* [The adventures of Toša the tomcat], 1954; *Raspjevani cvrčak* [The singing cricket], 1955; *Lalaj Bao, čarobna šuma* [Lalaj Bao, the magical forest], 1957; *Orlovi rano lete* [Eagles fly early], 1957; *Bosonogo djetinjstvo* [Barefoot childhood], 1957; *Partizanske tužne bajke* [Sad partisan fairy tales], 1958; *Vječernje priče* [Evening stories], 1958; *Djeda Trišin mlin* [Grandpa Triša's mill], 1960; *Priče zanesenog dječaka* [Tales of a daydreaming boy], 1960; *Magareće godine* [Awkward teenage years], 1960; *Ribar i mačak* [The fisherman and the

tomcat], 1960; *Slavno vojevanje* [The glorious combat], 1961; *Mjesec i njegova baka* [The moon and its grandmother], 1962; *Čarobna šuma* [The enchanted forest], 1962; *Bitka u Zlatnoj dolini* [The battle of Golden Valley], 1963; *Krava sa drvenom nogom* [A cow with a wooden leg], 1963; *Priče za najmlađe* [Stories for the little ones], 1963; *Šarov u zemlji bajki* [Šarov in the land of fairy tales], 1964; *Mala moja iz Bosanske Krupe* [My darling from Bosanska Krupa], 1971; *Glava u klanцу, noge na vrancu* [Head in the gorge, legs on the black horse], 1971; *Lijan vodi karavane* [Lijan leads the caravans], 1975. Čopić won numerous literary awards.

**JOVAN DELIĆ** (b. Borkovići near Plužine, Montenegro, 1949) writes literary criticism and essays. Books: *Kritičarevi paradoksi* [The paradoxes of a critic], 1980; *Srpski nadrealizam i roman* [The Serbian surrealism and novel], 1980; *Pjesnik „Patetike uma”* (o pjesništvu Pavla Popovića) [The poet of “The Pathos of the Mind” (on the poetry of Pavle Popović)], 1983; *Tradicija i Vuk Stefanović Karadžić* [Tradition and Vuk Stefanović Karadžić], 1990; *Hazarska prizma – tumačenje proze Milorada Pavića* [The Khazarian prism: an interpretation of the fiction by Milorad Pavić], 1991; *Književni pogledi Danila Kiša* [The literary views of Danilo Kiš], 1995; *Kroz prozu Danila Kiša* [Across the prose by Danilo Kiš], 1997; *O poeziji i poetici srpske moderne* [On the poetry and poetic practices of the Serbian modernism], 2008; *Ivo Andrić – Most i žrtva* [Ivo Andrić – the bridge and sacrifice], 2011; *Ivan V. Lalić i njemačka lirika – jedno intertekstualno istraživanje* [Ivan V. Lalić and German lyric poetry – an intertextual research], 2011; *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. Delić has edited a number of books by and on Serbian authors.

**BRANISLAVA DILPARIĆ** (b. Sremska Mitrovica, 1970). Professor at the Department of English Language and Literature of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Priština with a temporary seat in Kosovska Mitrovica. She is a researcher in the field of semantics and contrastive analysis of English and Serbian languages. She is the author of a large number of scientific papers and a participant in several domestic and foreign conferences. So far, she has participated in two projects of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia “Istraživanja srpskog jezika na Kosovu i Metohiji” [Research of the Serbian language in Kosovo and Metohija] and “Prevod u sistemu komparativnih istraživanja nacionalne i strane književnosti i kulture” [Translation in the system of comparative research of national and foreign literature and culture]. She is one of the translators

(from English to Serbian) of the *Proceedings of the First International Conference and Exhibit on the Jasenovac Concentration Camps / Zbornik radova Prve međunarodne konferencije i izložbe o jasenovačkim koncentracionim logorima* held in New York in 1997. Dilparić is a deputy editor of *Zbornik radova Filozofskog fakulteta u Prištini* [Proceedings of the Faculty of Philosophy in Priština].

**MINA ĐURIĆ** (b. Belgrade, 1987). She works as an assistant professor at the Department of Serbian Literature with South Slavic Literatures of the Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade. She defended her doctoral dissertation titled „Modernizacija srpske proze 20. veka u odnosu na stvaralačku recepciju književnog dela Džejmsa Džojlsa” [Modernization of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Serbian prose in relation to the creative reception of the literary work of James Joyce] at the Faculty of Philology in 2017. She has published dozens of scientific papers in national and international publications. She is the author of the monograph *Transmuzikalizacija teksta: muzika srpske modernističke književnosti* [Transmusicalization of the text: the music of Serbian modernist literature], 2022 and one of the authors of the book *Slovenska susretanja: jug i zapad* [Slavic encounters: south and west], 2021. She has edited the publications *Na trepavici neznani: izbor iz poezije Vaska Pope* [The unknown on the eyelash: selection from the poetry of Vasko Popa], 2020 and *Venac prkosa: izbor iz dela Dragoslava Mihailovića* [Wreath of defiance: a selection from the works of Dragoslav Mihailović], 2021. She has edited and translated Robert Hodel’s book *Worte Vom Marmor – Leben und Werk des Schriftstellers Dragoslav Mihailović / Reči od mramora: Dragoslav Mihailović – život i delo* [Marble words: Dragoslav Mihailović – life and work], 2020. Đurić co-authored several readers for high schools. She is an executive editor in the Vukova zadužbina [The Endowment of Vuk Karadžić] for editions in German, Russian, French and English language and one of the authors of the trilingual digital exhibition *Vuk i Nemci* [Vuk and the Germans] (in Serbian, English and German) and other works.

**SLAVKO GORDIĆ** (b. Dabrica near Stolac, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941) writes fiction, literary reviews and essays. From 1992 to 2004, he was Editor-in-Chief of *Letopis Matice srpske* (The Matica Srpska Chronicle) and in the period 2008–2012 Vice-President of the Matica Srpska. Books of fiction: *Vrhovni silnik* [The supreme oppressor], 1975; *Drugo lice* [Second person], 1998; *Opit* [The experiment], 2004; *Rub* [The edge], 2010; *Posle ruba* [After the edge], 2020. Books of essays and critiques: *U vidiku stiha* [Within the horizon of verse], 1978; *Slaganje vremena* [Concordance of times], 1983; *Primarno i nijansa* [The primary and a nuance], 1985; *Poezija i okružje* [Poetry and the milieu], 1988; *Obrazac i čin – ogledi o romanu* [Pattern and act: essays on the

novel], 1995; „Pevač” *Boška Petrovića* [“The Epic Poet” by Boško Petrović], 1998; *Ogledi o Veljku Petroviću* [Essays on Veljko Petrović], 2000; *Glavni posao* [The principal job], 2002; *Profili i situacije* [Profiles and situations], 2004; *Razmena darova – ogledi i zapisi o savremenom srpskom pesništvu* [Exchange of gifts: essays and notes on contemporary Serbian poetry], 2006; *Savremenost i nasleđe* [Contemporaneity and heritage], 2006; *Kritičke razlednice* [Critical postcards], 2008; *Traganja i svedočenja* [Searching and testifying], 2011; *Ogledi o Ivi Andriću* [Essays on Ivo Andrić], 2013; *Srodstva i razdaljine – ogledi i dnevnički zapisi* [Kinship and Gaps: essays and journalary notes], 2014; *Osmatračnica – književne i opšte teme* [An observation point – literary and general topics], 2016; *Među svojim* [Among their own], 2020; *Podsećanja i nagovori* [Reminders and persuasions], 2022. Gordić has edited a number of books by Serbian authors.

**VLADIMIR GVOZDEN** (b. Novi Sad, 1972). He writes studies, reviews, essays and literary criticism, translates from English. Published books: *Jovan Dučić, putopisac – ogledi iz imagologije* [Jovan Dučić, travel writer – essays from imagology], 2003; *Činovi prisvajanja – od teorije ka pragmatički teksta* [Acts of appropriation – from theory to pragmatics of the text], 2005; *Književnost, kultura, utopija* [Literature, culture, utopia], 2011; *Srpska putopisna kultura 1914–1940 – studija o hronotopičnosti susreta* [Serbian travel culture 1914–1940 – a study on the chronotopicity of encounters], 2011; *Književnost i otpor* [Literature and resistance], 2015; *Anatomija robe – ogled iz kritike političke ekonomije* (koautor Alpar Lošonc) [Anatomy of goods – an essay from the critique of political economy (co-author Alpar Lošonc)], 2016; *Kapitalizam i književnost – fragmenti jedne (ne)obične povesti* (koautor Alpar Lošonc) [Capitalism and literature – fragments of an (un)ordinary story (co-author Alpar Lošonc)], 2020. Gvozden has edited a number of books.

**DANA HUČKOVÁ** (b. 1965). She graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy of the Comenius University in Bratislava, Department of Aesthetics, Section of the Science of Literature (1991). She became an independent researcher in 2003. Her focus is on the research of Slovak literature at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (until 1918), Slovak modernism, short literary forms in the period of realism and modernism, Holocaust literature, contemporary Slovak prose, editing and textology. Since 1991, she has been working at the Institute of Slovak Literature of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. She was the editor of the scientific journal *Slovenská literatúra* [Slovak literature] (1999–2000), deputy director of the Institute (2001–2006), and the director of the Institute (2007–2019). Since 2019, she has been the head of the Department of Textology and Digital Projects and the scientific editor of the journal *Slovenská literatúra*. Hučková speaks Russian, German, Polish and English.

**JELENA MARIĆEVIĆ BALAĆ** (b. Kladovo, 1988) is a philologist (Serbian studies) practising research in the fields of the Serbian literature of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as avant-garde and neo-avant-garde. She writes poetry, fiction, studies, essays and reviews. Poetry books: *Bez dlake na srcu* [Pulling no punches], 2020; *Arsenal* [Arsenal], 2023. Books published: *Legitimacija za signalizam – pulsiranje signalizma* [Entitled to practise signalism – signalism pulsating], 2016; *Tragom bisernih minđuša srpske književnosti (renesansnost i baroknost srpske književnosti)* [In the wake of the pearl earrings of the Serbian literature (the Renaissance and Baroque character of the 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. Marićević Balać has edited a number of books.

**MARKO PAOVICA** (b. Cibrijan near Trebinje in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1950) is an author of literary reviews and essays about contemporary Serbian literature. Books published: *Rasponi prozne reči – o proznim knjigama savremenih srpskih pisaca* [The spans of 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.

**GORAN PETROVIĆ** (b. Kraljevo, 1961 – d. Belgrade, 2024). Serbian prose writer and academician. Short story collections: *Saveti za lakši život* [Tips for an easier life], 1989; *Ostrvo i okolne priče* [The island and stories around it], 1996; *Bližnji* [Loved ones], 2002; *Sve što znam o vremenu* (izbor) [Everything I know about time (selection)], 2003; *Razlike* [Differences], 2006; *Ispod tavanice koja se ljuspa – kino-novela* [Beneath the peeling ceiling – a cinema-novella], 2010; *Porodične storije* [Family stories], 2011; *Unutrašnje dvorište* [Inner courtyard], 2018. Dramas: *Skela* [The flatboat], 2004; *Matica* [The current], 2011. A book of essays *Pretraživač* [Browser], 2007. Novels: *Atlas opisan nebom* [An Atlas Traced by the Sky], 1993; *Opsada crkve Svetog Spasa* [The siege of the Church of St. Salvation], 1997; *Sitničarnica „Kod srećne ruke”* [Shop of sundries “At the lucky hand”], 2000; *Papir sa vodenim znakom (Roman delta: Tok 1)* [Watermarked paper (delta-like novel: stream 1)], 2022; *Ikonostas* [Iconostasis (delta-like novel: stream 2)], 2022.

**GORANA RAIĆEVIĆ** (b. Novi Sad, 1964). She deals with literary theory and Serbian literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. She writes literary



studies, essays and reviews and translates from English and French. Published books: *Čitanje kao kreacija* [Reading as creation], 1998; *Bibliografija srpskih nekrologa* (koautori M. Bujas i M. Kleut) [Bibliography of Serbian obituaries (co-authors M. Bujas and M. Kleut)], 1998; ; *Laza Lazarević – junak naših dana* [Laza Lazarević – a hero of our time], 2002; *Eseji Miloša Crnjanskog* [Essays of Miloš Crnjanski], 2005; *Komentari „Dnevnika o Čarnojeviću” Miloša Crnjanskog* [Comments on “The Journal of Čarnojević” by Miloš Crnjanski], 2010; *Krotitelji sudbine – o Crnjanskom i Andriću* [Fate tamers – on Crnjanski and Andrić], 2010; *Drugi svet – eseji o književnosti: istorija, teorija, kritika* [The other world – essays on literature: history, theory, criticism], 2010; *Agon i melanholija – život i delo Miloša Crnjanskog* [Agon and melancholia – the life and work of Miloš Crnjanski], 2021; *Dobra lepota – Andrićev svet* [Good beauty – the world of Andrić ], 2022; ; *Veliki krug – književna prijateljstva Miloša Crnjanskog* [A great circle – literary friendships of Miloš Crnjanski], 2022. Raičević has edited a number of books.

**MIODRAG RAIČEVIĆ** (b. Podgorica, Montenegro, 1955). He writes poetry and prose. Poetry books: *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* [Muse’s winds: tandarology], 1995; *Dlan & lopata* [Palm & spade], 2009; *Muzini vetrovi: tandarologija – popunjeno a zabibereno izdanje sa erotiĉeskim proplamsajima* [Muse’s winds: tandarology – a full and spiced edition with an erotic touch], 2019; *Bluz dva prijatelja – u 54 tjedna* (pesme M. Raiĉeviĉa i eseji B. Koprivice) [Blues of two friends – in 54 weeks (poems by M. Raiĉeviĉ and essays by B. Koprivica)], 2022; *O stvarima koje je Homer propustio* [On what Homer missed], 2022. Miscellany book *Sviranje Malaparteu* [Playing to Malaparte], 2002. Books published under the pseudonym T. H. Raiĉ: *Opet silovana* (roman) [Raped again (novel)], 1990; *Najbolje od Džeka Trboseka* (roman) [The best of Jack the Ripper (novel)], 1995; *Reĉnik afrodisijaka* (erotiska svaštara) [Dictionary of aphrodisiacs (erotic miscellanies)], 1997; *Ĉovek 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 rjeĉnik (Librus docleanus palamudus)* [Dictionary of Duklja (Librus docleanus palamudus)], 2005. He lives in Belgrade. Raiĉeviĉ has edited a number of books.

**SLOBODAN RELJIĆ** (b. Teslić, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1954) is a journalist who for a long time held the post of the Editor-in-Chief of the weekly *NIN (Nedeljne informativne novine* [Weekly News Magazine]). He graduated from the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Political Sciences

in Belgrade; he received his Ph.D. from the Faculty of Philosophy (title of dissertation: “The Change in the Character of Media in Contemporary Capitalism: Causes, Protagonists, Consequences”). Books published: *Odumiranje slobodnih medija* [Dying out of the free media], 2011; *Kriza medija i mediji krize* [The crisis of the media and the media of the crisis], 2013; *Mediji i Treći svetski rat – smatrajte se mobilisanim* [The media and the Third World War – regard yourself as mobilised], 2016; *Bukvar medijske pismenosti: kako proživeti život u doba „ekranoida”* [A primer for media literacy: how to cope with life in the age of ‘screenoids’], 2018; *Volja za laž: novi svetski dezinformativni poredak* [The will to lie: the new disinformation world order], 2021.

**NENAD STANOJEVIĆ** (b. Sremska Mitrovica, 1982). He deals with the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Serbian literature and writes essays and literary reviews. A book of essays and literary reviews *U ogledalu literature* [In the literature mirror], 2017.

**MLADEN ŠUKALO** (b. Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1952). A literary theorist and a professor at the Faculty of Philology in Banja Luka. He writes prose, studies, literary criticism and essays and translates from French. Published books: *Narodno pozorište Bosanske Krajine 1930–1980* (koautori P. Lazarević, J. Lešić) [National Theatre of the Bosnian Krajina 1930–1980 (co-authors P. Lazarević, J. Lešić)], 1980; *Okviri i ogledala* [Frames and mirrors], 1990; *Ljubičasti oreol Danila Kiša* [Purple halo of Danilo Kiš], 1999; *Odmrzavanje jezika – poetika stranosti u djelu Miodraga Bulatovića* [Unfreezing the language – the poetics of strangeness in the work of Miodrag Bulatović], 2002; *Pukotina stvarnog – odmrzavanje jezika, nulto* [The crack of the real – unfreezing the language, zero], 2003; *Đavolji dukat – o Ivi Andriću* [Devil’s *ducat* – about Ivo Andrić], 2006; *Oblici i iskazi, ogledi* [Forms and statements, essays], 2007; *Portreti – iz srpske književnosti u BiH* [Portraits – from Serbian literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina], 2015; *Krhotine i druge priče* [Debris and other stories], 2016; *Kulturni identitet Kočićevih junaka* [Cultural identity of Kočić’s heroes], 2018; *Velike iluzije (igrivost, teatralnost, stranost)* [Great illusions (playfulness, theatricality, strangeness)], 2020; *Kritički otkloni* [Critical deflections], 2020; *Obrazovni paradoksi: fragmenti, aforizmi, citati, sholije* [Educational paradoxes: fragments, aphorisms, quotations, scholia], 2021.

**BILJANA TURANJANIN NIKOLOPOULOS** (b. Trebinje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1984). She works as a Serbian language editor in Athens. She writes literary studies, essays and literary reviews. Turanjanin Nikolopoulos deals with Serbian medieval and contemporary literature and publishes papers in periodicals.

**SARA ZDRAVKOVIĆ** (b. Novi Sad, 1993). Junior research assistant and doctoral student of Serbian literature at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. She writes poetry, prose, literary studies and reviews. Her areas of interest include contemporary Serbian and European novels. Zdravković has published a collection of short stories *Srebrne šume* [Silver forests], 2021.

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