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INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR ETHNIC STUDIES, COLOMBO

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Contributors

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Bogomil Gjuzel was born in 1939 in Èaèak, Serbia. He was dramaturgist with the Dramski theater, Skopje. One of the ten founders of the Independent Writers of Macedonia association he is currently editor-in-chief of its bi-monthly journal *Naše Pismo*. In 1999-2003 he was acting director of the Struga Poetry Evenings International festival. He has published more than twenty books of poetry and several books of prose.

Jovica Ivanovski was born in 1961, Skopje. Author of poetry collections *Why Such Liver For Me* (1995), *The City Is Full of You* (1997), *A Strange Kind of a Sunny Day* (1999), *Three Forward Three* (2004), *Ice-cream To No End* (2005) and *In the Shadow of the Billboard* (2005) as well as selected poems *Open the Window* and *Let the city breathe a little* (2002). He still lives and works in Skopje.

Katica Kulavkova, born in 1951 in Veles, Republic of Macedonia. Currently full time professor at the "Sts. Cyril and Methodius" University of Skopje, Faculty of Philology, Department of General and Comparative Literature. She has published several volumes of poetry and some literary criticism. For her last book *Blind Corner* she has won the award "Aco Sopov" for the best book of poetry of the year.

Liljana Dirjan was born in 1953 in Skopje. She is now editor-in-chief and director of *Zena*. She is one of the ten founders and member of the Independent Writers of Macedonia Association. Author of the following books of poetry: *Natural Occurrence* (1980), awarded with the "Miladinov Brothers" prize for best book of the year, *Live Measure* (1985), *Wormwood field* (1985), *Heavy Silk* (1997) and *Cocoons*, 1999.

Dragi Mihajlovski was born 16th October 1951 in Bitola. Some of his works are: *The beehive* (short stories, 1981), *Uncrucified gods* (essays, 1991), *The Prophet of Discountria* (novel, 2001), *Stories from the Sixth Floor* (short stories, 2003). Awards include: "Racinovo priznanie", "Gligor Prlièev", "Stale Popov" novel of the year (Writer's Association of Macedonia).

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Olivera Kjorveziroska was born in 1965 in Kumanovo. She has written the two books for children; her other works are: *Sufferings of the Young Lector* and *Interwoven Stories* – short stories; *Do Dreams Make Work* – criticism and essays.

Her first novel *Locked Body of Lue* was published in 2005. Awards: “Nova Makedonija” for best short story in 2001; and “Stale Popov” for best prose book for 2003 “*(S)pleteni raskazi*” (*(Inter)woven Stories*).

Risto Lazarov was born in 1949, in Stip, the Republic of Macedonia. His collection of poems *Night Owl in the Park* won the *Mlad Borec* award and *8 Noemvri* award of the town of Stip (both in 1972). His collection of poems *Jana* won the *13 Noemvri* award of the city of Skopje (1980), and his book of poetry for children *Gorjan in Dorjan* won the Struga Poetry Evenings award for the best book for children in the period between two festivals.

Elizabeta Šeleva is a literary critic and theorist. She was born in Ohrid, 1961. She has edited over 100 articles, also including the books: *Comparative Poetics* (postmodernism in Macedonian fiction, Skopje, 1996), *Studies on Literary Theory* (Skopje, 1997), *Cultural Essays* (Skopje, 2000), *From Dialogism to intertextuality* (Skopje, 2000), and *Home/Identity* (Skopje, 2005).

• **ariko Kujundziski** was born in 1980, Skopje. Novelist, dramatist and short story author. He has published *Spectator*, novel and four short stories (first edition, 2003) and *Andrew, love and other disasters*, three plays for reading and watching (2004). He has won several awards at different short story, essay and drama writing competition.

Lidija Kapusevska-Drakulevska was born in 1962. Books: *In the labyrinths of Fantastic* (1998), *Poetics of the Unknown* (2001) and *Poetics of the Surprise* (2003). Co-editor of the *Anthology of World Lyric Poems* (1994) with Maja Bojadzievska; editor of the *Anthology of Short Stories on Skopje* (1998) and of a thematic selection of contemporary Macedonian poetry (“The house – the threshold”) – *The World Is My Home* (2004).

Venko Andonovski was born in Kumanovo in 1964. Some of his books are: *The barbarian's tender heart* (poetry 1986), *Frescoes and Grotesques* (short stories 1993), *Alphabet of the disobedient* (novel, 1993), *Text Processes* (essays, 1996) *Decodings* (2000), Awards: Best drama text at the “Vojdan Cernodrinski” festival in Prilep, “Novel of the Year”, and “Balkanika”, for his novel *Navel of the World*.

In this issue we are privileged to have the finest of modern Macedonian Literature. Thanks to Lidija Dimkovska, herself a poet, and who was featured in our Sept-Dec 2005 issue, we have gathered together fourteen Macedonian poets, writers and thinkers who have contributed to this issue of *Nethra*.

When one thinks of East European literature what springs to mind are the Russian writers – Chekov, Dostoyevsky, Brodsky, Marina Tsvetaeva, or the Polish writer Czeslaw Milosz or the Czech writer Milan Kundera. However, recently we are becoming aware of a rich and vibrant literary tradition coming out of other East European countries like Hungary, Romania, Macedonia and Slovakia.

The end of World War II was a turning point for the Macedonian people. It is then that the Macedonians were finally recognized as a distinct people with their own nationality, language, and culture in Yugoslavia. Macedonia seceded from Yugoslavia and became a sovereign state by a popular referendum held in September 1991 when the majority of voters chose independence.

Today a sign of the increasing world-wide recognition of Macedonian literature can be gauged by the increase in translations of Macedonian texts. Over the last thirty years about forty anthologies of contemporary Macedonian poetry, prose and dramatic works have been published abroad, translated into Russian, English, French, Chinese, German, Polish, Spanish, Greek, Turkish, Malaysian, Hindi, Slovene, Montenegrin, Serbo-Croat and Albanian.

Many writers in Macedonia now write in Albanian and Turkish as well, languages which were banned earlier. Two international literary festivals are held annually in Macedonia: the Struga Poetry Evenings and the Racin Meetings. In the past three decades, the occasions have been attended by nearly 3,500 writers, mainly poets, from all over the world. The Miladinov Brothers Prize is also awarded each year for the best book of poetry by a Macedonian author. Other, smaller events are also held in Macedonia during the course of the year. In Macedonia, literary creation takes a remarkable place among the interests of the population.

This issue of *Nethra*, attempts to introduce Macedonian literature, hitherto unknown and unfamiliar to the Sri Lankan readership. While most of the writers are fairly young, we have two writers, Risto Lazarov and Bogomil Gjuzel, poets, who were born around the Second World War and while making reference to their era in their writing yet manage to write in a modern style. This whole issue is remarkable in its lack of romantic nostalgia and melancholy and I hope that it will be enjoyed, appreciated and awaken our interest in Macedonian literature.

Ameena Hussein

DIALOGUE WITH THE WORLD

(Regarding the short story in contemporary Macedonian literature)

Lidija Kapusevska-Drakulevska

How easily stories are made!

Aleksandar Prokopiev, "Two women"

The short story is a relatively young art form, born from an old, possibly the oldest form of literary expression. It can be said that narrating, as well as dreaming, has always been and will always be an integral part of living. The story which lies in the core of the narrating distinguishes itself with a certain subtle, indefinite and unspeakable enchantment to which equally succumb both the creator and the reader. The satisfaction from narrating the stories comes from the narration itself. The narration is a travel in time...

The role of a pioneer in separating the short story genre from the traditional story genre belongs to the American Edgar Allan Poe (in 1842). In the XX century literature, the developing line of the short story leads to Hemingway and his "new theory" (according to which it is necessary to avoid certain parts of the story in order to stimulate its effect), all the way to the short phantasmagorias of Jorge Luis Borges according to who: "The story is one short dream, one short illusion." The Austrian novelist Robert Musil already in 1930 complained (in his maxi-novel *Human without characteristics*) that we are living in a period of magazines and that we are becoming impatient when it comes to reading books. Fragmentation, dynamics of living make the short story a present-day genre, and ever more popular among the reading public today. Borges and B. Casares created *Anthology of short and unusual stories*; our Vlada Urosevic has prepared an anthology of short fiction in

the French literature, and Petko Dabeski - *Anthology of Macedonian Short fiction*; in 2000, at the turn of the centuries and millenniums, an anthology of the contemporary Macedonian short story appeared (since the Macedonian independence) having the title *Change of the System*, published in English, an effort of team work of Richard Gaughran and Zoran Ancevski. This anthology has the concept of being a landmark of the Macedonian literature and culture in the world, as it is primarily dedicated to the readers of the English-speaking area. *The translation* as handiwork, creation, or more precisely, *meta-creation* of the literary work in a different language and culture context, personifies one of the potential forms of realization of the *dialogue with the world*.

The human as a being is inevitably condemned to dialogue, communication and co-habiting with the others. The culture (art, literature) is the only area of human activity which knows no borders - which means that the international cultural communication, all by itself, is a key destination to each culture, but, on the other hand, every separate national culture is in the quest for the so-called "differentia specifica" which would determine the previously mentioned as unique and unequalled. Possessing identity means being different from others. Therefore, the process of Europeanization which disturbs the intellectual circles so much, especially lately, should be understood not as globalization (in the sense of assimilation and anonymity, as a final instance), but as guarding (and equal integration in the unity) the nationality and the right to personal identity.

Transferred to the plan of the short story in the contemporary Macedonian literature, it results into marking out its own original trajectory over the background of the European (and worldwide) tradition of the narrative genres, simultaneously integrating in its Pantheon. Or, through "the rapid literary development" as a fundamental feature of the Macedonian literature as a whole, the short story, on one hand, stocks the blanks in its own atypical tradition, and, on the other hand, creates synchronization with the art development of the other European (and worldwide) literatures. On Macedonian scope, for a long period,

there hasn't been any art literature, whereas on the other hand, Macedonian folklore distinguishes with exceptional richness and artistic beauty. Bearing the fact that the genesis of the short story is in the folklore precisely - the short story, namely, continues the tradition of oral telling - it is clear that this genre in the contemporary Macedonian literature doesn't begin "ex nihilo", but it has fruitful ground in its own national tradition.

A lot of theorists claim that certain "simple forms" revive in the short story (according to the term of Andre Joles): tales, ghost tales, parables, legends, fables ..., Which means that the short story anticipates the archaic, the primeval, the eternal, and the traditional? On the other hand, the short story is something current and it happens every day to everybody; it has central meaning for the human experience, because, as the Nobel-prize winner Nadine Gordimer says, "the short story deals with the discrete moment of truth", with something in which "only the human can be certain - present moment". Nevertheless, just as the moment, the short story is fluid as well; it escapes constantly, slipping through the fingers. This is the base for its vitality, flexibility and "open" structure. In the nature of the short story to pulsate constantly between the tradition and innovation, between the national and universal, folklore/oral and contemporary/trendy, current and timeless, lies the cause for its expansion in the contemporary Macedonian literature. As if the key destination of the overall Macedonian literature is reflected through the short story: the constant yearning, on one hand, for personal identity, and on the other hand, for a dialogue with the world, with the other, as Bahtin would say. Or, as Richard Gaughran says (in the inspirational and comparative views presented) in the introduction of the previously-mentioned anthology *Change of the System*: "Macedonia is a small country, but with a deep and wealthy culture, its borders are at reach, but probably because of that, the desire for leaving, for crossing the borders is so immense;" we would add, just as immense is the dependence and the embedment in the national soil. Our playwright Goran Stefanovski, has named this typically Macedonian syndrome as "flight of fancy".

The short story appears in the literary works of a whole generation of Macedonian prose writers. Its developing line can be followed from the prose discourse of one of the most eminent writers in the contemporary Macedonian literature - Slavko Janevski, through the realistic letter of Dimitar Solev or the folklore paradigm of Petre M. Andreevski and Vase Mancev, then through the Macedonian classics of fantastic literature, otherwise great masters of the prose miniatures - Vlada Urosevic and Mitko Madzunkov, all the way to the post-modern writers: Krste Cicanski, Dimitrie Duracovski, Dragi Mihajlovski, Aleksandar Prokopiev, Kim Mehmeti, Jadranka Vladova, Blaze Minevski, Ermis Lafazanovski, Venko Andonovski, Olivera Korveziroska, Igor Isakovski ... The short story in the contemporary Macedonian literature, apart from connecting it to the folklore suggestion, has to be brought into contact with the contribution in this area given by the great South-American poet and writer Jorge Luis Borges. The worldwide fiction or the art of narrating is divided on that *till* Borges, and that *after* Borges.

The literary work of Borges was “discovered” in the late 60s of the 20th century (in the time of the computer chips and the first video cameras), but the characteristics of his work gained its full confirmation in the literature of the 80s. At the same time, the short story in the Macedonian literature experienced full bloom. Literature is one and only; although the Macedonian writer lives and creates in specific provincial conditions, his literary ideas are related and are in harmony with those of his contemporaries from the European (and worldwide) literary area.

The obsession of the “dangerous pleasure of reading” reveals the literature to Borges as a world in which everything is included, so using the magic of writing he tried to reconstruct the surreal world, as well as the world of the already-existing literary fiction. With this, he permanently determined the physiognomy of the contemporary short story, whose poetry implies: erudition, fragmentation, collage, not-linear narration, polyphony, parody, inter-text, rhetoric strategies of the writing, out-of-time and out-of space games, etc. As a matter of fact, the main pivot of the short story is

the *game*; the purpose is a certain juggle, manipulation with the world and the life in the frames of the fictive reality. Or, as the critic has noted extremely well, the short story with its picture of life says: life is not such. For illustration, we are pointing out the beginning of the story “Relationship” by Dragi Mihajlovski: *That morning I saw her on the post. What are you doing here? -I told her. She was quiet. Get down! - I ordered her - I'll take you to the movies. I haven't got any legs - she said.* This fragment shows that even in the short story of the contemporary Macedonian authors the literary formation of the world is completely unusual, surprising, because it comes to mixing of the subjective (altered) world with the objective (surprisingly formed as well) world, completely in the spirit of the post-modern manner of Borges type. The prose foundation does not come from the experiential reality itself, but everything happens on the field of consciousness, in the space and time of the imagination. The short story functions as a mirror, but what is reflected in it is not the picture of the conscious reality, but the picture of the human mind. With other words, the story does not concern the real, but the imaginative as real, true; it pulses on certain levels which can be marked as world *in* the world.

This produces the analogies with television and film. Short story is the only form of fiction which does not bound to solid, closed forms, and which distinguishes simultaneously with poetic and drama effects (according to the opinion of Northrop Frye). Furthermore: its structure is “open” – as Umberto Eco would say - to every type of experience resulting from the remaining artistic or extra-artistic domains, which would mean that it decides on certain poetry of multimedia: The literature should be fed with photography, film, comic, rock-music, television - in this sense Aleksandar Prokopiev states his poetic programmed as a type of diary memoirs, titled “Anti-directions for personal use”. Intermediation, being in close connection to the poetry of concision which implies: extraordinarily concise and dense style/expression, vigorous pressure (tension), indefiniteness and fragmenting, exceptional precision and refinement, needs educated reader, his involvement and competent literary erudition. The aesthetic existence of the short story as

completed entity or a whole little cosmos, needs “creative individual reading”, to follow Trails for discovery of a new, on the map of literature - unmarked continent.

The short story has the function of creating certain poetry from the ordinary prosaic day-to-day life, has the possibility to extend the present horizons of the perception of the world: *I lived in a decoration made of fir. Whole winter. I was sitting in the bowl and watching the snow falling outside* - states one story-a dream by Mitko Madzunkov. Or, in the story “Fever” by Slavko Janevski, we read: *Chickenpox - rubies on the child's face! The little boy of 11 covered over his head and dreamed an unusual event. In that dream the pet cat Luna became a princess. . . It dawned. The boy opened his eyes. In one corner of the room the cat Luna was dreaming her own dream. The cat with a crown on her head was just a childish drawing on a white piece of paper.*

The short story offers a world perhaps small, false or tragic; a world perhaps well-known, bizarre, palpable, or abstract, introduced, dreamt. Perhaps it is only one small fragment, which yet, succeeds to cast a shadow over our mind, spirit, thought. . . Because, in the final instance, the literary world from the short story concerns all of us, it affects all of us, whether we are Macedonian or not, this world refers to the enigma of the human spirit and life. This world *exists*, same as the “moon flower” from the story with the same title by Kim Mehmeti, on which occasion its author lyrically warm would say: *Beauty is perhaps a fruit of your fantasy, a great illusion, as is life itself. But it exists.*

Translated by: Daniela Prackovska

WHEN SOMEONE GOES AWAY EVERYTHING THAT'S BEEN DONE COMES BACK

Nikola Madzirov

In the embrace on the corner you will recognize
someone's going away somewhere. It's always so.
I live between two truths
like a neon light trembling in
an empty hall. My heart collects
more and more people, since they're not here anymore.
It's always so. One fourth of our waking hours
is spent in blinking. We forget
things even before we lose them –
the calligraphy notebook, for instance.
Nothing's ever new. The bus
seat is always warm.
Last words are carried over
like slanted buckets in an ordinary summer fire.
The same will happen all over again tomorrow—
the face, before it vanishes from the photo,
will lose the wrinkles. When someone goes away
everything that's been done comes back.

*Translated from the Macedonian by
Magdalena Horvat*

AFTER SUCH PAST, WHAT FUTURE?

Bogomil Gjuzel

With all the past's weight,
we have become so light
we may simply disappear.

All history seems an epitaph,
our seed so long suppressed
its roots grow numb...

Some other time or place,
perhaps, we'll see the trigger
pulled, the anchor cast away,

and we might root in earth,
to spring up like janissaries
at our neighbors' throats...

Right straight through the earth,
like antipodes or enemies,
like exotic plants whose tendrils

have escaped the potted boundaries
they had been planted in and planned for.
The clay is cracked...

the earth is scorched
and cleansed,
again.
After such pasts, what sort of future?

Translated by Peter H. Liotta

MACEDONIAN SWEATY WEDDING

*Jovica Ivanovski**For Pepi Terzioski*

Swollen from kisses and red as lipstick the newly-weds
stand at the table of honour and receive presents
their faces hardly seen from the piles of flowers
undisturbed they estimate the weight of the envelopes
and joyfully toast each other
the parents are happy but still unsure of what's happening
the best-man looks lustfully at the bridesmaid
and in an hour or two he'd look the same at the bride
the dancers impatiently wait for the newlyweds' waltz
to open the season
(I bet even the most restrained lady in the hall
will belly dance on the table)
the gentlemen's suits (borrowed, smelling of mothballs)
look wonderful only on hangers or on chairs
red cheeks loose ties flying collars
(the drunks can be divided into static and mobile
but no doubt they are both top singers)
the children have more fun than in the amusement park
between two courses – a tart of bodies (fat + sweat)
holding hands (a navel cord of endlessness)
in a group orgasm sinks toward the whirlpool of the universe
the musicians have high foreheads the lady singer has an open guard
and the master of photography hardly waits to go back
to his still-life
so definitely eternal in the frames of his black-and-white "Leica M6"
"waiters! - you are gods," screams alcohol
"boozers! - you are crap," say the waiters to each other

The fallen walnut, the hidden parchment
on Eros and Psyche, seething with larvae
with vermin and eggs.

The one that accepts only damp dark
surfaces, and underground routes undesirable
in all homes, it flares up suddenly like a fire
crawls over ceilings as if over a designated sky

without the speed of cockroaches
mice and wasps.

Unadapted and dreadful
without the mythology of the ancients.

Translated by Rajna Koska; copy-reading: Margaret Reid

Poetry

PURPLE

Liljana Dirjan

I can't describe it
with eyes open or closed
(in itself) it seems red-white-gold
a warm fire in winter
a piece of cloth
that brings heat and strikes spark
the flint of stone in fields of snow
and the negative of weather
the identity of four still less than zero
a reindeer pulling a sleigh
leaves traces in dream
-or-the dream tracing in tracks the snow
an opposite at large
His shirt balloons in wind
and my face recedes
newborn (in him) a piece of now
now this distance, separation
a thousand miles in one heart

Translated by Peter H. Liotta

MACE

Ermis Lafazanovski

In my previous life I was a puppeteer.

I learned the trade in Constantinople; and in Konje at Shakir Bey's, Aga Sakaoglu's, and Ibrahim Mensur's; and in Epirus at the place of Barbajanis Barahalis from Calamante; and from Ilija Jorgos of the Peloponnesus. He acquired new knowledge from the great masters André de Sauvignon from France and Bartholomeus Cassa from Ragusa, who taught for a short time in the vicinity of the Aegean Sea.

I learned to master all the fundamental and more advanced characters: from those of Karagjos, Hazivat, and Nastradin Bey, to those of Molière.

Immediately after acquiring the title of master, satisfied with myself but with unrest in my heart after five years of studying, I returned home to Skopje, one evening at the end of May, 1855.

They awaited me with song and dance: my poor father Pavle, my mother Panda, my beautiful fiancée Angelina, and neighborhood friends. Nobody knew what kind of a trade I had learned, not even my father, who had cleaned up the old shed facing the main street, and he had opened up a door and a window, converting it into a shop for me.

Poor father! He thought I had become a saddler, a slipper-maker, a tailor, a boza vendor, a tinsmith, or maybe a stove-maker, comb-maker, furrier, or even a barrel maker. Why would he suspect that I had not obeyed him after he sold half of his property for my education?

Neither did my mother suspect: looking at the heavy new cases and boxes I took down from the carriage, she told me that everything was ready for the wedding, which would take place, of course, before

I started earning money through my trade. And I didn't say a word about my trade, so as not to disappoint them.

But not a day had passed before everybody found out about it – father was terribly disappointed – and it was, according to others, very indecent, a result of my propensity for pranks.

Everything happened on our wedding night, when the beautiful Angelina and I were to go to bed for the first time. After she lifted the covers to lie beside me, she screamed at the top of her lungs because, instead of me, she saw the Black Arab himself suddenly getting up on his behind, waving his arms feverishly, then reaching out to grab her.

Poor Angelina: the beauty of her face disappeared in a second, and she fainted. Shaking with laughter, I appeared from under the bed, holding in my hands the wires and sticks with which I manipulated the life of the Black Arab, and I saw it was not a laughing matter.

Because of Angelina's screams before she fainted, our whole household gathered in the room: and so my wedding night was a failure! And I had just wanted to make her laugh a bit.

It didn't take much for Dad to figure out what "trade" I was in, and when he did, he started plucking out his hair, calling me the son of Satan, someone who had spent the money of his ancestors on puppets instead of on acquiring a trade. After that he stopped talking to me. I tried in vain to convince him that what I did was also a trade, one even better than others.

Mom and Angelina cried for several days, and then they calmed down.

The rumors that I had become a puppeteer spread around Skopje much faster than the news that some Beline or Peline had come to Bitola from France in order to teach people with an interest in all languages, including that of snakes.

Children from the surrounding neighborhoods came – first from those nearby and then from neighborhoods more remote – and they watched me through the small window as I painted my puppets, sewed their clothes, caps, and shoes, and fastened strings to them, lifting them to their feet and moving them left and right.

I started fashioning puppets after the characters of street beggars, local bakers, neighboring Jews, Skopje braggarts, well known misers...

In the meantime my father gradually but noticeably went gray and cursed me, and once he tried to burn down the shed, together with me and my puppets, though I still had not put on a single show.

My first show was called "Karagjozo Tricks the Peasants," and it was accompanied by the music of the blind accordionist Nikephorus: a dozen people were present. Then there were "Money Can't Buy Happiness," "Cane's Battle with the Dragon," and "Done Pockov and Mara Kamara."

The audiences kept growing in number and in the level of their satisfaction, and I was more and more popular, before I staged "Mace" – a comic allegory without an intermission. I had already sold some fifty tickets.

My father still could not give his assent to my profession, though I brought money home and gave it to him. However, my mother and Angelina not only went along, but they also started sewing clothes for my shows. They were obviously very pleased. While I was involved in my work, I tried to breathe some life into my puppets, trying to make them as real as possible, getting them to think and talk like people in the neighborhood.

Through them, I wanted to instruct everybody who watched, to get them to see something else in what they were looking at.

One day my proud father came to see me, in the already expanded shed. He stood among Angelina, my mother, and me, showing me the likeness of his enemy, Alija the janissary, made of wood and dressed in rags: he had a big nose and long ears. We all smiled, and that is how we reconciled.

It came about that an Austrian officer, perhaps even a general—an Eisenblatt—, because he could find no other entertainment, decided to attend the performance "Mace," disguised as a poor peasant travelling to see his brother in Constantinople. He was not pleased; in fact, he protested personally.

I had heard that he was an officer holding secret meetings with east and west European diplomats over certain spheres of influence, but I found out the truth much later, after the damage had been done.

The show "Mace" was the most difficult act, because the puppets and props were all natural size.

The story itself is very simple and folksy: a poor young girl (this young girl was a puppet modeled after Angelina) is enclosed in a tower, imprisoned by a seven-headed dragon, each of whose heads speaks a different language. The brave hero (in my likeness) goes off to rescue her, whacks the dragonheads one after another with a great mace, while it screams for help in French, English, German, Italian, Greek, Bulgarian, and Turkish. The hero keeps calling out, "Die! Damn you!"

Throughout the show, Nikephorus played exciting, fast dances on his accordion, and at the end, when the last head falls, for some reason he played "Drumbeats in the Village Center," probably because it is joyful.

Around a hundred people, from all of Skopje, were present at the show, and my father checked the tickets.

Everybody laughed hard because of the way the mace did slammed the dragonheads, but immediately after the show Eisenblatt came and said he wanted to talk to me personally.

My father and I, after everybody had left, took him to a room with windows opened wide, and in bad Turkish he told us that he understood very well what we intended to say with the show and that he would report us to the authorities unless we immediately stopped performing it, because it stirred up national hatred and xenophobia, which were very bad. He even said that the next morning he would come with his assistants, he would knock down the house and confiscate all of our puppets unless we did what he said.

My father and I looked at each other only once, but it was enough for us to understand each other.

The next morning Turkish soldiers came to our house – ten of them – and one of them pulled us aside and said that a very important person had been seen for the last time the previous night at our home. Since then there had been no trace of him. My dad and I defended ourselves by claiming that those who said they saw him must have seen a puppet that looked just like the person they were looking for, that they were mistaken.

They searched the whole house but didn't find the person they were seeking.

The mace we used in the show looked somewhat suspicious to them, but they didn't pick it up. If they had done so, they might have noticed blood on it.

They straightened their shoulders and left, cursing those who had given them bad information.

Thus, my father and I finally drew close to each other, thanks to my trade and our quiet happiness over our great success, and after the disappearance of Eisenblatt, the puppet show "Mace" could be performed many more times, even if secretly.

Translated by Elizabeta Bakovska

Fiction

CONVERSATION WITH SPINOZA (extract)

Goce Smilevski

The name of the man who came to the Beth Jacob synagogue that morning carrying his son — born eight days earlier — was Michael Spinoza. Michael himself was born forty-five years earlier as Miguel Despinosa in Vidigere, Portugal, where his father, Isaac, had settled, moving from Lisbon and hoping that in the small town he would be able to observe the law of Moses with no fear of the Inquisition. He came into this world in 1587, exactly forty years after the establishment of the Inquisition Tribunal in the kingdom, whose principal goals were the forceful conversion of Jews and the prevention of converted Jews from going back to their original faith. He remembered a single event from his childhood: one hot summer night when he was nine he dreamt of huge fish flying in the sky with blood dripping from their mouths. It was then, in this dream, that he heard the voice of his mother, Mor Alvares, crying out to him from this side of reality. When he opened his eyes he saw his mother and father hastily grabbing a few essentials: two loaves of bread, three handfuls of salt, a knife, a few tablespoons, a needle and yarn, and some clothing. While he was stepping over the threshold of his home for the last time together with his mother and brother and sister he saw how his father Isaac kneeled in the room, pulled a plank up from the floor, took several books out and put them under his arm. Later, when recollecting their flight, he would often take out one of those books, the Torah, and read Exodus again and again. At these times, he remembered again and again the tearful eyes of Mor Alvares staring at their little house which grew ever smaller and smaller, vanishing into the distance, while no one travelling in the wagon drawn by two horses had any idea of where they were going. For a long time, from every town in which they

found shelter, Mor Alvares would send a letter, which she had previously dictated to Isaac, to her brothers, not knowing whether her brothers were aware that they had been indicted by the Inquisition for professing the Jewish religion. The Alvares family always sent their letters on the day they set off for another town, in case they were caught by the Inquisitors: the letters contained only the name of the town which they had just left, the name of a place in that town, a date, and a signal. Mor Alvares believed that her brothers would understand her messages. If the letter said, "Ponte de Lima, marketplace near the courthouse, 14th August, picking your right nostril with the little finger of your left hand," it meant that she expected her brothers to appear on 14th August on the square near the courthouse in the town of Ponte de Lima, looking for a man who picked his right nostril with the little finger of his left hand, and that they were to give the same signal. In each of the towns in which they stayed for a few months, Mor Alvares and Isaac found a discreet Jew to whom they revealed the secret sign and the date on which he was supposed to appear in a particular place. They also mentioned to him the name of the town to which they were going so that the brothers would be able to find their sister. In all of the towns they passed through, Isaac and Mor Alvares left people jumping on one leg in the square, crouching and standing up near the harbour, or clapping their hands in front of the cathedral, but Mor Alvares's brothers never appeared. She often dreamt of a large piece of paper and the hands of her brothers writing something, but as she was illiterate, it was difficult for her to recognize the unfamiliar symbols, and also to remember them so that her husband could interpret them all after she woke up. So she decided to learn how to read and write to be able to interpret her dreams. In every town they stayed in she learnt three letters, and when she learnt all the letters of the alphabet, she managed to read the following text in her dream: "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to

mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace." When she woke up, Mor Alvares spoke of her dream to her husband, but since she had already much forgotten, what she remembered was as scrappy as a dead body devoured by vultures: "To every thing there is a season: a time to die; a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill; a time to break down; a time to weep; a time to mourn; a time to cast away stones; a time to refrain from embracing; a time to lose; a time to cast away; a time to rend; a time to keep silence; a time to hate; a time of war." The words sounded familiar to Isaac, but he could not remember where he had heard or read them. From that day on Mor Alvares had no more dreams and sent no more letters. She only hoped that one day she would find a comfortable home for all of them: for her children, Fernando, Miguel, Maria Clara, for her husband, Isaac, and for herself. The reply to all her letters arrived a month after she died in Nantes, France, in 1616. The reply came in the form of Sara, her brother Gabriel's daughter. While Sara was explaining that her father and the other two Alvares brothers had died having been tortured at the hands of the Inquisitors, Miguel Despinosa, recently renamed Michel D'Espinoza, stared at the missing fingers of his cousin's left hand. Noticing his bewilderment, Sara put her fingerless hand close to his face and said: "They cut them off so that I cannot turn the pages of the Talmud they found under my pillow." A few days later, while sailing away from Nantes, leaving it for good, Michel D'Espinoza continued to gaze into the harbour until Sara's fingerless hand waving him goodbye disappeared into the distance. In Rotterdam he received his third name, Michael Spinoza, which he bore until his death. It was in this city that he had a premonition that the Dutch Republic would remain his home until his stay on earth came to an end. One day in November 1622 he moved to Amsterdam and married Rachel, the daughter of his uncle, Abraham. Towards the end of the following year their first

child died before it could even have been named on the eighth day after its birth, and in the spring of 1624 their second child died at birth. Rachel fell gravely ill and became weaker and weaker. Soon, whilst sitting in front of her front door, she would have to put stones in her pockets so that the wind would not blow her away. She died one morning in February 1627, and the people who bathed her body said it was lighter than a seagull's wing. As soon as he arrived in Amsterdam, Michael had become active in commerce with the support of his uncle, Abraham Spinoza. A year after the death of Rachel, Michael Spinoza married Hanna Deborah Senior, the daughter of Baruch Senior and Maria Nunes. Their daughter, Miriam, was born in 1629. A year later, Maria gave birth to their son, Isaac, and on 24th November 1632, they had another son.

The man who came to the Beth Jacob synagogue that morning in December 1632 was Michael Spinoza, and the eight-day old child he brought to the shrine to be circumcised and given a name was myself. The name they entered in the synagogue register was Bento Spinoza; they called me that at home and it was with that name that I became a merchant. I was registered as Baruch in the Talmud Torah school, and it was this name they used in the *cherem* through which my excommunication from the Jewish community was proclaimed. Following the *cherem*, the people called me Benedictus. All three names had the same meaning — the blessed one — the first in Portuguese, the second in Hebrew, and the third in Latin.

Translated by Filip Korenski

Fiction

THREE ROOMS FOR TWO

Olivera Kjorveziroska

“This is what happened” I told my husband, trying to release his eyes glued to the newspaper.

“So?” he answered mechanically not being able to detach himself from his favourite article.

“So?! You don’t think it’s enough that they always take three rooms, and there are two of them?”

“So what?”

“Three rooms for two and so what?”

“They have the money, so they take as many rooms as they want.”

“Three for two?”

“So why not?”

I tried several more times to develop the same dialogue, unsuccessfully of course, and then I gave up on the idea to provoke any interest with my husband, fully plunging into my thoughts as to why two people could possibly take three rooms.

I had realised long ago that nothing in this world is an accident. The dates we were born on, the jewellery that we wear or not wear, where we go for a holiday and how. I mean in how many rooms. Everything is written in the nature according to someone’s precisely taken measure. As a matter of fact, our huge villa that we had built in Lagadin in some agony, not even thinking why we needed it, the two of us alone. A silent voice came from the unknown depths of the lake that there was a secret connection between our villa and the three rooms of our regular guests. I remembered that ten years ago when we decided to make something in Lagadin at the place that was a gift from my parents, and was there unused since our wedding, my husband insisted so much that the villa was huge, exactly like it was today. “Why do you need it”, said both the builders

and the engineer who made the design that we constantly changed, always adding, never taking away, and my husband just said "I want it" and full stop. He "wanted" so much that the villa is huge that I start to doubt it was in some connection with the three rooms of the two Dobrici – Ena and Ante from Zagreb.

"Where are they now?" my husband asked me, finally closing the newspaper.

"Ena is probably walking along the beach to Pestani and back, and Ante is over there, smoking and staring at the lake."

"How long are they staying?"

"As always. From 1 July to 1 August. They're mid way now"

"And they don't even open the third room?" he asked absent-mindedly looking through the window.

"What are you looking at?"

"I want to see Ante... Oh, yes, there he is..."

"No" I answered, and he turned towards me startled and asked me:

"No what?"

"They don't open the third room."

"Ohhh, that" he ended the conversation silently, and I started recognising clear traces of recognition of the custom of Dobrici in his silence. I wanted to propose that we go to the beach or to Pestani, but I don't want to do it with words. I can't manage to do it in another way, so I run away from my wish to the kitchen and I dive into food, food, food...

When we used to live in Skopje and we only passed the summers in Lagadin, I had a woman who took care of the rooms of the guests. The rooms... It started all of a sudden, and soon got the features of something that had always been done... The woman was so hard working that she even managed to take care of our part, that is, of the rooms we never had rented. I enjoyed the laziness just as I enjoy the thousands of obligations now. I decided to do everything myself not to think of what was hurting me more and more. The first summer when we made more money renting rooms in Lagadin than we made in Skopje for a year we decided to move here for good. So, we became faithful neighbours of a piece of the lake that we shared with many tourists in the summer, but it was mostly ours

in fall and in winter. I remember clearly when Ena and Ante came for the first time, it was winter. "Are there any rooms free?" "There are as many as you want. There is no living soul in Lagadin.' We took them through the villa and they chose the rooms they wanted themselves, the very same ones that they always stayed in. They didn't even ask how much they were, or how the heating was. There was no heating, of course, and they were not expensive. They never came in winter again. Only then. All the other times they came to Lagadin from 1 July to 1 August. To the same rooms we always kept for them. Even if they did not call in time to reserve them, I was sure we would not give them to anybody else. It felt as if they belonged to them.

"Maybe they keep something secret in the third room" I said, not expecting an answer from my husband. "Or they use it for some rituals."

My husband left his crossword puzzle at my last word and with his pen in his hand and a mild irony in his voice, he said:

"Such as?"

"Such as, such as... I don't know. They speak with the dead, with the unknown... Maybe they have some strange power."

"Yeah, sure! If they had any power they would not hang around Lagadin for a month." His allusion hit me and the pain I always carried in my soul became unbearable. My knees bent.

"You want to say that..."

"No!" he interrupted me diving into his crossword puzzle, while our villa fell on our heads, larger and emptier than ever.

After this, I forbade myself to think about the third room. The shadow of it understanding that my husband threw in front of me mercilessly hurt too much. I removed Dobrici from my everyday life and with somehow lighter eyes I looked at the lake getting out of one season and readily entering another. The terraces of our villa that were almost hanging above its blue colour almost every day gave me tons of joy like an endless water surface: once perfectly smooth as a mirror, another time upset like a woman in love. Very rarely, when a sad or rainy day would come the surface of the lake also swallowed the sky, and the terraces of our villa hung above a

double endlessness. I started to understand. Lagadin could not change my relief, but it could always splash it with clear lake water. My husband calmly read the papers and I felt no need for conversation. I had perfected the communication with his silence to a spotless silence that could shortly be disturbed only by some restless lake wave.

“Maria, let’s go to the beach, or to Pestani” he proposes, certain that he would be refused. “When have you ever been on the beach with snow, huh?” he finished his tower joyfully following the fragile snowflakes that dance between the lake and us. “Maybe we’ll find some fish in Pestani...”

“Once the winter is over, we’ll go.” I say. “We’ll go everywhere.” I am saying things that I don’t believe in, and he knows, but he does not confront me with my own deceit.

“As you wish.” He lights a cigarette and gets back to his crossword puzzle.

Lagadin is the unfinished word in our lives that unites the biggest truth and the biggest lie in the beautiful villa with a view to the lake. Horizontally viewed, the sun will shine again fast, very fast, Dobrici will come from Zagreb, from 1 July to 1 August and vertically: the villa that hangs above both of our heads will become bigger and bigger.

Everything became different than it was. The lake brought some otherness to the air with the first summer days and I could not have enough of it. I knew that something had happened, but I could not say what. The spring had already rolled towards the summer, and nothing happened according to its regular order. The people from Zagreb did not call to confirm their usual reservation for the three rooms, which, of course we did not give to other people. A day before 1 July, I cleaned them thoroughly, I washed the terraces, I aired the blankets, Ena was a clean woman: I even washed the curtains. I wanted to be ready for them, regardless of the fact that they had not announced their arrival.

I knew they would come and... they did. The same car, the same roof storage, the same registration plate, the boxer glove of beautiful leather at the rear-view mirror. However, Ena and Ante were not

the same. They had a carriage with a baby whose eyes were even bluer than the lake. He barely had two months.

“Madam Maria, we made it!” said Ena, and I took them to their three rooms smiling.

“Sorry we didn’t call, but... now we only need two rooms” said Ante happily, and I and my husband who walked behind me found out everything at the same moment: The third room was for the same emptiness inside their lives because of which we built our huge villa in Lagadin.

“You know, Madam Maria, Matej is in a way... from Lagadin.”

I knew, but I didn’t tell her anything, I just gently touched her hand, feeling an unbearable wish to turn the villa into a small shack at the coast filled with children’s voices.

A wave of clear lake water splashed us all.

Translated from Macedonian by: Elizabeta Bakovska



A LOW FLIGHT OVER CHILDHOOD

Žarko Kujundžiski

When the apple-trees in our garden were still young, I was as big as the smallest of them. I was like a pea, like a piece of pie, like a candy wrapped in a colorful paper. Even smaller. I had a nose like a fin of a river trout and little hands like needles of a pine tree. Yes, I looked like that. But don't think that I was haughty, that I leaned my head upon my back. No, I have never been like that. My parents can tell you that - mom and dad.

At school they used to ask me what my mom and dad are doing. They wanted me to answer fast, to hurry up, as it was something unimportant, or to say - minor. The teacher would look at me through the windows of her glasses - waiting. She was waiting for the answer. Fast answer. As if the answer was an attic pigeon to rush from there as a thunder. It's hard to say what mom and dad are doing, because mom and dad are my parents. They are mom and dad.

- Look, kid how come you don't get it? I will repeat. What's the job of your parents? What? Say!

- Well... Mom loves dad, dad loves mom, mom loves me, dad loves me, I love dad, dad loves sis, sis... - And like this forever. It was important matter and I had to be correct and precise when I was answering. Dad says that. Me, mom, dad and sis - we love each other a lot.

Sis is a big sis. She puts color on her lips. That's not nice. Sis wants to have her hair colored too. Mom doesn't let her to do that. That's bad for the hair and bad for the looks. Mom says that. Sis gets angry; she smears the lipstick over her face and runs away in her room. Nothing is clear to me. Sis tells me annoyed that I'm stupid, that I don't understand anything.

*

When I turned 15, my father bought a mower and cut the grass in our yard for the first time. It was then when I learned what is a blade, how you open it, how it cuts and how it cuts off. From the window of our bathroom I was watching my father mowing the grass. The bathroom smelled of antidandruff shampoo because I had just washed my hair. I felt warm and nice and I didn't want to get out from there. Only the blade was bothering me. And my sister, knocking on the door intently.

The first day of high school brought a trayful of new kids that I was going to meet, in the new desks, in the new classrooms. And new teachers. Tough and those who pretend to be tough. And still, everything was the same. Even the questions:

- What's the job of your parents?

And again: rolling their eyes, breaking the fingers, moving the chair, painful prolonging - the look wandering somewhere.

- Well, daddy is mowing the grass in the yard and mom...

Laughter. Everyone's making joke. I'm not in the mood of joking. I like jokes but the fact that daddy works in the garden - together with the nightingale that every summer used to visit - was interesting to me, but not funny. Not funny at all.

The next spring my grandma died. The people were drawing near the bier carrying dark candles, with their pale faces trying to bring a fresh breath in the numbness of that day. I loved my grandma and that's why I was sad too, but no one seemed to notice. Everyone was crying, I wanted to cry too, but I was scared. Even when the priest was singing, even when my mom was talking. Someone came, touched my shoulder and said:

- Stop it, little boy, you don't understand.

*

When I finished high school, they were widening the street in front of our house and they cut two apple-trees. I felt sorry for them. At that time my father had retired, and my mother had started to work at home. So now they could sit all day in the yard watering the lawn. They even planted some flowers.

SILJAN THE STORK FLIES OVER MACEDONIA ONCE AGAIN

Risto Lazarov

As has been noted already,
 "The Macedonians, despite
 Their terrible poverty,
 Showed great good-heartedness"
 And gave willingly even more than they could
 So I and the Priest did not go on our pilgrimage
 With empty hands.
 I begged the Priest so much
 To give a hoot, do a good deed
 And take me with him to Christ's grave
 And then - may God be willing!
 It was hard to win him over
 But, finally, we found ourselves
 In the port of Salonica
 Waiting for a vessel to Jerusalem
 And it's not in vain they say Salonica towers.
 What houses, beautiful palaces
 They swept me off my feet!
 High buildings,
 All higher than the Prilep tobacco factory!
 Miraculous gardens with rose-beds
 And other most beautiful blooms
 As if an angel sits at my shoulder
 And I gaze and gaze to see
 How far the White Sea stretches!
 Somewhat out of fear before we boarded the ship

I entered university and I'm studying a lot. I read a lot. I don't want to hear any more that I'm stupid and I don't understand anything. I want to understand everything.

I should say too that I have a girlfriend. She always has rosy cheeks and a bunch of hairpins in her hair. I like to spend afternoons with her - kissing. She asks me what my parents are doing. I'm telling her the truth: they are planting flowers. And that's true. I have never lied. She is laughing to me, and I laugh too. I'm happy, happiest.

One day - by the fence of the yard where the big neighborhood dog lives - she didn't show up. She was not at her home; she was not in her grandma's place. When I saw her she didn't laugh like before and she didn't talk like before. She didn't take my hand. She told me that she doesn't love me. I got scared, I protested, I needed her appearance, her warmth, her kisses. She was determined.

- It's not that simple. The colors of the traffic light change, but red is longer than green. All the things change and move. We can't be together forever. Do you understand? Even the sky and the clouds are not always close. Brother and sister get apart, mother and child. Earth from sky, white from black, pain from joy, sweet from bitter. Nothing is forever. Everything changes. Our relationship is like a first snow, like first fallen tooth. Do you understand?

No! I don't want to understand, I gave up from understanding. I had firmly decided not to understand. But, it was too late, too late.

I understood.

Translated by: Donka Batakova Motamedhoseini



And somewhat out of sorrow that thus had ended
The Slavonic siege of Salonica
And many of our people left their bones here
In the tavern near Beaz Kule
We drank several glasses of strong Salonica brandy
Munched the olives together with their pits.
Two or three tables away
Grigor Prlichev seemed to be sitting -
The man looked so much like our Homer
Although his hair and moustache were gray.
He had ordered ice-cream,
Big scoops, like Ohrid apples,
And was doing his crossword
And when he glared at the sea
It looked as if he measured the grief of all Macedonians
It looked as if he listened to their pulse
It looked as if he searched for his ancestral roots
And recognized the scent of the new time.
He felt I rejoiced in him
And waved with a white cloth
When, afterwards, I looked at him from the ship.
Prlichev's cloth is to the present day
My most beautiful flag,
The flag of all my fancies and longings.

Before we boarded the ship
The Priest showed me
Another, much bigger, tavern
With billiards, dominoes, checkers on the tables
Only our people come to this pub, he said -
Anarchists, socialists, autonomists,
Federalists and other -ists, -ists, -ists
But it was getting dark
And I could not recognize anyone.
Our ship left port when it was pitch dark

In the port of Salonica
We were still on our feet
When we heard loud shooting
Coming from the tavern of our fellow country-men
It was the second assassination attempt on Yane Sandanski.

This was my first time on a vessel
And danger looks larger through the eyes of fear
Out of dread and unrest
To tell you the truth -
I spent the first night in the loo
And through a small round porthole
I counted the stars
And then I had a vision:
A lonely naked maiden dancing on the waves.
I was quiet as a mouse
That night on the ship.
Well, many days and nights had passed
When suddenly demons from the east and north
And strong winds took their turns
The youngest cyclops grew angry,
I think it was called Argos -
They had spoiled its nap after the feast
And it raged, rampaged and stormed,
Hurled great stones and rocks into the sea.
Our ship stumbled
Like a nutshell on the waves,
The demons swished, may God swish them
The cyclops went wild, may wild boars eat it!
The vision disappeared in a second
The naked girl dancing on the waves vanished
The ship keeled over and went down
Holy Moses, my dear mother,
Should I, your Silyan, fondled and spoiled
Be a bite for the fish?!

**THE BALKANS AS EUROPE'S POINT ZERO
("POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE AND
UNDERSTANDING OF THE BALKANS")**

Elizabeta Šeleva

The Home of Theory

At the beginning of this text it is indispensable to provide a framework answer to the crucial question: is it at all possible to establish a post-colonial criticism of the Balkans, and if it is, then, what (exactly) is it looking for? Before we ever indulge in argumentation regarding this issue, we also ought to face the existence of a riddle related to the thing, which metaphorically, we will designate as the "home of the theory". Does it undoubtedly exist, where is it situated and which is the home of the theory today, does that (home) have one and only location and how hospitable and open it is towards the other? All these questions arose for the first time while I was reading the book "*Macedonian Catachresis*" (2001) by Sarkanjac, in which the "derivativeness" of knowledge is clearly and innovatively presented, along with the founding of an authentic or catachrestic "theory for itself".

Now, I would draw your attention to a theoretical bestseller, essential for the initial clarification of the ABOVE question – "*Imagining the Balkans*" by Marija Todorova, which was first published in English in the USA in 1997. This book, since the moment of its publication has immediately drawn the broad readership interest, and within the framework of the cultural theory it has managed to install a new category, bound to one of the most acute (in terms of the historical events, very dynamic) fields in the world today, the category "balkanism". To begin with, my question would be posed this way: Would this book, provided it was published in the Balkans, have the

The girl who had danced upon the waves
Was in fact a plank
That I gripped tightly
And almost broke with my arms
I and she - grandchildren of Tantalus.
When I woke up,
Thank God,
I was already on shore
With the plank in my grasp.
If I had had a radio, Hey you Macedonian,
I could have heard that in some other sea
That great ship the *Titanic* had gone down
And in the Balkans there were wars, wars
Festering wounds
And Macedonia's division had begun.
This is how I stepped into the era of the Stork
With a plank and no radio-news.

(translated by Snezana Necovska)



same fortune, even this “glasnost” (voicing), which has contributed it to be taken as our starting reference?

It has been known that knowledge on the Balkans has mostly been imported from abroad! That the Balkans, as a rule has been citingly oriented, that the citation is the Balkans’ destiny, taking into consideration that the Balkans, in a large number of domains appears to be a “perfect consumer” (said by S. Slapsak)! Therefore, I would add one more assumption, that the unhindered and quick circulation of this theory has come as a consequence of the fact that the author of this work is a diaspora intellectual who lives in an (say, voluntary, but still) exile, displaced from her motherland. Would her work cause such a boom if Todorova, as a Bulgarian, who had come to live and work in the USA, did not belong to the increasing and respected group of “mascots”, this time, not coming from the Third World, but from the Balkans?

But, for the moment we will live aside these intriguing thoughts in order to get back to the legitimacy of the introduction of the postcolonial perspective when it comes to studying and understanding the Balkans.

In the introductory chapter of her book “Balknism and Orientalism”, Todorova herself was forced to provide at least a framework answer to this question. Considering the justification of the application of the postcolonial perspective, regarding the “semi colonial, quasi colonial, but certainly not the pure colonial status” of the Balkans, Todorova briefly (only on page 38) delves on 2 arguments: the geographical; and the historiographical. The former alludes to the self-understanding and the a priori set geographical state of the Balkans as “Europe, or a part of Europe, even though the Balkans, according to general belief in the past centuries, has become its province, its periphery (1999; 38). The latter argument comprises the objection of Todorova to put in the same basket on the one hand the historically defined and temporally limited categories like colonialism and imperialism along with the broadly understood notions of power and obedience on the other hand, which are not historically limited.

Todorova’s arguments are correct to a certain extent, but considering the current historical events in the Balkans, it can already be said that it has CERTAINLY come to belong to both sides of the imperial division.

On the one hand, E.Said, when speaking of the West, exclusively refers to “metropolitan Europe”, unlike the Orient, which is considered its colonized category. The trend of intensified orientalization, however, directly concerns and relates to the Balkans, which had been previously sanctioned as the European otherness. Hence, the Slavist, David Noris, regarding the distribution of the so-called “Balkan myth” into the West, concludes: “The Balkans may be regarded as a European territory, but it has been excluded from the European culture” (2002:27). However, I will discuss this at length in the text to follow.

Yet, we face the unstoppable dissemination of the attribute “post-colonial”. As it usually happens with the key terms of the cultural and theoretical sphere, the historically limited meaning of this attribute all the more, has been diffusely applied to a broader array of events than in the beginning, so that now it has been absorbing connotations of the current, anti-global trend.

The ambiguous rhetoric of centre and periphery

Spivak’s research which covers the interestingly conditioned mechanisms incorporated in the process of the margin production, are especially usable in understanding the Balkans, and they make ambivalent and problematic even its own imagologically confirmed status of a periphery.

“The margin is established to meet the institutional conveniences of the coloniser” (1998:95), the centre wants to establish a margin which can be identified” (1998:90).

This advises us to pay due caution when interpreting the existing analyses which ensue from the model centre-periphery. Namely, the governing hermeneutics of the centre, in its basis, results from the imperial optics (and perspective): according to which, the centre is a place of order and stability, whereas the periphery, in turn, is a source of disorder, instability and threat.

Hence, the reflections upon a major issue, ensuing exactly from the domain of the postcolonial criticism: the issue of typologisation between the cultural centre and the periphery and consequently of the pathos of the cultural boundary. The Balkans is really a part of Europe, but what is its status today? Regarding the current political situation, the analysts are already talking about an additional internal separation of Europe into a geographical and political Europe. It refers to the conspicuous asymmetry between the geographical and political belonging of the Balkans, too. Namely, for the time being, what remains obvious is the historical and political extraterritorial position of the Balkans, with reference not only to Europe, but also to itself, through the newly launched syntagm, West Balkans. And indeed, the Balkans today finds itself in the middle of “a life political situation: (B. Sarkanjac, 2001:14): it swarms with all sorts of refugees, displaced persons, emigrants, immigrants: real and virtual; acute and chronic. I say virtual, having in mind the numerous potential refugees who otherwise permanently long for emigrating from here, long for living outside the Balkans. I say chronic, having in mind the innocent victims of the identity conflicts (such as the Aegean Macedonians, the Bosnians etc), who instead of settling/setting up a home, and not to their own desire, constantly circulate around and outside the Balkans.

The state of permanent behomedness, borderiness, displacedness, interexistence, which Homi Bhabha describes with the least theoreticised syntagm “people with no address” fully relates to the current events which have taken place in Macedonia, the former “oasis of peace” (as our ex-president referred to it).

“I have no eyes to see the future” – a harrowingly, essentially, accurately and “killingly” described newly adopted refugee “position” by a woman, expelled from her home in the Skopje village of Arachinovo this summer. Thus geography proved to be the “evil fortune” once again. But may it (or rather, how much impact may it have to) decide on the “evil fortune”?

Earlier, in the stated quotation taken from the book by Todorova, we pointed at the fact that the Balkans, by rule, is considered a periphery of the (European) socio-political and cultural centre. We

should not shun the fact that this is owing to certain broader historical circumstances as well as to a newer historical constellation: which occurs by displacing the cultural and political centre, from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic (since the 16th century to date). This former status of a centre, which this area used to enjoy in the past, by the crucial part it used to play in the animation of Europe, is by and large the principal motive of the current resurrection of the nostalgic hermeneutics and emblematics of the “navel of the world”, particularly in the sphere of art and culture.

In the example of Macedonia, the rhetoric centre-periphery lives its own gradation. With reference to the evident denial of its identity on various grounds, as well as the conspicuous assimilatory aspirations for Macedonia by its (as periphery) Balkan neighbours, the American Slavist Victor Friedman presents a paradox, particular to Macedonia: “Macedonia has remained a potential centre of conflicts because it is at the periphery of all its neighbours, who themselves are at the periphery of Europe” (2001/2:124). Such (admittedly, extremely undesirable status) “centre of conflicts”, makes Macedonia “the periphery of the peripheries” (2001/2:155). All this in fact confirms the axiological dimension of the “production” of the axis centre-periphery, which is all but naïve and innocent, politically conditioned and diffusion-of-power determined, and takes place after one engages into someone’s (only ostensibly geographical or spatial) positioning, either in the centre or in the periphery, and then what follows is sanctioning of the political asymmetry. In other words, the geographical sides of the world have acquired quite certain political connotations today, which have been proved by the current domination of the East/West axis, instead of the previously preferred North/South.

But the accurate cultural “location” designates only the beginning of a long and painstaking process of identity self-processing. Since, the issue becomes complicated to the maximum once it has undergone the test of “belonging”.

In other words, could one’s identity (and determination) be solely reduced to the predetermined component of origin and unreflected belonging? Are we, because of the very fact that we belong to (live

in) the Balkans, definitely becoming clinched in the determination Balkanians?

In order to answer this question, for a moment I will borrow a statement by Derrida, which repeats my dilemma: "my cultural identity is not only European, it is not identical to itself" (2001:58). If Derrida can compromisingly define himself by the syntagm "a European among other things", then what prevents me (and all of us) to reach out for the same formulation, but in an altered, "Balkanized" version, quite legitimately pointing that I feel like "a Balkanian, among other things"?! All the more, as the very Balkans is in an extremely ambiguous position: it simultaneously belongs to both sides of the imperial division – to the colonizers and the colonized. Quite appropriate to the confession made by Edward Said on the constitutional meaning of his identity incompleteness: "I belong to more than one history, to more than one group, but to none completely" (2001:18).

Although for pragmatic reasons, overtly supported, this very striving towards homogenisation of identities (through the prism of origin and belonging), should however, be disclosed for the sake of its colonizatory effect. Namely, it aims at essentialising the very fact of origin (kinship, racial, ethnic or class) and by that to justify/sanction the acquired privileges and the "Darwinist" domination of the (momentarily) stronger.

Therefore, regarding the Balkans as a region, in which today one "culture of origin" (indigenusness, originality) has been extremely favoured, what appears more than necessary is the very process of decolonisation of the narrative (or the mentality) of the centre, as well as the very (discursive) struggle for the cultural centre (ajis mundi). The (useful) efforts to distinguish between the origins and the (manipulatively Aimed) act of its unconditional absolutisation – by all means differentiate between themselves considerably (even indicatively). Namely, if we speak today of the Balkans, it indispensably includes the paradigm of the "balkanism", which establishes the Balkans as an epistemological object, whose role is to be the "rest", the "residue" of Europe. At that, this and thus set

object, in accordance with the requirements for legitimisation of certain political enterprises carried out by the "centre" step by step, consistently, it turns into an abject.

The Balkans as Heterotopy of the Abject

Spivak, in one of her texts, warns that "the centre longs for an object", for "a margin, which could be identified" (1998:98), and that that process is conditioned (in favour of and coincides with) the relationships of power.

These relationships, on the other hand, are primarily concerned about finding optimum forms of self-justification and self-legitimizing. When it comes to the mechanism of generating imagological patterns about the other (which, in this case refers to the Balkans as an internal European otherness), it is useful to remind ourselves of Homi Bhabha, who warns that: "the representative forms taken, are such that build a picture of the other which present colonization as justifiable, even indispensable."

Therefore, the people of the Balkans are continuously treated as manipulative costs and spare parts, necessary for the functioning of the huge "Balkan industry", which constantly gains profits in a paradoxical way: by orders placed by others and in favour of others' well-being, it obediently makes losses: wars, refugees, crises.

Being aware of these assumptions, it seems, we could far more appropriately probe into the enterprise called "West regarding the Rest" – in an effective disclosure of, for us, intriguing contours of the Balkans as the rest (waste).

During the past year I have had the opportunity to have a look at several art catalogues, which are thematically related to (the perception of) the Balkans or its art production.

By means of these catalogues, I was able to see the image of the Balkans in a direct, visual form – and to interpret (analyse) them from my slanted perspective of a literary critic.

It is a matter of catalogues, which are published in English: "In Search of Bakania" (Graz, 2002); "understanding the Balkans" (Skopje, 2002), "(Bound)less Borders" (Skopje, 2002).

All these titles share one explicit mark, which overtly directs the perceptive logic of the reader towards the taxonomic determination "The Balkans" and its dark biography.

In summary, we may single out two basic (imagological) tendencies in the stated art presentations:

One group comprises the works (and authors) that offer various heterotypical exotisms and generally, the semiotics of the trash;

The other group would comprise those works, whose authors present themselves with the exhibitionally toned and ruthless, Balkan asceticism.

Presenting the Balkans heterotopy in a form of an abject, these works are to manipulatively confirm the colonisatory, "safari" optics of the Balkans in the form of abjective litter and "waste". In other words, they point at a phobic model of the Balkans, which is supposed to assure the image of subordination to the others' reality and its coincidence with the otomanized stereotype. In passing, the stereotype is founded in a "syntactic" operation (metathesis), when the epithet becomes the essence. It also flames the concoction of the descriptive and the normative, particular to ideology (Pagot, 2002:109). The stereotype applies the tautological principle: and it merely "naturalises" the previously launched "mythoid aggregate".

In the case of the Balkans, the mythoid aggregate is effectively disclosed through the popular syntagms "powder keg" or "dark vilayet". The art catalogues, thematically devoted to the Balkans are aimed at peeping at the other side of Europe, facing its (Balkan) de-homogenization, the justification of the currently drawn up, taxonomic separation of the Balkans with relation to Europe (according to Todorova, the Balkans are the obvious example of a transformation of a geographical denotation into a very pejorative, political label 1999:21). In this respect, the unavoidable impression is that the example of the Balkans proves the sustained logic of the "orientalism", which implies "imposing an identity in opposition with the other, western identity" (1999:28). In the balkanism example, we can notice the functional confirmation of the "binary oppositions", incorporated in the matrix of the imperial divisions, which were first pointed by Said.

The images of and from the Balkans in fact offer a priori demarcated subversiveness, carefully dosed provocation, doubling a scandal (by emphasising it). The Balkans are maximally orientalisated (prone to alien identification and domination), its reality is the inferior reality of the open markets, fairs, remains, down and outs, outcasts. Here, the operational role is assumed by the already recognisable in the theory, mechanism of "theatrilazation", which in fact presents such, thought of "images, which change the nature and the culture of the other into a spectacle" (Pagot, 2002:128).

However, here we can trace the contours of a carefully carried out sanitary operation: the spectators (luckily) remain completely safe and intact by the abject. But also by the overwhelming knowledge, which the writer Luan Starova, in his recently published novel "Balkan Scapegoat" (2003), expresses through the pregnant image of the Balkans as "the largest European sacrificial altar of all times". An additional confirmation of this decidedly established fact about the sacrificing character of the Balkans can be also found in the resignedly expressed opinion by the Albanian art critic Edi Muka, a participant in the project "Bound/less Boundaries", when he bitterly concludes: "It has been well-known to us, that we have been abused for some kind of a political show" (2002:17).

The disclosure of the sacrificing logic, which governs with and on the Balkans, on the other hand, encourages the resistance to the established, generalized judgments (one-sided generalizations) about it. This kind of resistance arouses in us especially when the art is also expected to provide examples and confirmation of those previously set imagological patterns which govern the cultural hermeneutics of a given space.

The same thing happens to the "commissioned" perspectives in these few art catalogues, which for the purpose of this type of attribution, probably performed in this form for the first time, also appropriately select (and interpret) the submitted material. When facing these images, we should never ignore the statement made by Pagot, that the interrelations between the original and the perceived culture are always acknowledged as "hierarchical". In this respect, the Mexican artist Giglermo Gomes Pegna is fully aware of this

hierarchical denotation that these (imagological) enterprises and rendezvous with the Other have, and for this reason he considers their motives and products problematic. In the trendy swing of projects on “presenting and reviewing the differences”, the western curators, in Pegna’s sarcastic judgment, behave as if they were on “an artistic safari”: The new objective is to watch the crises of the outsiders in a voyeur’s manner, and/or to borrow their artifacts and to exhibit them in museums. The frame, of course, will be provided by someone who will never understand the drama of “the outsiders”. As for the global impresario, who has set on an eternal artistic safari, there are yet a number of extreme boundaries and dirty realities which are to be disclosed, documented and brought back in the galleries, biennales or the film festivals”(2002:30).

In the end, such is the curator’s “hunt” of the recently accomplished Balkan (art) safari. But also, such are the recently published results of the awarded works of the latest film festivals, including the one in Montreal. As a rule, the priority in awarding was given to those works, whose optics only additionally reinforces the attitude in demand, “the voyeur’s” attitude to crises, “the dirty reality” of the otherwise safely distanced heterotypical outsiders. Compliant with the general imagological logic described in the work of Pagot, we can consider this to be an indicative example, when the European EGO is attempted to be denied by the Balkan ID. And, according to the perverted economy of the modern, above all consumer and beyond, inevitable heard-it-all, seen-it-before Look, the dirtier and more extreme and repulsive, the better, more effective and wanted! The Balkans have undoubtedly become one of the academic “mascots”, as, alluding to the declaratively expressed interest of the west academy for the authors from the Third World, was mockingly referred to by Spivak herself. The problem with mascots, as she formulates it, lies in the threat of their being superficially and simply fetishized. By a one-sided and uncritical generalization.

That is why, it would be on the one hand unjust, on the other theoretically intolerable, to reduce the Balkans merely to itself.

By means of the very postcolonial criticism, the Balkans ought to be freed from that type of slavery, which is perhaps the most difficult

to detect and prevent. Joan Copjec, in her imagological study of the black American mentality, calls this type of slavery “a slavery to oneself”, finding in it the very important (at moments fatal) trap, named “idealization of discontent” (2002). In the case of the Balkans, it is documented by the tough persistence of the fatalistic and suffering mentality of the victim. The passive object – the waste! It is my firm belief that this very idealisation of discontent along with the voluntary self-colonisation (by the reduction “balkanisms” and their respective essentialisation of the Balkans, but also the origin, including gender), is one of the components of the devastating epistemology of the Balkans, which only in correlation with the postcolonial criticism might be revised.

Regarding this, it is advisable to ponder over the following judgment, which this time comprises and refers to the gender element. The effects of the neo-colonizatory intervention of the Balkans increasingly confirm our assumption on the symbolic (phallic) castration, which has been experienced by this region (the Balkans) with relation to Europe. Here we face an occurrence, from this perspective very difficult to come to terms with, as is “the crisis of masculinity” (Judith Halberschtam, 2001:96), endemically peculiar just to the colonial position, but also to its softened versions, like the balkanism. Thus, in a state when the (colonially induced) “masculinity crisis” occurs, what takes place is the strengthening of the compensatory mechanisms, which provide “momentary consolidation of the male authority”: violence, criminal, alcohol. The project of “decolonization of the mind” undoubtedly includes the overcoming of the so far tough blindness regarding gender subalternness (which proverbially thrives on the Balkans, but also within the frameworks of the balkanism, which the science has already marked as a male discourse). The theoretical and practical disclosure of the gender subalternness, in its core is a constitutional element of each decolonisation, according to Spivak, who herself, had not been spared from the effect of the “academic sexism”. As it is, the “slavery to oneself” undoubtedly refers to phalo-centrism as an ancient (starting) and universal form of colonisation of the other gender.

A slight excuse: Macedonia before the optics of post colonialism

I do not know where else we could find such a good and adequate confirmation of the effectiveness of the “reproductive orientalism”, but between the covers of the book, which had been by program written with the purpose to disclose balkanism. Thus, despite its rich cultural tradition, precisely in the abovementioned book by Todorova, Macedonia is referred to merely as a geographical notion or destination. And it had not been mentioned otherwise or outside, except within the frames of that “naturally” set and culturally utterly defaced context of the set (geographical) presence.

This is in line with the anecdote on Macedonia, which was told by our guest Spivak. On her way to Skopje, at Thessaloniki airport, when she was asked about the destination of her trip, she was faced with the tendentious reaction of the Greek officer, asking “Which Macedonia?” But the momentary defense context in Macedonia also confirms that her problems about denying the identity could only be treated as onomastic only by employing heavy irony, and that they justifiably fit in the context of the postcolonial issues, all the more that the radical political exponents of the Albanian minority who lives in Macedonia, have lately gone as far as the mimicry of the postcolonial discourse, defining their own situation – nothing less than – colonial.

For us, within the context of our theoretical argument, there is a more significant fact that, even this fundamental book that has produced the key tool against balkanism has not remained immune to its own (Balkan) residue – placing its immediate neighbours merely to geographical frames, so that later it “politically” fails to mention them. Considering the fact that neither this study has been consistently decolonised (but now, for reasons of individual prejudices) it is still necessary to activate the postcolonial discourse and its constituent elements as an additional interpreting tool when understanding the Balkans.

Namely, the issue of applying the post-colonial discourse here was raised by Branko Sarkanjac (1998), considering the newly existing

conditions of post-communist demission of ideology. That suggestion had a rather shocking connotation and it resulted in an initial resistance on my part, for a number of reasons, including my previous yugo-centric experience. It has generated the awareness that along with my compatriots, we take part in a unique, definitely, European (and by all means, western) project, which had guaranteed our specific “dignity of exception”. After the fall of the “glorious” utopia of otherness, the adjunction of the post-colonial attribution, at the beginning stuck me as a quite unwanted (undesirable, downgrading) label. A stigma, which (has) confirmed my past colonisation by some other kind of prejudices.

Concluding points

After publishing the “Imaginary Balkans”, it appeared that the historical dynamics of the events, the accounts of which could not be placed in this book for objective reasons, was drastically reinforced by the NATO bombs over Serbia in 1999, the establishment of the protectorate in Kosovo, the war in Macedonia in 2001 as well as some other “minute” rarities.

Some of the stated indicators, as well as a large number of others, still, clearly confirm that the non-existence of a classic post colonialism on the Balkans, does not mean that, in return, we lack a barrage of examples of post-colonialism (freedom from the “tyranny” of the grand narration, entities, epistemologies). Or, that post-colonial criticism is an inappropriate, fashion, imported trend. Rather, one can claim quite the opposite: namely, that the Balkans experience an intensive, at times even more than a dramatic process of a more or less radical and ambitious de-colonisation (of the mind), this time, not only from the other, but above all, from oneself - which altogether convinces us in the inherent justification, preciousness, even necessity of the previously mentioned, postcolonial perspective.

□

From **THE NAVEL OF THE WORLD***Venko Andonovski*

We are: body and soul; The Lord is: soul, body, and God. But when it is said: beautiful is the Lord and great are his deeds, it is so said because all flesh, matter, and thing is perfect in itself, and because each one of them is in close relationship to the rest of creation, created for a certain and necessary purpose.

Thus it is with the ant. Thus with man.

Thus with me, a man-ant, with a cunning base purpose, unworthy as I was; I, an ant who proffers this creation to You who are to appear on the face of the earth after me and stand before the face of God as I stood but could not stand, because He banished me from before His face. And the Lord expelled me from before His face with these words: "Be gone from My face; thou decided to reshape and complete that which I never wanted to alter, recreate, or finish."

One is great, the Lord God Almighty, the One who is everywhere, the One who created everything out of nothing. He is everywhere, He watches all and hears all; He is everywhere, but he does not accept my body as his earthly temple, though for thirty-three summers I exalted him in prayers that issued pure from my heart. He rejected me as His dwelling place, He did not receive me into Himself, and my heart never had joy in God; and God forsook me after the day the destroyer of my soul appeared, the one who inflicted suffering and misfortune unto me: the Philosopher. The Lord rejected me because of him, and now He abides in me no longer, though He is everywhere: in the kernels of wheat on the roadside, in herbs and animals, in the fish of the waters and the birds of the air, in the eyes of people, and in all creatures. He is everywhere, except in me.

And I am angry with Him. And He sees that I am angry and mocks me, snickers throughout the firmament that he placed over the foundation of the earth. He laughs, because He has an advantage: it is easier for Him to create a new sun in the heavens than it is for me to light a candle; it is easier for Him to send a flood upon the earth, a great wave, than for me to shed a tear and beg for forgiveness. Thus we live, He and I, in an undeclared war. One beside the other, He above and I below, like two armies, one powerful, with an awesome array of banners, the other leprous, miserable, famished; two armies, mismatched, one against the other, before the sounding of the decisive bugle.

Because I have grievously sinned: all of creation has suffered because of my deed. I attempted to undermine the throne of God, to usurp it, to displace the center upon which it balanced; but this when the time is ripe, oh ye of feeble and wretched souls.

I am a black worm, a dark ant, black, abiding in the bleakest black. I have no eyes. My heart knows not the light. I tremble with fear. But I fear not Him, our Lord, for He has seen all; He has seen what I did. I fear myself. If I did it, then doth not my heart know the measure of evil to which it is prone? For evil knows no measure, as do mercy and beneficence; do evil, and thy soul yearns for more. Only a moment will determine thy choice between the two. I fear, my bones clatter, my soul is in fever as I write these words, for you who are to come, who will judge his deed and mine and will wonder how it came to pass that the Lord opened the gates of the celestial abode to him, but I, who surpassed him in certain respects, was despised and cast aside.

I emblazon these words for you, for I know what happened and what horrible results issued from my sinful soul. And He knows. He needs no epistles, words, or letters. He saw. Neither our public nor our secret deeds are hid from His omniscient eye.

Did the Philosopher know what my wretched soul, sick to the marrow, did for him? This question will pain me till I draw my last

breath, to the final closing of my eyes. If he did not know, then why were his last words addressed to me, when he rested in God, in shimmering Rome, on the fourteenth day of the month of February, in the second indiction since the creation of the world, in the six thousand three hundred seventy-seventh year, the words he expressed in a compressed tome, in his cramped, shaky hand: "This to be delivered to Father Ilarion. God's wisdom and His salvation are contained together within."

The letter read thus: "Imagine the darkest of nights, the blackest shade of marble, the blackest ants. On such a starless night, on such a marble slab, God not only sees the ant but also hears the thudding of its feet. May God and peace be with you, Father Ilarion. Amen."

I tore up the letter and swallowed the pieces. Deep within me, in my bowels, I concealed the pricking parable he wrote to me as well as the misery it brought me. I swallowed a letter, I devoured a poisonous tome. Now it rises up. This is but a confession. Before you, who are to come onto the face of the earth, before the face of God.

He saw. He saw me swallowing the letter. He sees still, as I write. He sees everything, from everywhere. He sees me.

Translated by Zoran Anđevski and Richard Gaughran

Fiction

SOLE LEATHER

(an excerpt from a long short story)

Dragi Mihajlovski

I don't know exactly whether this story starts on a Tuesday or a Friday, but I'm sure it was a market day in Bitola, and in Bitola only Tuesdays and Fridays are market days, which every Bitolan knows, and plenty of non-Bitolans too. I'd come from Skopje on the night train on some business - I think it was a copy of a birth certificate I needed, or some such document I could only get in Bitola. When they're working, the counters only work from ten, and supposing I'd have the luck of finding them working, I reckoned I still had another two or three hours to kill. So as soon as I'd got off the dirty train and gone through the station - an old building, its very appearance and atmosphere plainly recalling the last romantic, utopian days of Count Tolstoy - I set out unhurriedly on foot through the park, which begins just there, about twenty yards from the station. It was the beginning of October, a chilly morning, and a slight hoar frost clung to my beard and moustache. Fortunately I was dressed against the cold in a navy-blue overcoat and boots for autumn. The large public convenience in the park that you have to go past was stinking the way it always stank, and there was the public drinking fountain with its broken spout, too, with a puddle all round it. I walked for another ten minutes and came to the open area in front of the gym, where there were two merry-go-rounds, and tied to the pole of one of them a badly-trained mongrel was peeing on the asphalt. But in a short time the clear morning air went to my head, and as if it had hands of magic refreshed my woebegone face. From this open space you got a good view of the autumn having an early morning stretch over Mt. Neolitsa, and the Lavci grove - so well-known from folk songs. Then I went along the alley between the

hand-ball court and the gym, walked a few yards and came out in front of the Officers' Club, right at the beginning of the main street.

Broad Street's a story in itself. That's the name of the main street I now began to walk along. At least, that's what the Bitolans call it, out of habit or affection, even if officially it's called Marshal Tito. For those who haven't been to Bitola, but have been for example to Belgrade, I'd say that Broad Street is rather like Knez Mihajlova. It starts from the clock tower and ends at the Officers' Club, but the promenade logically continues to the Tumble Cafe, winding right up the hill to the cafe on the terrace in front of the zoo. Anyone who's been here even only once knows the satisfaction of strolling along Broad Street; it's not for nothing that they came along here on foot or in a phaeton, Sultan Ahmed, Ataturk, Josip Broz...

'Oi! So it's you then, kid!' a tenor voice stopped me dead in my tracks. 'So you've forgotten all about us? You don't want anything to do with us, eh? You're away, you're away, you're always away. You don't ever visit us and then when you do come you go past like a ship in the night. Who do you think you are? You little shit!'

Just think, what a come-down, and to drive the irony of it home, right there in front of the Aeroclub, on the corner in front of the Steve Naumov statue. I think he just appeared out of nowhere, or right out of the stillness of this quiet street: my brother, fair and tall, in jeans and a leather jacket, and without waiting to be asked he began to talk, waving his arms uncontrollably, threatening and scolding; in those five minutes while he stormed away he really ruined the day for me, even the sandwich I'd hurriedly gobbled in the dirty railway carriage. I really didn't know what to say, I couldn't think of anything to say; well, tell me, what on earth could I say, caught like that red-handed, with a gawping mouth and an empty feeling inside.

'And you weren't thinking of coming home, eh? Admit it! Well, but I've seen some people, but I've never met anyone like you, you're unbelievable. And there are the old folks, crying all day 'the child, the child', and the child's deserted the nest! You should be ashamed of yourself! You filth!' and he paid me a whole string of

similar compliments, and I had nothing to say to him, let alone to answer him; I was indeed thoughtless, I admit it.

My brother went on and on like that for another ten minutes maybe, I really don't know exactly, because I wasn't myself at all just then. It was as if someone else was standing there instead of me, stuck miserably to the pavement; but when I came to myself a little the picture of this man who was shouting at me was going through my mind, and I suppose I began to think. I could excuse aggression as long as there was some reason for it, but in this case I'm sure the aggression was really unreasonable, and what's worse, I believe it was due to reasons of pure self interest. And as if in confirmation of this my brother soon began to cool off, to calm down, patted me on the shoulder and said in an almost brotherly way, 'All right, all right, if you're a shit you're a shit, but I'm not saying another word about it. Just you come with me!'

So now what? I'm a man who easily gets over anger, but not embarrassment. That's why I think it's best for me to be on a balanced footing, a footing of peace with everyone - even with my own brother. So I set off obediently behind him like a little child. As if he felt a bit ashamed of my presence, or so it seemed to me, he walked on ahead, just like our old people - or a lot of them, at least - if you've seen them: the husband in front and the wife two or three steps behind and a little to the right of him. I won't tell you how we went along Broad Street, I'll only say that it was a very odd walk; anyone would have thought my brother was leading me just as if he had me on a leash, like a dog. When we'd crossed the Dragor at the Lenski Bridge we turned right at the Macedonia Cinema and found ourselves near the market. It was certainly a market day, because I remember it was seething with people everywhere, all the little shops were open, you could hear the clink of the hammer on hot metal in the smithies; hundreds of villagers and townspeople were squeezing along the alleys, rush bags, carriers and baskets in their hands; at the slipper-makers' there were lots of brightly coloured slippers laid out in front of the open shutters, and then quilters, clog-makers, chick-pea sellers — it was very lively, really.

'You just follow me!' said my brother again, and as if nothing had happened he gave me a wink with his left eye because I know ever since he was small he's never been able to wink with his right eye, he just couldn't manage it, he always shut them both at once, and blinked.

When we got to the shoemakers, my brother stopped in front of a shop with closed shutters. He told me to wait a bit, the way he nearly always did on such occasions, sniffed around a little, went into the seemingly closed shop and when he came out, gave me a sign to follow him. To tell you the truth, it was as if I was under a spell: not a word passed my lips, I just remained silent, as if I was simple-minded; there was no way I could explain to my brother that I'd come on business of my own, that I'd a right to my own business, and as usual, he paid no attention to me. He couldn't have cared less that I had something to do. He just went ahead, and crossed the lane with its cobblestones and broken glass.

'It doesn't matter!' he said, 'maybe something's wrong with him, I saw him yesterday and he was complaining about his head, but it's all the same, we'll go to his house.' What house, for heaven's sake, I was asking, but not a word passed my lips. When somehow we escaped from the market crowd, we crossed Ivan Milutinovik Street, paralysed with parked cars, and by a short cut that led past the Ajdar Kadi Mosque we came out in front of the Beir local school. It begins to get very steep here, but fortunately right at the beginning my brother turned left and in about a hundred yards stopped in front of a massive doorway with a large stone in front of it where the women probably sat in the early evening. My brother called two or three times, and soon a woman in her sixties, with white hair and a broad nose, opened the door.

'This is my brother,' my brother said, and said very little more until the end of our visit to this to me unknown house. The woman greeted us very warmly and unaffectedly, first him and then me, and led us into the little house that I couldn't enter without bending my head. I'm sure that's how they ought to make the doors of all the churches, if they want the faithful for ever to bow before the lord God. From the wooden-floored parlour on the left a wooden staircase with bannisters led upstairs, but she took us into the small

room straight ahead of us. We had just sat down on the couch against the wall with the door when a man appeared. He getting on for seventy, of middle height, with a broad nose and moustaches, almost bald, in a thin shirt with the sleeves rolled up. What was particularly impressive was his ungovernable belly, which emerged uncontrollably from his trousers and finished vulgarly somewhere up by his double chin, or at least that's what it looked like to me.

'I'll tell you about the sole-leather at once, lad!' and he sat on the chair and looked me straight in the eyes. 'You'll go to the Old Market, where the shoemakers be, and you'll ask where Lazo Bodkin works, and when you find him you'll tell him about the sole leather, that me, Stojan Kozeto of Bitola, sent you, and somehow or other he's got to find you some sole leather, and you know the rest. There won't be no problem with the money.'

And what could I say now? Who was I to blame, who could I get to tell me what was going on? I stood in confusion like a little kid and gave my brother a pleading look for help, but he had just fallen with passionate greed on the preserved quince that the hostess was offering him on a handsome tray. It seemed to me that he munched that sweet preserve interminably, drinking water from a crystal clear glass.

'And you say as you live in Skopje?' the man went on. 'I wouldn't live in that shit, not if you was to give me a palace. What do you say?'

What did I say, how should I know what I said, what could I have said indeed, even if I'd been in a state to say anything just then, about Skopje? I was young, very young, I was only twenty-three, I'd just started work, and I knew absolutely nothing about Skopje, meaning I'd no idea what went on there; what can a person know about what it's like somewhere when he's at the very start of his life?

I didn't manage to say anything, I shrugged my shoulders, I didn't understand a thing, not a thing.

'Well,' he said, 'say something, to see if you've started to speak like the Skopje way. There's lots of folks as changes when they leave here.'

I was absolutely trapped; I got something round my tongue, that was my profession, but this direct attack on me, on my conception of life, I'd say, I couldn't really take it all in. I peered left and right, from the family photographs crowded along the edges of the shelves of the dresser to the stuffed bear's head hung on the wall.

'Maybe your brother told you,' he went on, 'I'm a man of my word, and you got to go to Bodkin's, he's a really good man, and send it at once!' and he began to rub his hands together, as if something was growing inside them, in his soul, and only he knew exactly what it was.

'Hey, Ljopa,' and he turned to the hostess, 'you see there are still some decent young people? I told you we'd find someone as'd get the sole leather for us, didn't I, eh?'

Just then the hostess brought in a bottle of rakija and three glasses on the tray I've already mentioned. She filled them carefully and placed one in front of each of us.

'Well, son?' he continued to bombard me, 'You see what times is come? To be without sole leather! Even if you've got the money, you can't buy sole leather! You'll say, well there's Greece. But that's not the way it is, I'm telling you. Even for the Greeks it's not so easy! First of all they haven't got none either, and then if you find it it costs the devil and a half! It's a disgrace!'

I really couldn't say anything to him, and what's worse I couldn't even think of anything to say. I just gawped at the grinning bear's muzzle, struck dumb.

'And Bitola here!' said the man, and downed his glass as if it had been water, 'what it was and what it is, only the name's left and nothing else, the peasants've ruined it!'

I remained silent, and what else could I do except digest this tale I was hearing about the peasants and then how they had ruined Bitola and that's why there wasn't any sole leather and so on. It's funny, but just at that moment I remembered that the man in front of me was called Stojan, and I immediately connected it with the idea in 'Prespa Church Bells' by Dimitar Tale, where he says that all the Stojans in Macedonia come from the country, and finally, quite

against my will, I smiled; and the man, not understanding what was going on in my mind, gave me a warning look as is to say there was nothing to laugh about, that that was how it was and had been, but mainly he talked about that famous sole leather, and that Bodkin's where I had to go.

'You'll recognise him easy enough,' he said, 'his nose's just like a bodkin, that's why we call him that. He's in the Old Market, with the shoemakers.'

Finally, after an age, or so it seemed to me, my brother saved me from this attack on my eardrums; he stood up, and in five or six minutes, I can't remember exactly any more, we found ourselves outside in the clean air - a far cry from that unbearable stench of sole leather.

We went on walking through Bitola for a long time, my brother and me, maybe another hour or two, but no way did he want to talk to me, to give me any kind of an explanation; he just led me through the town and I followed him as if drunk, unable to do anything to improve the situation I was in.

It was only some time in the afternoon, when I'd lost all possibility of finishing the business I'd come about, that my brother took pity on me and said that for now our paths would part.

'Listen,' he said, wagging the index finger of his left hand at me because from birth he's been left-handed, 'I know you're a bit slow on the uptake, but mind you get this business done. I gave a good report of you to that man, and he's not just anybody, you should know. Firstly, he's the best shoemaker in Bitola, and secondly, he's going to be my father-in-law. So that's why you mustn't make a botch of it. Because afterwards there'll be no shilly-shallying, no excuses. I'll wash my hands of you and - finished! Off you go now!' and he disappeared by the stone bridge up in Salonica Street, and still dazed by everything that had happened to me, I walked almost mechanically to the railway station and caught the afternoon train to Skopje at the last moment.

I'll tell you at once that my return to Skopje brought me absolutely no comfort, no kind of compensation for all that had happened to

me in Bitola, for the simple reason that here there was even less chance of there being anybody who could or would do anything of the sort for me. I paid too dearly, I can say it freely now, for living in Skopje. No, it's not a matter of money because that's the cheapest thing on earth, this is a question of nerves. I paid with them dearly for my uprooting, for moving away from the age-old dwelling of my ancestors and for the attempt to be something different, that elementary mistake of everyone who gets carried away, of every beginner, that is. A person who's moved away from his own mythical place - he's just an ordinary cur, constantly hounded by unscrupulous dog-catchers. Because I was at the start of this attempt, you can imagine how lonely I was, how desperately buried in long nights of silence, lostness and hopelessness. This was greatly contributed to, I'd say, by my strange living conditions. I was living illegally in a bed-sit in Karposh. I moved into it completely by chance in June that year when a friend of mine - and only a friend could have done it - because he'd got a larger flat through his wife, made it possible for me to move in by simply giving me the key; and between us there was an agreement to keep it all from the ears of malicious mischief-makers. Me being as God made me, and still wet behind the ears, from that very hour I reckoned everyone malicious, but particularly my 'cronies'; I broke off all contacts with friends and completely shut myself in on myself. I'm telling you, from before I was born, as they say, I'd been timid, closed in and over-sensitive. The most ordinary thing could upset me and make me think about it for days. To make you believe that I kept quite literally to my word over the secrecy of my use of the flat - I'll tell you how I not only managed to live illegally, but made myself feel illegal too. Well, for example, the way I approached 'my' block of flats, which was just by the last stop on the number nineteen route. As soon as I got off the bus, I'd look left and right just in case there was someone who knew me, even though before that, usually crouched in the back of the bus, I'd followed all the characters who got on or got off with the attention and cunning of an inspector, and I took particular note of those who'd come to my stop, the last one, more

than twice. I immediately put them on my list of potential dangers to my security. (I'm telling you this because once it happened that at the last bus stop someone tapped me on the shoulder, of course to my extreme surprise, and it paralysed me. This acquaintance had no idea what the reason for my alarm was because I quickly recovered myself and set off walking beside him, going past my block, and after a little while the man said goodbye and turned to the left, towards the Russian flats. To be absolutely certain, I went on and walked another two or three hundred yards, and made a large circle round the mini-market and when I was certain that I'd covered my traces completely, I came back to 'my' block of flats.) So, as soon as I was certain that nobody from the bus could take me by surprise, I'd make one, two or sometimes even three circles round 'my' block, to make sure that the coast was absolutely clear. Then I'd go up the stairs to 'my' seventh floor (using the lift obviously didn't come into it), and casually, with my hands in my pockets, I'd stroll up and down in front of 'someone else's' doors, making out I didn't know which was the flat I wanted to go into; and finally, when I was convinced that it was one hundred percent certain that all surprises were excluded, in a flash I'd unlock the door - not even allowing the key to click - and noiselessly close it behind me. And my 'life' in the bed-sit is a story in itself. I always came 'home' in the evening, because during the day the possibility of being caught was much greater. So, waiting for night to fall, after I'd eaten lunch in one of the small self-service restaurants, I wandered through the town, and that was the most boring, killing, hateful part of the day. Then, when I'd gone through all these operations that I've just described to you, I'd find myself in the flat, and another long period of dark wakefulness ensued. I'll tell you at once what I'm talking about. Because a person, every person I believe, and particularly a loner above all, more even than vulgar food maybe, needs a human voice, I had found it in the days before I moved into 'my' bed-sit, in reading - because to me that is the best, the most fulfilling and secure conversation: with a man who has struggled, risking his own privacy, to put down his thoughts and feelings on paper, and then having undergone this humiliating act of evaluation presents them to the

public. But now, in 'my' flat, I was completely cut off from such a satisfaction. On grounds of total security, I never lit the light - although suppressing the desire to turn the switch often and all too easily drove me mad. But having decided to be faithful to my given word, to remain faultless in the eyes of that friend of mine, in a word to be worthy of his generosity, it was beyond my lowly needs, and so, unfortunately, I was forced to set reading aside. Usually I'd lie for hours on the couch in complete darkness, and think of various things which I have no intention of boring you with since - fortunately or unfortunately - they bear no relation to the events that I'm telling you about here. Then, since I've already begun to tell you about that frightful bed-sitter in Karposh, let me tell you that I never aired it - out of fear, of course, that the neighbours might notice something, in case some extra dust or staleness in the air might reach their poisonous noses. I never ventured out onto the small balcony, though the desire to do so was almost unbearable. And then you ought to have seen the columns of ants that paced through the room and continued their monotonous march through the hole in the floorboards and down to the lower floors. The bath was boiling with cockroaches and with the prolonged periods of darkness in the flat the rats became more frequent and bolder, and there were days, or rather nights, when they came in in hordes through the ventilator and played like wild things through the flat. Most frightening of all was when someone rang at the door maybe by mistake, maybe intentionally, I don't know, but I know that my blood froze at such unrestrained ill-breeding. I'd stay like that, stuck to the radiator, mute, motionless, all turned into a piece of darkness and expectation. That moment or two of ringing, I'm sure, shortened my life by years. And then of course I must tell you that in keeping to the word I had given I refused myself the right to listen to music. It gives me gooseflesh even now to remember how threatening it was, that mute radio on the locker by the couch. Believe me, I cut off every possibility, I suppressed every desire, mine or another's, that could intentionally or by chance at any time arouse any kind of life, from the human point of view, in that totally dead flat.

So, that's the kind of housing and the kind of situation I was in when the incident with the sole-leather hit me. Think of me, then, how much it weighed on me, just the thought that I had to go to the Old Market, find this man and then find a way to send the sole-leather to Bitola! On top of everything, I was also, to tell the truth, a difficult man. I had been very inactive throughout my life. I'd left all the main things to chance, appointing her my lord and master - out of self-defence of course. And then all that aggression in Bitola, that strange way of asking a favour, all of it somehow threw me off course and created an unprecedented resistance in me to anything that threatened my integrity. Believe me, if this until then unknown feeling had not been born in me, I would certainly have followed my brother's instructions and those of Stojan the shoemaker, and I'd have finished the business immediately. But as it was a struggle flared up within me between natural obedience and submissiveness towards my elders and that new 'NO!' which continually echoed deep within me and would not let me lift a finger. I tell you, for nights I tried to convince myself that going to the Old Market was a question of honour, but I'd no sooner succeed than I'd be overwhelmed by that other feeling and it would throw me once again into self-examination, once again into counting the pro's and con's. You should have seen me lying there on the couch in the darkness in 'my' bed-sit, persistently trying to find the inner strength that would set me right and drive me out of my apathy, my despair.

The days went by, but there was no solution in sight. And with this postponement it happened as it almost always does with things when you don't finish them in time. Quite simply, the business of the sole-leather lost urgency. You should understand how with every passing day I heard more loudly within myself that 'No', and how in the end it victoriously squeezed out the gnawing worm that was eating me, that didn't leave me in peace to take a look at my own life. And finally, I was once again free in the prison of my own misery, without any obligations to anyone whatsoever.

'Hallo!' I heard when I picked up the receiver one cold day in the middle of December. 'Hallo! Hallo!' shouted the light tenor - cold,

cruel, poisonous. I stood crouched in the small office with the receiver in my hand and waited. 'It's you, eh? Well, aren't you ashamed of yourself, you smug little turd! I've got a brother, but bloody hell, I'd be better off without him! All because of you I get into trouble, and see what you do for me! You thought you'd got away from it all, did you? So, I finally managed to find out where you work, ha ha! I'd find you if you were half a needle in a haystack! It's not as if I couldn't have found the sole-leather myself, but now I'm damned if I will! Two bloody months, and you can't get yourself to the god-forsaken Old Market! Do you know what you're doing to that man? Hell, who was it who told him that you'd get the sole-leather! You know how much work he's taken on, and you leave him in the lurch! Well, he's got an honest soul, he's not just a thick skin! What's the man to do now? All day long he shouts at his wife and swears at her, not to mention that he doesn't want to see me! He says if that's what your brother's like, that's what you're like too, and what've I done to you for you to do this to me? I know, you're so busy whoring you can't lift your head, boozing, painting the town red - you're more drunk than sober, but you might sober up enough to find five minutes to get the man's business done for him!' And he went on at me like this for another ten minutes; I knew he'd vent all his anger on me, and I stood braced, with the receiver in my hand, and didn't say anything in reply - whatever could I have said? There wasn't anything I could say. 'Go on, right now! Drop everything and go!' The voice at the other end finished, and in a second I heard a click and *ting-ting, ting-ting*.

That evening I took out my anger on the ants that drove me out of my mind with their infuriating, pedantic columns, and the cockroaches that had long ago gone too far from every point of view. You should have seen how I squashed them, how I ground them, and how their innards squelched on the floor. But still, later that night I came to myself and after a little sober thought grasped that the problem of the sole leather had cropped up again, almost out of nowhere, and that this time it weighed on me even more heavily. I knew I had two possibilities. Either to forget it, or to settle

it at once - of course going through that whole crucifixion of getting a grip on myself, suppressing my own problems for the sake of someone else. This time I decided on the latter. The decision to have done with this monstrous imposition almost took me myself by surprise. I got so worked up that I simply laughed at myself when I remembered all the pain I'd gone through to arrive at this very simple and easily-executed solution! To get up early, I stayed awake all night, and the vigil was very positive, let me tell you! The next morning, as soon as it was getting light, I thrust my head under the tap and rubbed my beard with soap and crept like a new man out of my flat and - unnoticed by anyone - in a little while I found myself on the number nineteen. (I tell you, I'd developed the technique to the height of perfection!) Soon the bus came out into Partizanska, and I was deep in a study of the shallowness of the comically fresh faces of the well-slept passengers when someone tapped me on the shoulder, and there before me, unpleasantly close, stood the friend who had 'housed' me in the flat.

'OK?' was all he said to me, but from the tone of voice I sensed a hidden unrest that was threatening to upset me even that early in the morning and shatter my good intentions.

I nodded my head; I must have appeared very strange from the way he looked at me, I admit, but I wasn't prepared for any kind of meeting and believe me, it could clearly be read in my face.

'You've appeared as if to order!' he said, peering into my face, and I jumped out of my skin. And there was no way I could get back into it, although I looked straight at it as it hung there, all wrinkled, within easy reach of my hand. He went on talking, bending close into me, and I really hate it when someone has no decent sense of distance. And the import of it all was that 'my' neighbour on the floor below had come to him at work and complained to him of the unbearable noise coming from 'my' flat every night, that it wasn't fair, that he wanted to spend his retirement in peace with his wife, that he'd endured children, his own and other people's, all his life, and that it was really rude and uncivilised on the part of a polite and cultured man like my friend to behave like that.

I looked at him with staring eyes as I clung comically to the handrail; no, I couldn't believe my own ears; but he went on talking, saying that the man had profoundly humiliated him, 'annihilated him,' as he said, and right in front of his colleagues, at that; they'd gathered round and listened like monsters, and he said a whole lot more, foaming at the mouth.

'And he thinks I still live there and hold parties every day. I had enough of him when I was living there, and now he's even chasing me at work. I won't tell you how many times he called the police, not to mention the Residents' Committee. The man's mad, I know, but I don't know what he'll do next.'

Translated into English by Peggy Reid & Violeta Svanson

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