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**AN ANTHOLOGY OF  
SERBIAN LITERATURE**

**EDITED BY**

**VASA D. MIHAILOVICH**

**An Anthology of South Slavic Literatures**

**Fascicle 2: Serbian Literature**

Edited by

**Vasa D. Mihailovich, Henry R. Cooper, Jr.,  
and Branko Mikasinovich**

## Contents

### Vasa D. Mihailovich

An Introduction to Serbian Literature .....	1
<b>*Saint Sava</b> (1175–1235) .....	11
Nemanja's Last Wish .....	12
<b>Jefimija</b> (c.1349–c. 1404) .....	13
A Prayer to Prince Lazar .....	14
<b>Arsenije Čarnojević</b> (1633–1706) .....	15
A Prayer to the Sleeping Lord .....	16
<b>Serbian Folk Poetry</b> .....	15
The Death of the Mother of the Jugovićes .....	19
The Kosovo Maiden .....	21
Prince Marko's Plowing .....	25
The Girl Curses Her Lover .....	26
O Lord, why do you turn your face from us?... ..	26
<b>Dositej Obradović</b> (1742–1811) .....	27
<i>The Life and Adventures of Dimitrije Obradović</i> (Excerpt) .....	28
<i>Counsels of Sound Reason</i> (Excerpt) .....	32
<b>*Vuk Stefanović Karadžić</b> (1784–1864) .....	35
A Meeting with Goethe .....	37
To the Serbian Council .....	37
<b>*Jovan Sterija Popović</b> (1806–56) .....	41
<i>Kir-Janja</i> (Excerpt) .....	42
<b>Petar Petrović Njegoš</b> (1813–51) .....	45
<i>The Mountain Wreath</i> (Excerpts) .....	47
<b>Branko Radičević</b> (1824–53) .....	53
The Maiden at the Well .....	54
As I Thought of Dying .....	55

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<b>*Đura Jakšić</b> (1832–78) .....	57
The Birthland .....	58
Night in Gornjak .....	59
<b>*Jovan Jovanović Zmaj</b> (1833–1904) .....	61
She Must Not Die! .....	62
<b>Laza Kostić</b> (1841–1910) .....	63
Between the Real and the Dream .....	64
<b>Milovan Glišić</b> (1847–1908) .....	65
The First Furrow .....	66
<b>*Laza Lazarević</b> (1851–1890) .....	73
The First Matins with My Father .....	74
<b>*Simo Matavulj</b> (1852–1908) .....	89
Povareta .....	90
<b>Stevan Sremac</b> (1855–1906) .....	97
Ivko's <i>Slava</i> (Excerpt) .....	98
<b>Vojislav Ilić</b> (1862–1894) .....	103
Autumn .....	104
Tibullus .....	105
In Late Autumn .....	105
<b>*Radoje Domanović</b> (1873–1908) .....	107
The Leader .....	108
<b>*Branislav Nušić</b> (1864–1938) .....	119
The Cabinet Minister's Wife .....	120
<b>Aleksa Šantić</b> (1868–1924) .....	131
We Know Our Fate .....	132
Evening on the Isles .....	133
<b>*Jovan Dučić</b> (1874–1943) .....	135
Sunset .....	136
The Sea Willow .....	137
Wine of Dubrovnik .....	137
Shadow .....	138



<b>Milan Rakić</b> (1876–1938) .....	139
A Commonplace Poem .....	140
The Abandoned Church .....	141
Simonida .....	141
Chinese Madrigal .....	142
<b>Borislav Stanković</b> (1876–1927) .....	143
<i>The Tainted Blood</i> (Excerpts) .....	144
<b>*Petar Kočić</b> (1877–1916) .....	153
Jablan .....	154
<b>*Momčilo Nastasijević</b> (1876–1938) .....	159
A Commonplace Poem .....	160
The Abandoned Church .....	161
<b>*Ivo Andrić</b> (1892–1975) .....	163
<i>The Bridge on the Drina</i> (Excerpts) .....	164
<i>The Bosnian Chronicle</i> (Excerpt) .....	176
A Letter from 1920 .....	184
<b>*Miloš Crnjanski</b> (1893–1977) .....	195
A Tale .....	196
Sumatra .....	196
<i>Migrations</i> (Excerpts) .....	197
Lament over Belgrade (Excerpt) .....	204
<b>Desanka Maksimović</b> (1898–1993) .....	205
No, Come Not Near .....	206
Don't Fear .....	206
For All Mary Magdalenes .....	207
<b>*Branko Ćopić</b> (1915–84) .....	209
The Cruel Heart .....	210
<b>Mihailo Lalić</b> (1914–92) .....	215
<i>Leleja Mountain</i> (Excerpts) .....	216
<b>Dobrica Ćosić</b> (1921– ) .....	221
<i>A Time of Death</i> (Excerpts) .....	222
<b>Meša Selimović</b> (1910–82) .....	233
<i>Death and the Dervish</i> (Excerpt) .....	234

<b>Vasko Popa</b> (1922–91) .....	243
Proud Error .....	244
The Little Box .....	244
St. Sava the Shepherd .....	245
Eyes of a Wolf .....	246
<b>Miodrag Pavlović</b> (1928– ) .....	247
The Epitaph of an Ancient Slavic Poet .....	248
Prince’s Daughter Weaving .....	249
Balkan Itinerary .....	250
Traveler’s Departure .....	251
<b>*Stevan Raičković</b> (1928– ) .....	253
Awareness of Autumn .....	254
Song of the Grass .....	254
Stone Lullaby .....	255
<b>*Ivan V. Lalić</b> (1931–96) .....	257
Voices of the Dead 2 .....	258
The Stonemasons .....	258
Of the Works of Love .....	259
<b>*Miodrag Bulatović</b> (1930–91) .....	261
<i>The Red Cock Flies to Heaven</i> (Excerpts) .....	262
<b>Matija Bečković</b> (1939– ) .....	269
No One Will Write Poetry .....	270
If I Knew I’d Bear Myself Proudly .....	271
<b>*Danilo Kiš</b> (1935–89) .....	273
<i>Garden, Ashes</i> (Excerpts) .....	274
<b>*Milorad Pavić</b> (1929– ) .....	287
<i>The Dictionary of the Khazars</i> (Excerpts) .....	288
The Story of the Egg and the Violin Bow .....	289
Excerpt from the Court Minutes, with the Testimonies of Witnesses in the Dr. Abu Kabir Muawia Murder Case, Istanbul October 18, 1982 .....	296
<b>Borislav Pekić</b> .....	301
The Houses of Belgrade ( <i>Excerpt</i> ) .....	303

## An Introduction to Serbian Literature

Serbian literature is a branch of the large tree that grew on the rocky and often bloody Balkan Peninsula during the last millennium. Its initial impulse came from the introduction of Christianity in the ninth century among the pagan Slavic tribes, which had descended from the common-Slavic lands in Eastern Europe. The first written document, the beautifully ornamented Miroslav Gospel, is from the twelfth century. Not surprisingly, the first written literature was not only closely connected with the church but was practically inspired, created, and developed by ecclesiastics—the only intellectuals at the time. As the fledgling Serbian state grew and eventually became the Balkans' mightiest empire during Tsar Dušan's reign in the first half of the fourteenth century, so did Serbian literature grow, although at a slower pace. From the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries it blossomed, suddenly but genuinely, in the form of the now famous old Serbian biographies of rulers of state and church. Until modern times, this brilliance was equaled only by the literature of the medieval republic of Dubrovnik. Then came the Turkish invasion, and a night, four centuries long, descended upon Serbia and every aspect of its life. The literary activity in the entire area during those dark ages was either driven underground or interrupted altogether. The only possible form of literature was oral. Consisting of epic poems, lyric songs, folk tales, proverbs, co-nundrums, etc., it murmured like an underground current for centuries until it was brought to light at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In retrospect, it is a miracle that anything, let alone the ability to bounce back into life when the opportunity arose, survived this long, sterile, cold night.

Schematically, Serbian literature can be divided (roughly) into several periods: medieval literature (1200 to the eighteenth century); Enlightenment, Rationalism, and Pseudo-Classicism (the second half of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries); Romanticism (1840s to 1860s); Realism (the second half of the nineteenth century); "Moderna" (the beginning of the twentieth century); the interwar period; and the contemporary period (literature after 1945).

The medieval period is called Old Serbian Literature. As mentioned, it consists primarily of translations or adaptations of ecclesiastic works for use by the church. The most important—and most original—works in this period are biographies of Serbian saints and rulers. Folk literature also flourished at this

time, especially after the Battle of Kosovo, lasting throughout the Turkish occupation. Next to the old biographies, these epic and lyric poems, tales, and proverbs belong to the highest achievements of all Serbian literature.

After five centuries of enforced dormancy, literature was revived, gradually, to be sure, in the form of Enlightenment, Rationalism, and Pseudo-Classicism. It was basically a period of transition, ushering in Modern Serbian literature approximately in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. The revival of literary life is closely connected with the stirrings of national aspirations against Ottoman rule throughout the entire Balkan Peninsula. During the Turkish occupation, the Serbian Orthodox Church was the only force that kept alive the national spirit and the hope for a better future. In the process, the Church emerged as the strongest factor when the nation was preparing for the final battle with the declining empire. As a consequence, the Church was able not only to influence the thinking of the few Serbian intellectuals but even to impose upon them a written language, the so-called Slavic-Serbian—an odd mixture of Old Church Slavic, Serbian, and Russian. It was created under the influence of the Russian Church to promote church affairs. In its early form it was distinctly removed from the everyday spoken language. The only literature in the people's language at this time was folk poetry, which was quite different from the officially fostered literature.

Because they lived in the Austrian Empire, only the Serbs of the northern province of Vojvodina—in contrast to other Serbs still suppressed by the Turks—were permitted to carry on literary activity, even if this was under the auspices of the Austrian authorities and in the official, church-sponsored language. In addition to the Russian influence, they were exposed to the liberal and rationalistic thinking of Western Europe. Long periods of Rationalism and Pseudo-Classicism ensued at the end of the eighteenth century and in the first four decades of the nineteenth. It was mainly the work of one man, Dositej Obradović, that initiated the process of liberation from Slavic-Serbian in Serbian letters. Thus he launched the revival of Serbian literature that led to its phoenixlike rise around the middle of the nineteenth century. A former monk, Dositej renounced the shackling atmosphere of his early education and, instinctively drawn to the learned world yet unknown to him, set off on wide travels throughout Europe, learning everything within his grasp. Eventually, he became one of the best educated Serbs of his time. He never forgot his national allegiance, however. On the contrary, the more he learned the more he realized the backwardness of his foreign-dominated people and the need for a pioneering work among them. He spent the rest of his life enlightening his countrymen and establishing various educational institutions, the most important of which were a university and a national museum.

Dositej's literary merits rest largely on his autobiography, *The Life and Adventures of Dimitrije Obradović* and on his pedagogical, utilitarian writings. More important, however, is his use of a language that, although not yet a replica of the everyday speech of the people, freed literature from its unnatural bond with the church-fostered linguistic invention. Thus he made the first hopeful steps towards full use of the people's language in literature a few decades later.

To be sure, the victory of the reformists did not come overnight. For a number of years the official language was still Slavic-Serbian. Even those writers, like the playwright Jovan Sterija Popović, who decided to write in a language accessible to the broad masses could not avoid altogether that superimposed hybrid language. It was not until another self-made Serbian writer, Vuk Karadžić, declared an all-out war against Slavic-Serbian that the battle was fully engaged. He was fortunate to attract to his ideas several talented writers and scholars, who applied in their works his concepts about the purity of the written language. But Vuk went even farther than just liberating literature from the parasitic burden of an artificial language: With his peasant genius he created an entirely new alphabet by following his own slogan "write as you speak," allocating to each sound in Serbian speech only one character. The consequence of his ingenious work was an almost completely phonetic alphabet that is still used in Serbian and Croatian literature (the latter uses the Latin script) and, much later, provided the foundation for the Macedonian alphabet.

Karadžić's other accomplishments include the translation of the Bible into language comprehensible to all Serbs, the first grammar of modern Serbian, the first encyclopedic dictionary of Serbian, and the first large and systematic collection of epic poems, folk tales, and other forms of folk literature. Through him the outside world, by way of the Brothers Grimm, Goethe, Lamartine and others, learned of the priceless treasure that had hitherto been hidden among the "primitive," "uncultured" Serbs and Croats.

If Dositej ushered in a new era in Serbian literature, Vuk gave it substance, meaning, and direction. It is not surprising, therefore, that in a very brief span Serbian literature witnessed a flourishing of young writers and, under the circumstances, remarkable works in both poetry and prose. After Vuk's spadework, it remained for the poets to dot the i. A young Serb from Vojvodina, Branko Radičević, proved with his highly lyrical, emotional, and rhythmical poems that good poetry could be written in the people's speech. The Montenegrin prince and bishop Petar Petrović Njegoš wrote several enduring works, patterned after the epic poetry not only in form but in spirit as well. His most significant work is a verse play, *The Mountain Wreath*, which depicts an important moment in the history of the Montenegrin heroic struggle

against the Turks. His philosophical epic, *The Ray of the Microcosm*, resembling Milton's *Paradise Lost* in more ways than one, showed that even the most profound thought could be expressed in the language of the people. For these two works alone Njegoš would enjoy immortal fame in Serbian letters; but he wrote many other works of lasting value. Today he is still considered one of the greatest Serbian poets, if not the greatest.

With Njegoš and Branko, the Romantic movement in Serbian literature began in the 1840s. It lasted about three decades, following, somewhat belatedly, the other European Romantic movements. Poets dominated the scene. Their flights of emotion and fantasy easily match those in other literatures. Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, with his highly sensitive love lyrics, Đura Jakšić, with his exuberance and fiery patriotic verses, and Laza Kostić, with important though at times awkward prosodic innovations, were the other most important Romanticists.

Romanticism in Serbian literature faded slowly and reluctantly. By the 1870s, a new movement, Realism, made its appearance. A similar change was taking place throughout European literature, though in Serbia on a smaller scale and, by now, at a somewhat accelerated pace. The acknowledged catalyst of the new trend was Svetozar Marković, although his influence was only an indirect one; he was primarily a social and political thinker and publicist. Practically all the new writers—Milovan Glišić, Laza Lazarević, Janko Veselinović, and Simo Matavulj, to name only the best—reflected in their works the newly attained awareness of existing social problems and matters other than individual concerns. A corollary to the increased social awareness was the emergence of the village as the main, and at times the only milieu and subject matter. Glišić, an author with his ear to the ground and somewhat more optimistic than the others, was, in addition, highly critical of the cities' intrusion into the secluded life of the peasant, which threatened to destroy the simple but durable fabric of the Serbian village, the principal factor in the survival of the national spirit after centuries of foreign occupation. Laza Lazarević, who mustered the craft of a finely woven psychological short story, was far more pessimistic about the ability of the village to withstand the onslaught, and about the fact that the cities themselves were beginning to show the symptoms of corruption. Veselinović's presentation of idyllic village life revealed not only his lack of sophistication but also his desire to delay the inevitable by saturating his stories with hope, inherent in the peasant philosophy of life. In addition, Matavulj (*Bakonja Fra-Brne*) reflected in his stories and novels the life of the Serbs and Croats along the South Adriatic coast, penetrating the complex make-up of these two peoples.

Other Realists followed more or less in the same vein until the turn of the century. Stevan Sremac divided his allegiance between Vojvodina in the

North and the southern provinces, which were newly liberated from the Turks. His is an artificial idiom of people's daily life sprinkled with a hefty dose of ribald humor. Svetolik Ranković, having studied in Russia, was heavily influenced by the great Russian writers of the nineteenth century. His three novels displayed a fine insight into the psychology of an outlaw, a monk, and a village teacher. Radoje Domanović is the best satirist in all Serbian literature. A gifted writer interested in politics, he wielded his implacable pen against the injustices of a democracy in the making.

All these writers, as can be clearly seen, were closely attached to their home town or their narrow region, yet they did not completely shut themselves off from the rest of the world; indeed, they were trying to speak to all mankind by presenting the seemingly inconsequential destinies of peasants, artisans, small merchants, and incipient proletarians. Some works of the Realists crossed the boundaries of narrow regionalism, but by and large they remained locally bound, folkloristic, conventional, and artistically frugal. Thus they struck a note that was to last for decades, a note of practical and somewhat limited concern with the here and now, devoid of a loftier and universal scope.

One of the few lyric poets at the turn of the century, but a good one at that, was Vojislav Ilić. He was able to combine the Realists' concern for the concrete with the genuine emotion and sensitivity of a lyrically tinged landscape painter. In the drama, towards the end of this period, the playwright Branislav Nušić began his long and fruitful career. When he died half a century later, he left behind scores of plays, mostly hearty comedies, with which he was able to make people laugh while at the same time throwing sharp barbs at the causes of social ills. He enriched a genre notoriously weak in all of Serbian literature.

The first two decades of the twentieth century saw new trends in Serbian literature, usually referred to as the Moderna. Undoubtedly, the Moderna came as a result of the sharply increased but still indirect and somewhat vague influence of the leading literary movements in Europe, notably that of Symbolism. This influence was more pronounced in the literatures of Croatia and Slovenia. In Serbian literature, it was more an influence of mood and aesthetic attitude than of literary craftsmanship. It was manifested most keenly in two poets, Jovan Dučić and Milan Rakić. Dučić was a poet of refined taste, worldly culture, and preference for things past. His melancholic and almost fatalistic disposition reflected the decadent fin-de-siècle mood of the French Symbolists, whom he admired. An avowed esthete, he wrote some of the most beautiful and sonorous poetry in Serbian literature. Rakić, though similar to Dučić in his basic poetic attitude, was different in many respects. He wrote a small amount of contemplative, analytical poetry, permeated with pessimism

and awareness of man's inability to change his fate. His love lyrics show a keen understanding of love relationships. He also wrote several topical but unconventionally patriotic poems. The third leading poet of this time was Aleksa Šantić. His was a much simpler poetry, but what he lacked in sophistication and the philosophical approach he made up with sincerity and pathos. He wrote poems with personal, romantic, patriotic, and social overtones.

There were other young poets who struck independent paths and showed great advancement not only in their world view but also in the craft of poetry: Vladislav Petković Dis, Milutin Bojić, Sima Pandurović, Veljko Petrović. They all showed a surprising savoir faire, sophistication, and maturity in poetic matters. Most of them were pessimistic in their outlook, while at the same time warmly patriotic in supporting their country's cause on the eve of the fateful events culminating in World War I.

In prose, a new generation of writers also made its presence felt. Perhaps the strongest was Borisav Stanković, a writer of boundless talent but limited skill. His best work, *The Tainted Blood*, is considered one of the best Serbian novels despite its serious technical shortcomings. His was the world of the quaint, tradition-laden town of Vranje, close to the border between Serbia and Macedonia. This world of merchants and landowners was on its way out together with the retreat of the Turkish empire from the area. Similarly, Svetozar Ćorović depicted his native Herzegovina, where the changes brought about by the shift of the Moslem population were most severely felt. Ivo Ćipiko, like Matavulj, gave us a picture of the South Adriatic which was not always sunny and blue. He frequently injected into his lyrical writings a sense of alarm concerning the deterioration of social conditions (*The Spiders*). Another regional writer, Petar Kočić, described in a highly lyrical prose the Bosnian Serbs and their struggle for independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and for unification with Serbia. In his most enduring work, the play *The Badger Before the Court*, he ridiculed with devastating satire the right of the Austro-Hungarians to rule over Slavic peoples. The Bosnian peasant, by nature sly, suspicious, and witty, is shown here as morally superior to his foreign oppressors.

The efforts of the writers of this time were aided by several capable critics educated in the West, especially by Jovan Skerlić and Bogdan Popović. Skerlić, with his sweeping historical survey, and Popović, with his refined, Western-schooled aestheticism, not only weighed the writers' achievements but also pointed out the directions of modern world literature to them.

Several writers from this period (Dis, Bojić, Uskoković, to name only the best known) made the ultimate sacrifice during World War I, adding to the enormous toll the small Serbian nation had to pay on its way to victory.



The First World War represents a natural watershed in the development of Serbian literature. Although the majority of prewar writers reappeared on the scene after the war, it was mainly the new generation that brought a new and different spirit into literature. Six groups of authors can be distinguished according to their orientation. In the first, two poets, Miloš Crnjanski and Rastko Petrović, especially embodied and exploited the postwar mood in their works. On the one hand, they were revolutionary in demanding vigorously a new approach to life's problems; on the other hand, they showed signs of revulsion and tiredness after the colossal slaughter of humans they had just witnessed. But it was in the form of their work that they, together with many other authors, struck a very modern note, seeking a new, more forceful expression in poetry, and in literature in general. The entire first decade of postwar development was permeated with the spirit of innovation, marked by heated polemics with the opponents of Modernism as well as among the modernists themselves.

The counterpart to the modernists was provided by a number of prewar and new writers who followed the traditional realistic line and who, while enriching their language with new possibilities, generally shied away from the extravagant experimentation of the modernists. Ivo Andrić grew during this period into a mature short story writer and his skill, poise, and wider historical scope made him one of the most significant interwar storytellers. Some prewar writers continued their well-trodden paths—Dučić, Rakić and Šantić in poetry, Stanković, Ćipiko, V. Petrović in prose, Nušić in drama—but most of them left the scene, one by one, realizing that their era had ended with the war.

Early in this period, a small but vocal third group of young writers declared their allegiance to the French surrealist movement, trying to transplant it onto Serbian literary soil, with greater or lesser success. The Serbian surrealist episode was very important for the enlivening of the literary atmosphere.

A similar characterization can be made of the writers with a pronounced or exclusive socialist orientation. Few of them amounted to much by way of literary production, yet they represented both the symptoms and the causes of the social ills that beset the country prior to World War I.

A fifth group can be called, for lack of a better term, the folklorists. These writers—there were quite a few of them, mostly young ones—were very close to the so-called traditionalists: they too were realistic and conservative in their outlook and the treatment of the subject matter. But they clung to their narrow region and were uniquely untouched by outside literary currents. They limited themselves to the description of people, customs, and problems of their home provinces, renewing the tradition of the second half of the nineteenth century in Serbian prose. Like their predecessors, however, they too tried to focus on

the universally human pathos by presenting their little man, usually a peasant, in his microcosm. Some stories and novels by these writers have survived the erosion of time and winds.

Finally, a few highly individualistic writers worked secluded in their private worlds, the loners who either cared not to, or could not, find rapport with their fellow writers. The best example of this isolated attitude is Momčilo Nastasijević, a darkly strange and powerful creator, whose mystifying poems and stories have yet to be fully fathomed, mostly because of their obscure language.

The interwar period, despite all evident hustle and bustle, left relatively few great works: poems by R. Petrović, M. Crnjanski, S. Vinaver, D. Maksimović, and Nastasijević; short stories by Andrić, V. Petrović, D. Vasić and B. Ćopić; novels by M. Crnjanski (*Migrations*), B. Ćosić (*The Mowed Field*); and a few plays by Nušić. This period of less than great literary productions is not to be underestimated, however; for some writers it was a time of maturation for, when another world cataclysm was over, it was these writers who gave Serbian literature a new breath of life, notably Andrić with his three great novels, *The Bridge on the Drina*, *The Chronicle of Travnik*, and *Miss*. The socialistically oriented prewar writers and the former surrealists attempted to adopt the norms of Soviet-style Socialist Realism in the immediate postwar period. Political developments, however, aborted this movement.

Between 1948 and 1955, approximately, two groups fought each other for supremacy. They can be called the “realists,” who advocated adherence to straightforward, utilitarian literature, and the “modernists,” who demanded greater freedom, especially in matters of form. The struggle ended in the mid-fifties with the victory of the modernists. Since then, Serbian literature has followed its own meandering path of accommodation to, and acceptance of, reality. As a result, several new writers have attained prominence, and a number of enduring works has been produced, particularly novels. All Serbian literature has been steadily gaining in stature, the rise culminating in the Nobel Prize for Ivo Andrić in 1961, the first of its kind in the entire Southeastern part of Europe.

In addition to Andrić’s achievements, there are those by Branko Ćopić, Mihailo Lalić, Oskar Davičo, Dobrica Ćosić, Meša Selimović, and Miodrag Bulatović in prose; and in poetry by Desanka Maksimović, Davičo, Vasko Popa, Miodrag Pavlović, Stevan Raičković, and Ivan V. Lalić. Although basically a one-theme writer—the last war and man’s predicament in it—M. Lalić explores the darkest corners of man’s soul stripped of the last vestiges of civilization, as in his novel, *The Wailing Mountain*. Ćosić dramatically fictionalizes Serbian history of the twentieth century in his monumental novels, *A Time of Death*, *A Time of Evil*, and *A Time of Power*. Bulatović is ironically

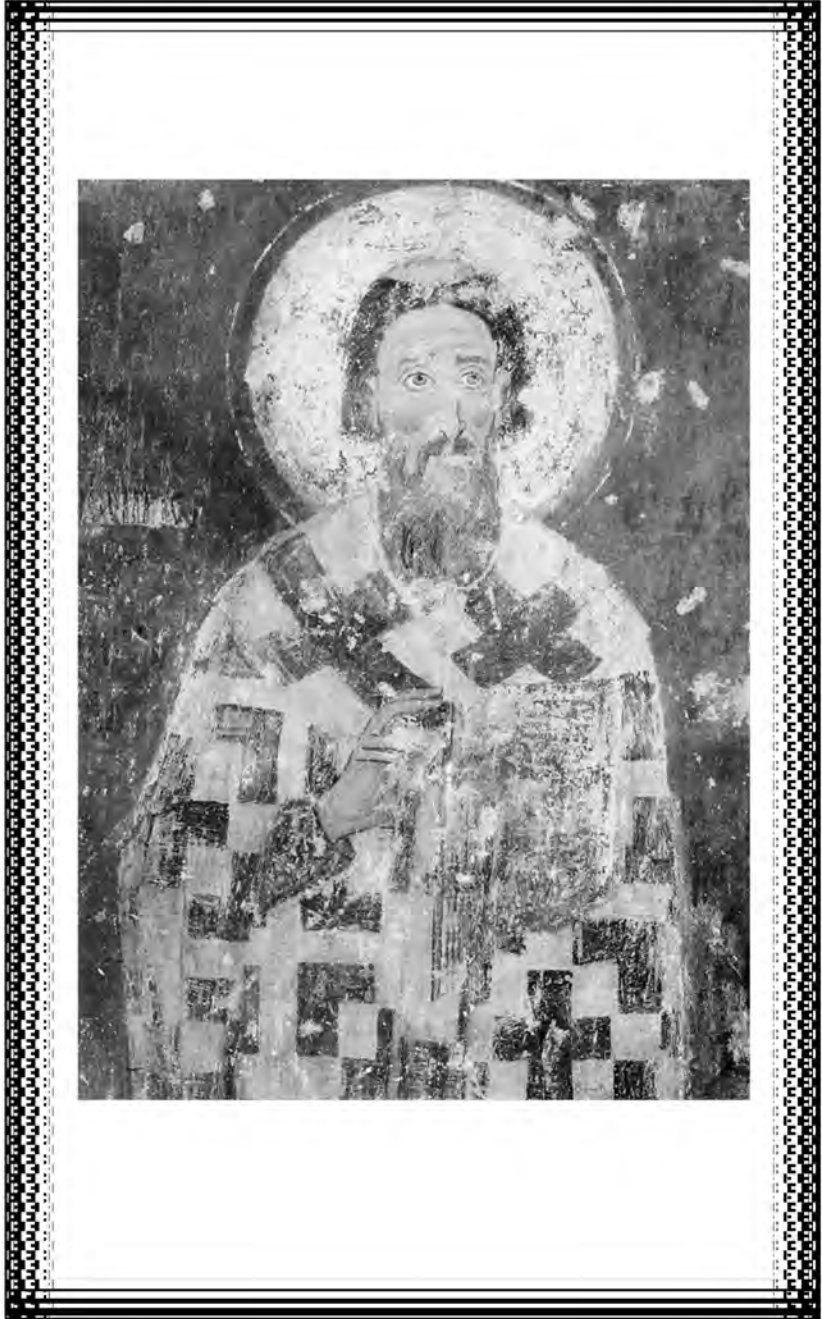
more popular abroad than at home, his popularity undoubtedly stemming from his fashionable depiction of a nightmarish, demented, perverted world which knows neither the causes and consequences of its plight nor the remedy.

Among the many younger writers deserving mention here are, above all, Danilo Kiš and Milorad Pavić. With their novels on universal themes they have—more than any other writer after Andrić—elevated Serbian literature to the level of world literature, especially Pavić with his *Dictionary of the Khazars*. Other leading writers are Aleksandar Tišma, Borislav Pekić, Dragoslav Mihailović, and Slobodan Selenić in fiction; Branko Miljković, Ljubomir Simović, and Matija Bećković in poetry, and Aleksandar Popović, Simović, and Dušan Kovačević in drama.

The present-day situation is one of fluid activity and great expectations. An entirely new generation has entered the literary scene, young writers who have brought with them their own ideas and problems, and who are surprisingly deft and knowledgeable about literary matters. They are benefiting from the international exchange of ideas, of which they freely partake. Indeed, the most important aspect of contemporary Serbian literature is that in the last two decades it has broken the centuries-old indifference toward it on the part of the outside world. Although only time will judge the true merits of the works written now in Serbia, it can be said that Serbian literature as a whole has found its proper place among others, and that it is willing to listen and eager to be heard.

In sum, through these seven periods (Medieval, Transition, Romanticism, Realism, Moderna, Interwar, and Contemporary) Serbian literature has made its tortuous way from a low existence and obscurity to respectable membership in world literature. Following in the main the developments in other European literatures while at the same time adhering to the peculiarities of its own nature, trying to satisfy both the quest for esthetic fulfillment and the need for a spokesman of historical, social, and patriotic causes, and creating traditions where there were none while often destroying those that might still serve well, Serbian literature has asserted itself against mighty odds. Aware of the difficulty a small nation, with an unfamiliar language, has in being heard in the outside world, but also conscious of their own shortcomings and limitations (due above all to historical developments, four wars on their soil in the last half century, to cite one example), Serbian writers have seldom sought excuses or demanded undeserved laurels. Instead, they have worked patiently and hard to justify their membership in the family of world literature to which they have made a modest but genuine and heartfelt contribution.

Vasa D. Mihailovich



**Saint Sava (1175–1235)**

Saint Sava, the son of the Serbian ruler, Nemanja, was the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church and one of the leading Balkan statesmen of his time. As a monk and, later, archbishop, he was instrumental in developing schools, fostering literacy, and organizing literary activity among his people. As the author of several church-related works, he was also the first important Serbian writer. His biography of his father, *The Life of Saint Simeon* (1200?), is the first original work in Serbian literature. Showing Sava's reverence for his father, the biography also expresses his deep piety and spiritual exaltation. Because of their true poetic beauty, some passages are often cited as poetry. Today Saint Sava is revered as the founder of Serbian culture and the father of Serbian literature.

## Nemanja's Last Wish

(from *The Life of Simeon Nemanja*)

My child, do this for your love of me:  
lay me upon this cloth, readied for my burial,  
prepare me fully, in the holy manner,  
for the way that I shall lie within my grave.

Spread a rush mat upon the ground  
and lay me down upon it,  
then place a stone beneath my head,  
and leave me to lie there alone  
until Our Lord comes to carry me away.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich and Milne Holton*

**Jefimija (c. 1349–c. 1404)**

Before entering monastic life, Jefimija (Jelena) was the wife of a regional Serbian ruler, Uglješa Mrnjavčević. Upon his death in a battle against the Turks, she joined the court of Prince Lazar, who was to die leading the Serbs in the Battle of Kosovo. After becoming a nun, she embroidered in gold a prayer to Prince Lazar, which is not only one of the holiest of Serbian relics, but also one of the most illustrious works in Old Serbian literature.

Jefimija composed several other pieces in a highly personal manner, thus becoming the first woman writer in Serbian literature.

A Prayer to Prince Lazar

Come to our aid, wherever you may be,  
Look down upon my small offering,  
and place it among the many,  
for I praise you, not because I am worthy,  
but because my small mind compels me,  
and therefore I expect little reward.

But you are not so generous,  
O my dear lord and holy martyr,  
with that which is perishable and transient  
as you are with the eternal and the glorious  
which you have received from God.

Yet you have bountifully nourished me,  
a stranger among a foreign people.  
So now my prayer is twofold:  
nourish me,  
and calm the fierce storm  
in my soul and in my body.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich and Milne Holton*



**Arsenije Čarnojević (1633–1706)**

Arsenije Čarnojević was a patriarch of the Serbian Church toward the end of the seventeenth century. Because of his involvement in the struggle against the Turks and his alliance with Austria, he was forced to leave his homeland after the Austrian defeat and to go north to what is now known as Vojvodina, taking with him sixty thousand Serbs in what is known as the Great Migration of the Serbs in 1690.

He wrote a diary of his journey to Jerusalem and a book of poetry in 1705. In the poem offered here he poured out his grief over the plight of his people during the Great Migration.

A Prayer to the Sleeping Lord

By day and night I flee with my impoverished people  
from one place to the next  
like a ship on a great ocean.  
We give ourselves to flight  
and wait for the sun to set,  
the day to end,  
and the dark night to pass,  
and the misery of winter is above us.

For the One who counsels us is no more,  
no more the One who saves us from our troubles.  
Our troubles double in strength,  
and I say through my tears:

How long, O Lord, will you completely forget us?  
How long must we strengthen ourselves, in order that we may deserve you?

Rise, O Lord,  
Why do you sleep?

*Vasa D. Mihailovich and Milne Holton*

## Serbian Folk Poetry

Serbian folk poetry was created during the centuries of Turkish occupation. At first, and for a long time, it was delivered orally by singers accompanying their recitation by a one-string instrument called *gusle*. In 1814 Vuk Karadžić collected those songs in a book *Pesnarica* (song book) which has since then remained a standard collection of Serbian folk poetry, although there have been many other collections in the 19th century.

Serbian folk poetry is of two kinds: epic poetry and lyrical folk poetry called women's songs. Epic poetry is customarily classified into several cycles: songs before history, songs before the Battle of Kosovo, songs of the Battle of Kosovo, songs about Marko Kraljević, songs about *haiduks* (outlaws), and songs of the Serbian Resurrection. Each cycle is a unit unto itself, concentrating on the main events of the period it covers. Thus, of the songs selected here, *The Mother of the Jugovićes* and *The Kosovo Maiden*, represent the highest points of the tragedy and grief caused by the loss in the Battle of Kosovo, as well as the grief for the lost warrior sons, while the Kosovo Maiden grieves for her fallen fiancé and his close friends, heroes like him. *Prince Marko's Plowing* is one of many songs extolling the virtues and valor of the most popular Serbian folk hero. The prehistoric songs deal with the memory of the pagan past; the pre-Kosovo songs depict the heights of Serbia's glory before the defeat, exemplified by Tsar Dušan's empire; the songs about *haiduks* tell of the warriors who fought the Turks long after the Battle of Kosovo; and the songs of the Serbian insurrection glorify the final victory on the road to freedom in the 19th century.

The beauty of the Serbian epic songs does not end with the subject matter, but shines also in the artistic execution, all the more miraculous since these songs were composed and passed on from generation to generation by the almost illiterate peasants. All songs have decasyllabic lines (*deseterac*) of two halves separated by a caesura after the fourth syllable. The songs also offer a vast treasure of folkloric material—the way the Serbs viewed the world in medieval times, the values they honored, the sense of high artistic expression, and so forth. No wonder that, after Karadžić's publication, they attracted the interest and praise of leading world literary figures such as Goethe, Walter Scott, Prosper Mérimée, Aleksandr Pushkin, Jakob Grimm, and many others.

The Women's Songs are altogether different, sung mostly by women. They treat the beauty of nature, family and social life, and, mostly, the pas-

sion of love, courtship, and marriage. They are much shorter than the epic songs and are usually of great delicacy.

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The Death of the Mother of the Jugovićes

She leads away the nine fine battle steeds,  
and brings away the nine ferocious hounds,  
and bears away the nine gray-winged falcons,  
and she returns to her high white palace.

Then from afar her daughters-in-law see her  
and so toward her they come ever closer.  
The nine widows thereon begin to wail,  
the nine orphans thereon begin to cry,  
and nine fine steeds thereon begin to neigh,  
and nine fierce hounds thereon begin to bay,  
nine gray falcons thereon begin to shriek,  
but even then the mother's heart is firm;  
her heart won't break, she sheds no tears at all.

When the night falls and the dark midnight comes,  
Damjan's young horse, the dapple-gray horse, neighs.  
Damjan's mother questions his faithful wife:  
O, my dear daughter, and my Damjan's dear wife,  
wherefore neighs so Damjan's dapple-gray horse?  
Is Damjan's horse hungry now for white wheat?  
Or does he thirst for Zvečan's cold water?  
Damjan's wife then makes this answer to her:  
O, my mother, O, Damjan's dear mother,  
he does not neigh because he wants white wheat,  
nor does he thirst for Zvečan's cold water,  
for his master, our Damjan, has taught him  
to eat fine oats, tiny oats, till midnight,  
and then go forth on roads after midnight.  
The horse now mourns his dear lord and master,  
for he did not bring him home on his back.  
But even then, the mother's heart is firm;  
her heart won't break, she sheds no tears at all.

On the next morn, when the sun has risen,  
there fly to her a pair of black ravens,  
wings all bloodied, all up to their shoulders,  
and a white foam flowing from their beaks.  
They bear with them a warrior's severed hand;  
a wedding ring, gilded, is on that hand.

They drop the hand into the mother's lap.  
She takes that hand, the mother of the nine,  
she turns it round, then she turns it over,  
and then she speaks to Damjan's widowed wife:  
"My dear daughter, and my Damjan's dear wife,  
can you now tell just whose hand this might be?"

Damjan's wife then makes this answer to her:  
O, my mother, O, Damjan's dear mother,  
this is the hand of our beloved Damjan,  
for, my mother, I recognize this ring.  
This very ring was with me when we wed.

She takes the hand, the mother of Damjan,  
she turns it round, then she turns it over,  
and to the hand she softly speaks these words:  
O, you hand, my unripe green apple,  
where did you grow, and where were you plucked off?  
On this my lap, you, Damjan's hand, grew up;  
you were plucked off on Kosovo's flat field.  
And then it is the mother's heart is swollen;  
her own heart swells and at the last is broken  
for her nine sons, the nine Jugovićes,  
and for the tenth, the old man, Jug Bogdan.

*Arash Bormanshinov and Milne Holton*

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### The Kosovo Maiden

She rises early, the Kosovo maiden;  
she rises early, on a Sunday morning,  
on a Sunday, before a warm, bright sun.  
Both her white sleeves there upon her fair arms,  
Both her white sleeves are rolled to her elbows,  
and on her back she carries her white bread.  
And in her hands are two golden vessels;  
the one of them is filled with cold water,  
and the other is filled with rosy wine

Now she sets out for Kosovo's flat plain.  
The maiden walks over all the war field,  
o'er the war field of the prince of honor.  
She turns over every bloody warrior,  
and when she finds a warrior still alive,  
she washes him with the cooling water  
she offers him a cup of rosy wine,  
and she feeds him with her well-baked bread

She encounters, as her fate has willed it,  
a young hero, brave Pavle Orlović  
a guidon bearer, a youth who served Lazar,  
and she finds him still alive and conscious.  
But his right arm is cut off completely,  
and his left leg is severed at the knee,  
and his brave chest is crushed in and broken.  
His bloody lungs are horrible to see.

She bears him off, away from his pooled blood,  
and she bathes him with the cooling water,  
she offers him the cup of rosy wine,  
and she feeds him the well-baked bread

When the warrior regains sufficient strength,  
he speaks to her, young Pavle Orlović:  
O, my sister, O, Kosovo maiden,  
what misfortune so great has come to you,  
that now you turn all these bleeding warriors?  
Whom do you seek, maiden, on the war field?  
Your own brother, or paternal nephew?

Do you search out your old, revered father?  
Then she answers, the Kosovo maiden:  
O, my brother, O, dear, unknown warrior,  
I do not seek any of my kindred,  
neither brother, nor paternal nephew,  
nor do I seek my old, revered father.  
You may recall, O, dear, unknown warrior,  
when for three weeks a group of thirty monks  
gave Communion to Prince Lazar's army  
at the fine church there at Samodreža.  
The whole army of Serbs did purge their sins.  
The last to come were three mighty vojvodes:  
he first of them, the great vojvode Miloš,  
and the second, brave Ivan Kosačić,  
the third of them, young Milan Toplica.

That day I came to the church door by chance,  
and past me strode the mighty vojvode Miloš;  
in all this world a most handsome warrior.  
He dragged his sword along the cobblestones.  
His silken hat was fur-lined, feather-dressed;  
he also wore a richly colored greatcoat;  
around his neck he wore a silk kerchief.

He glanced about, and he caught sight of me;  
he loosed his coat, his richly colored greatcoat,  
he took it off and offered it to me:  
Take this, young girl, my richly colored greatcoat;  
you should keep me in remembrance by it,  
for with my name is my greatcoat embroidered.  
I'm on my way to death, you lovely girl,  
to Lazar's camp, that holy prince of ours.  
Pray to our God for me, you lovely girl,  
that I shall come back from this war unharmed,  
and that you, too, shall find happy fortune.  
Then I shall wed you to my dear Milan,  
Milan, in God and by oath my brother,  
who swore to be my brother by our God,  
the Almighty, and by St. John the Blessed.  
When you are wed, I'll serve as his best man!'



After him strode brave Ivan Kosančić,  
in all this world a most handsome warrior.  
He dragged his sword along the cobblestones.  
His silken hat was fur-lined, feather-dressed;  
he also wore a richly colored greatcoat;  
around his neck he wore a silk kerchief,  
and on his hand a gilded wedding ring.  
He glanced about, and he caught sight of me;  
from his own hand he took his gilded ring,  
he took it off and offered it to me:  
Take this, young girl, my gilded wedding ring;  
you should keep me in remembrance by it,  
for with my name the ring is graven deep.  
I'm on my way to death, you lovely girl,  
to Lazar's camp, that holy prince of ours.  
Pray to our God for me, you lovely girl,  
that I shall come back from this war unharmed,  
and that you, too, shall find happy fortune.  
Then I shall wed you to my dear Milan,  
Milan, in God, and by oath my brother,  
who swore to be my brother by our God,  
the Almighty, and by St. John the Blessed.  
And when you are wed, I'll be the first witness!

After him strode young Milan Toplica,  
in all this world a most handsome warrior.  
He dragged his sword along the cobblestones.  
His silken hat was fur-lined, feather-dressed;  
he also wore a richly colored greatcoat;  
around his neck he wore a silk kerchief,  
and on his arm a gold embroidered shawl.  
He glanced about, and he caught sight of me,  
and from his arm he took his golden shawl,  
he took it off, and offered it to me:  
Take this, young girl, my gold embroidered shawl;  
you should keep me in remembrance by it,  
for with my name is the shawl embroidered.  
I'm on my way to death, you lovely girl,  
to Lazar's camp, that holy prince of ours.  
Pray to our God for me, you lovely girl,  
that I shall come back from this war unharmed,

and that you, too, shall find happy fortune.  
Then I shall wed you as my faithful bride.'  
And off they went, the three brave vojvodes.  
It's them I seek on the war field today.

Then again speaks young Pavle Orlović:  
O, my sister, O, Kosovo maiden,  
do you see there those battle spears, my girl,  
there, where the pile is highest and most dense?  
So it is there where the great warriors bled;  
blood was as high as stirrups on a horse,  
up to the strap of stirrup, where they mount,  
up to the waist, the silken belt of soldiers.  
There all three fell; they died there, together.  
Now you go home, home to your white-walled house,  
lest the blood stain your skirt's hem and your sleeves.

As the girl hears these strange and awful words,  
she sheds salt tears all down her whited face.  
She leaves for home, for her own white-walled house,  
and as she leaves she wails from her white throat:  
O, woe is me, a girl of wretched fortune!  
Were I to touch, just touch, a green pine tree,  
even that pine, that green tree would wither.

*Arash Bormanshinov and Milne Holton*

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Prince Marko's Plowing

Bold Prince Marko sits and drinks the red wine  
with his mother, dear old Jevrosima.  
And as these two finish off the bottle,  
the old mother starts to talk to Marko:  
O, my dear son, my own son, Prince Marko,  
stop this fighting, this incessant warfare,  
for no good comes out of all this evil,  
and your mother is now very tired  
of the washing of blood from your clothing.  
So take the plow and a team of oxen.  
Do some plowing; plow the fields and valleys.  
Sow some white corn; we could use some produce  
which would nourish both you and your mother.

Now Prince Marko does his mother's bidding.  
He takes a plow and a team of oxen,  
but he doesn't plow the fields and valleys;  
rather, he plows right down the tsar's highway.

Down that road come the Turk's janissaries;  
they have with them three large bags of booty.  
Now they call out to that bold Prince Marko:  
Hold it, Marko, don't plow up the road here!  
You Turks hold it! You stay off the furrows!  
Hold it, Marko, don't plow up the road here!  
You Turks hold it! You stay off the furrows!

Now when Marko gets fed up with this talk,  
he goes and takes his plow and his oxen,  
and he kills them, the Turk's janissaries.  
Then he seizes the three bags of booty,  
and he takes them to his dear old mother:  
"Look here what I plowed up for you today!"

*Dragana Perović and Milne Holton*

The Girl Curses Her Lover

I wonder not at the dark nor at the clouds,  
Nor at the north wind that stirs up the sea,  
But at my dear who is angry with me.  
Yet were I once to grow angry with him,  
Not all Bosnia could bring us together,  
Not all Bosnia nor Herzegovina.  
Though I gave him an embroidered kerchief,  
I did lay a magic curse upon it.  
In it there are five and thirty branches,  
And so may he as many wounds receive,  
Not from a knife nor a small pistol,  
But rather from my white and shiny teeth.

*E. D. Goy*

O Lord, why do you turn your face from us?  
Rise again, O Lord,  
Bring us help, for Your Name's sake.

And so, endlessly, we add one cry to another,  
but no help comes.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich and Milne Holton*

### Dositej Obradović (1742–1811)

Dositej Obradović is one of the most deserving men in Serbian literature. Born in Čakovo, Vojvodina, and orphaned early, he entered the monastery of Hopovo as a monk. He spent all his time reading. His inquisitive mind and wanderlust made him leave the monastery. He traveled through the Balkans, Austria, Russia, Germany, France, and England, tutoring children for financial support, learning foreign languages, and studying philosophy, especially the 18th-century English Rationalists. He became perhaps the most learned man among the Serbs of his time.

After returning to his homeland, he was invited to Belgrade, which had just been liberated from the Turks. Appointed Minister of Education, he put to good use his knowledge and experience by opening schools and by founding a higher school (which eventually became the University of Belgrade), the National Museum, and many other cultural institutions. He died in Belgrade, having seen his efforts toward enlightening his countrymen begin to bear fruit.

Dositej began writing short didactic pieces to combat illiteracy among his people. This led to larger works: the autobiography, *Život i priključenja Dimitrija Obradovića, narečenoga u kaluđerstvu Dositej* (The Life and Adventures of Dimitrije Obradović, Who as a Monk Was Given the Name Dositej, 1783–88); *Sovjeti zdravago razuma* (Counsels of Common Sense, 1784); *Basne* (Fables, 1788); and *Sobranie* (Collection). As the titles imply, these works are not literature in the artistic sense but rather practical didactic writings, having the teaching and enlightenment of a young nation as a primary goal. They are mostly translations from other literatures, but they also reveal Dositej's common sense, keen observation, and patriotism. His style was also reformatory. Although unable to break off completely from the church-fostered style and language based on Old Church Slavic, he nevertheless wrote in a language closer to that of the people and introduced many innovations, which later facilitated the language reform. Thus, he is justifiably called the founder of modern Serbian literature.

*The Life and Adventures of Dimitrije Obradović* (Excerpt)*(Part Two, Letter I)*

A thirst for learning was the main reason why I lost all desire to remain longer in that Srem paradise, Hopovo monastery in Fruška Gora. When I read Chrysostom's sermons on the Acts and on the epistles of St. Paul, strange feelings were awakened within me and took form in my young heart. "Had not Chrysostom studied," I thought to myself, "even though he had read the Acts and St. Paul's epistles for a thousand years he would have been unable to discourse upon them so beautifully and so sweetly." What countless other men had read the same compositions and knew them by heart, but were totally unfit to speak of them so copiously and so finely! That was reserved for scholars who had studied in Athens or in Alexandria. Thenceforth, not only when I was awake, but in my dreams, my mind and heart were full of naught else than great libraries, academies, and schools, where teachers gave instruction in various sciences and where industrious pupils, like bees, gathered the honey of wisdom.

But all this burning desire was restrained and to a certain extent crushed by my heartfelt, almost filial love for that pure and virtuous soul, my benefactor Todor Milutinović. Often when he observed my zeal for learning he would tell me with a sigh that he regretted that I was wasting my youthful days in his monastery. But I was terrified at even letting the thought occur to me that I might desert so good and kind a man and never see him again! After his decease, however, nothing remained in Hopovo that could detain me and keep me there any longer.

At this time it happened that one of the monastery novices, named Atanasije, had made plans for returning to his family in Croatia. But since he knew that his uncle Dionisije, who had brought him to Hopovo in order to make a monk of him, would on no consideration release him, he intended to take French leave and go home. And since he and I were on excellent terms he informed me of his purpose. Bursting with impatience, I could hardly wait to tell him in the same confidential fashion that I also was anxious to quit the monastery and to settle in any place I could find where young men were pursuing their studies; but, not knowing which way to turn, I begged that he would take me with him as far as Croatia, whence I should proceed wherever God might prompt. "Why not," he replied. It is much pleasanter to travel with a comrade than alone.

I gave him some money and he went to town, where he bought me a blue dolman, Turkish trousers, and red haiduk sandals; and the next morning, without least delay, we set out together across Mount Rakovac. We descended into Rakovac, but by a roundabout way, since I was known in that region, and

proceeded between Fruška Gora and the Danube toward Zelengrad. We touched at Osek and passed into Slavonia; and while we were going on toward Pakrac, in one village we had an adventure such as we had never expected.

From a yard there came to our ears songs and the conversation of a whole throng of people. "I tell you what," Atanasije said to me; "I'm thirsty anyhow; let's go into the yard to ask for water and see what's going on." We went in and came upon a marriage and a merrymaking. When we asked for water the bridegroom's mother said to us: "My dear travelers, today we are not drinking water here, but wine; come indoors if you wish." We did so. And when we had told the bridal party that we had come from a distance, the groomsman called out: "Well, well, it's good luck when guests come from far away to a jolly party like this." He told us to sit down, eat, drink, and be merry. They asked us about the grain crop in Srem, about the vineyards, and so on. So we had a fine, friendly talk while we listened to the music and watched the gay young people dance.

Then a big student suddenly made his appearance and sat down directly opposite me. After listening to our conversation for a few moments he addressed me, saying: "From your pronunciation I judge that you are a Schismatic." "I am no Schismatic," I replied without hesitation, "but an Orthodox Christian"; and I added that I was a better Christian than he, if he was interested in the matter. Then according to custom we immediately began to discuss the supremacy of the Pope and the question of seniority between the Greek and the Roman Church. I had read a book on those topics in the Rumanian language by a certain Maxim Peloponesiotski and I knew it almost by heart, so that I could argue the questions till the earth shook beneath me. Hence the student got into great difficulties with me and began to mix into his talk Latin words and phrases, while at that time I was as innocent of the Latin language as were the rest of the wedding party. After every word he would shout, *Probo majorem* or *probo minorem*.

The groomsman, the senior wooer, and the rest of the company, though they were all sons of the Roman Church, nevertheless with one voice began to compliment me, explaining that they could understand whatever I had to say; but they jeered at their own student, since he called on majors and minors to help him, though the subject had nothing to do with majors or captains, but with Christ, St. Peter, the Pope and the patriarchs. This so vexed the fellow that he threatened he would have me tied and set to Požega. Hardly had he said this than they all descended on him, the women worse than the men, for everybody had stopped dancing and making music in order to listen to our discussion; they all called him all kinds of names. "When you get married, they told him, go ahead and tie up travelers and guests at your own wedding party, but let them alone in our house and at our party!" And so they turned

him out of house and yard and bade me not be in the least alarmed; then we started to chat peaceably and agreeably once more, as we had been doing previously. Night was coming on and those good people would not let us leave. So we spent the night there and the next day they gave us breakfast and said farewell to us in the most friendly fashion, kissing and embracing us as if we had been kinsfolk.

We were just as cordially received, not only at a wedding party and not merely in one place, but everywhere on our way through Slavonia and Croatia. Everywhere those good people are glad to see someone from a distance who speaks the same language as they. Whoever has enough bread in his house is glad to have somebody come for dinner or supper. Love of strangers is one of their inborn traits, and nothing divides and estranges them from one another so much as the Greek and Latin churches. The church, which ought to bring them nearer together, uniting them in kindness and in love! Would it not, then, be an extremely useful thing to open the eyes of good people on this subject, and to tell them, that, no matter which church they belong to, they may nevertheless serve as godfathers and godmothers for one another, may be friends, may honor and love one another?

From Slavonia we passed into Croatia and not far from Garevica reached the house of my friend's brothers, where all his kindred, his brothers and their wives and his sisters, welcomed him as joyously as if he had escaped from slavery. It was autumn. At that time the Seven Years' War was in progress between the House of Austria, Prussia, and Russia. Atanasije's brothers, when they heard that I was anxious to visit Russia and study there, advised me to go to Germany with the chaplain of some regiment; telling me that there, since a large number of Serbian officers were then in the Russian service, some one of them would very likely befriend me and send me wherever I wished. For the moment, in order to find such a chaplain, they thought I had best go to Zagreb and wait there, for the Croatian regiments kept passing in that direction. These kind people kept me for twelve days, not allowing me to depart. Only with great difficulty could I escape from them; it was as if we had purposed to live together for all eternity.

My friend Atanasije set out to accompany me only to Petrinja, but went with me all the way to Zagreb, where I took a room for a month with a merchant in the suburbs. That evening, on hearing of my plans, my landlord told me that in the city there was a college maintained by the Vlach bishop; and that, while I was waiting for a chance to join the army, I could there begin my Latin studies. This suggestion appealed to me, and the next day Atanasije and I went to see what sort of college our bishop had there—for they gave us the name of Vlachs.

We arrived at the college. They conducted us to the principal, who received us courteously. When he heard that I wished to study there he told me



that he would write to the bishop that very day in my behalf and that he was confident of obtaining for me the privilege of board and lodging with them. I kissed his hand and thanked him for his promise.

“But I must forewarn you, my son,” he added, “that though you may study here for several years if you desire, and may have all needful sustenance, it is on condition that you become a Uniate, just as we are ourselves.”

“What, are you Uniates?” I asked him in alarm.

“We are,” he replied; “and if we were not, not only could we have no college here, but they would not even let us live here.”

“If that’s the case,” I told him, “don’t write anything about me to your bishop, for I won’t become a Uniate, not even if I be absolutely certain that I shall never learn a single thing more.”

He saw that I was terrified and so he said to us gently: “Don’t be afraid, my lads, we will not make you Uniates by force. Just stay and dine with us, and then goodbye: go wherever you please.”

We took leave of him and left his room. He said something in Latin to the other boys, who followed us out and in a kindly fashion asked us to stay and eat with them. “It is time for dinner,” they said; “don’t go away hungry!” But I was in no mood for dinner, since my knees were trembling beneath me. I do not remember how we excused ourselves; I know only that we went out and fled from the city.

Even now, when I think of that occurrence, I am horrified at what an awful thing prejudice may become. Those same lads, boys of my own age, whom a bit earlier I had gazed on with ineffable joy, just as if they were my dear brothers and kinsfolk, now, when I had heard that they were Uniates, appeared to me in a different light; they had become terrible enemies, who desired and sought my destruction. O gracious and eternal God, why and wherefore does this happen among men, that thy sweet and eternal love, which should serve them as a bond of most holy kinship, of most faithful friendship, and most sweet and heartfelt love—that this same love, when men misinterpret it and abuse it, serves to divide them and to make them bitterly hate one another!

*Counsels of Sound Reason* (Excerpt)

I recall that when I was in Montenegro Prince-Bishop Vasilije had brought in from Russia a large number of little books; it seems to me that they were called *Monthly Publications*. In one of these I read an article on the rainbow; and on a summer day, when a gentle rain was falling, I was in the upper room, telling old Prince-Bishop Sava what I had been reading about the rainbow, and at the same time we were gazing at a magnificent rainbow in front of us. And then there came riding up on an ass a certain abbot, a huge personage with an enormous beard. Prince-Bishop Vasilije, who had joined us while we were talking, caught sight of the abbot and said to me:

“Deacon, I beg you, just ask that abbot what a rainbow is and why it has many colors.”

I had not yet learned of Bishop Vasilije’s crafty habit of continually striving to stir up a dispute between other people, just to have something to laugh at. I was overjoyed at the suggestion. My mischievous heart started to leap for joy at the thought of dumbfounding the big abbot. The door opened and in walked the abbot. I barely gave him time to bow to the bishops and sit down. Then I rushed in like a gamecock and blurted out:

“Father Abbot, tell me, please, what a rainbow is and why it has many colors.”

I had already begun to feel amusement, anticipating that he would be disconcerted and would not know what to reply, but I could hardly keep from exploding with laughter. But if he had been disconcerted, he would not have been a real Montenegrin. He seized his great bushy beard with one huge hand, looked at the rainbow for a moment, and then turned on me his large, terrible, black eyes: they would have scared Newton himself. And instead of answering he inquired:

“Do you see that jackass of mine?”

“I see it,” I replied, “but I was not talking about it. What has a jackass to do with a rainbow?”

“I understand your question,” retorted the abbot; “but just let me tell you that jackass of mine has a lot more sense than you have.”

“I should like to know how you measure my sense and that of the jackass,” I asked him.

“Listen to me and I swear you’ll find out!” said the abbot. “That jackass recognizes the chaff that’s in front of him. If you don’t believe it, look at him chewing. But despite all the years you’ve lived you don’t yet know what a rainbow is! A rainbow’s a rainbow, and not a hoop for a tub! But you ask why it has many colors. Why, confound you, how can it be a rainbow without having many colors? Did you ever see a black rainbow anywhere?”

The bishops thought they'd die of laughing, and I felt the walls of the room whirl around me, and I was so ashamed that the rainbow grew black before my eyes owing to the charming comparison that the man had made of me to my face. If he had at least likened me to a horse or an ox I should not have minded, but he said I was worse than a jackass. And he was mighty well satisfied with himself, and he kept twirling first one mustache and then the other with as much exultation as if he were parading Cleopatra in triumph.

My experience with this man was just like that of certain Catholic theologians in Zadar. They once heard that there had come to town a certain priest, Father Muzdalo, famous throughout all Dalmatia for his skill in disputations. They wasted no time, but came and surrounded him in the middle of the town; and in order to make fun of him they asked him who begat Melchizedek.

"Tell me first who begat me," he replied.

"Who the deuce wants to know who begat you!" the theologians answered. "That's not written in any book!"

"Bah, shame on you!" shouted Father Muzdalo. "The women in my village have more sense than you do; they all know who begat me! And now you want me to tell you who begat Melchizedek!"

"Bravo, bravo, Father Muzdalo!" exclaimed all the bystanders.

And the theologians returned whence they came. They had found out by experience that it is not safe to start an argument with people of another sphere in life than yourself.

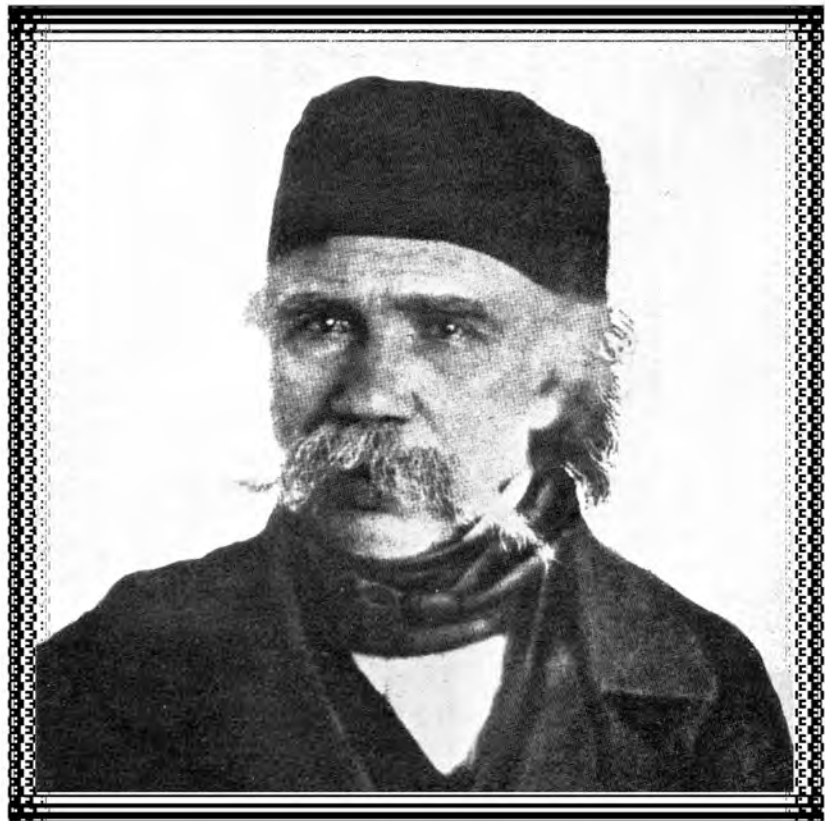
But when my abbot noticed that I was holding in my hands a little book printed in civil letters, he told me frankly and plainly, like a Delphic priestess speaking from her tripod, that if I did not forswear such books I should lose even the little sense that I had.

"Don't you see," he told me, "that half the letters in it are Latin, and that every book is accursed that contains even a single little Latin letter?"

He told me that from the time when such books came into the world people had begun to eat snails.

"Ho, confound you!" he shouted, "the world might have lasted another hundred years if you had not corrupted it with such books!"

*George Rappall Noyes*



### Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1784–1864)

Vuk Stefanović Karadžić was born in the village of Tršić, Western Serbia, in 1787. He was one of Serbia's first students of higher education. He participated in the first Serbian uprising against the Turks and, after its failure, had to emigrate. He went to Vienna, where he met Jernej Kopitar, the censor for Slavic publications in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Under his encouragement, Karadžić began to write down folk poems and songs he knew by heart and to collect new ones later among the Serbian people. This led to the first small edition of folk songs, *Mala prostonarodna slavenoserbska pjesmarica* (A Short Popular Slavic-Serbian Songbook, 1814). More and extended volumes were published later. He also collected folk tales, proverbs, and riddles. The sudden appearance of these epic folk poems made a great impression on European scholars and writers and prompted some, Goethe and Mérimée among others, to translate them.

Karadžić was also interested in language problems. Like Dositej Obradović, he was dissatisfied with the hybrid Slavic-Serbian language used exclusively by writers at that time. He began to work on reforming it and eventually devised a new alphabet consisting of thirty characters, one for each sound, following the slogan "Write as You Speak." In 1814 he published a small grammar of the Serbian language spoken by common people, with which the Awar for the reform of the language began. This was followed by an extensive *Srpski rječnik* (Serbian Dictionary, 1818), for which Kopitar provided the German and Latin definitions. Karadžić's efforts toward linguistic reform met with strong opposition on the part of the church and the church-led intelligentsia, who were afraid that the abandonment of some letters borrowed from the Russian and introduction of others from Latin would weaken ties with Russia and affect the dominant position of the Church. Their most vocal argument was that the language of the peasants could not serve loftier purposes, such as the Bible and poetry. But Karadžić's cause was espoused by many young linguists and writers. Toward the middle of the century, two important works, *Gorski vijenac* (The Mountain Wreath) by Petar Petrović Njegoš and *Pesme* (Poems) by Branko Radičević, were published in the language spoken by common people. The Bible also was translated into the vernacular (1847). In 1850, the leading Serbian and Croatian writers, at a meeting in Vienna, agreed to one grammar and spelling. This signaled the to-

tal victory of the principles advocated by Karadžić, although the struggle was to last a few more years.

Karadžić spent his last years enlarging his collection of folk poetry and other folk literature, writing historical pieces, and encouraging younger writers to write in the people's language. In 1868, four years after his death, his reform was officially adopted in Serbia. He was soon recognized as the father of the modern Serbian language—a self-made man of peasant origin who accomplished one of the most striking feats in the annals of linguistics.

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### A Meeting with Goethe

I was in Weimar eight days and can say that those were the most glorious days of my life up until now. I had a letter for Goethe from Grimm, in which he sent him a translation in German of the epic poem *The Partition of Jakšićes*. I cannot ... say how much Grimm praised our epic poetry in that letter.

“From what I know of this genre,” he said, “nothing can compare with Serbian poems: and the more a person tries to translate them faithfully, the more he realizes and feels the inadequacies and imperfections of our [German] language compared to this [Serbian].”

I gave the letter to Goethe’s chamberlain in the evening, just as Goethe was getting ready to go out somewhere by coach. After the chamberlain had presented the letter to him, he said to me that His Excellency had told him that he would be especially pleased if I would call on him at two tomorrow.

When I came the following day, Goethe welcomed me from the middle of the room, and when after many compliments, we had sat down on the sofa on which lay unfolded Grimm’s letter and the translation of *The Partition of Jakšićes* together with an unwrapped bundle of newspapers, Goethe, putting his hand on the bundle of newspapers, said:

“You can see that you are not in my room for the first time today. You have been here with me for a long time.”

When I glanced at the newspapers, I saw a review of my first Serbian grammar... What a triumph it was for me! Then we talked a long time about our poems. He read me *The Partition of Jakšićes*, asked me about some verses in the original, said that he would have it printed, and he begged me to translate for him, word for word, several other poems and send them to him.

From a letter to J. Kopitar  
11/23 October 1823

### To the Serbian Council

I am being persecuted and harassed both secretly and in public, and I am forbidden to justify and defend myself.

When thousands of leaflets were printed and distributed among the people, saying that I had written or done something for Luther and the Catholic Church against our Orthodox Church and that I was an enemy of our laws and our nation, it was no more important to me than if someone had printed and sent around an allegation that you had stolen something or squandered peo-

ple's money. Just think how everyone would feel if he were not permitted to answer and justify himself from such attacks.

And yet, let us look who attacks me so unjustly in my own country. I am being harassed by the newcomers who have come there at the sound of a taler, like grasshoppers that hop about the earth after the grass and leaves. And why do they persecute me? They do it because I was born in Serbia and, for one thing, they are sorry and ashamed that the learned world, on the basis of my works, thinks that I, who was born and raised in Serbia and did not attend school as long as they, know something better than all of them, especially as far as our people are concerned. For another thing, they are afraid that the people and government in Serbia would know and appreciate me as much as learned people abroad do, and thus place me ahead of my persecutors. That is why they slander me in various ways in order to conceal my literary achievements, or at least belittle them.

Judging by the deeds of my pursuers and enemies, it can be seen that they have neither common sense nor conscience, nor do they know what shame or sin, literature, criticism, or censorship are.

These enemies of mine are the reason that I live outside Serbia. When a friend, in 1841, wrote me from Belgrade that I ought to move to Serbia, I answered him that I do not live in Vienna because Vienna is dearer to me than Serbia, but only because I would be able to be of more use to our country here. And if I live to see Serbia in such a state that I could go about my own business there as peacefully as here, so that I could be of some use to our country—if no more, then at least as much as from her—then I will immediately, and with great joy, move to Serbia without invitation. That is what I wrote seven years ago, and it is exactly what I say today.

Just as there is a big storm raised now against me, my language, and orthography because of the translation of the New Testament, so Jovan Hadžić raised the storm in 1839 on account of my Serbian history, so that some reviled me to my face, saying that I, describing popular customs, have said that girls in Serbia were being abducted, and by that in their opinion, I have disgraced the nation. And for the collecting of our folk poetry, there were people who called me a mockery to my face and asked me how long I would carry on this ridicule. All this clearly shows that I would not be able to do any of my literary work as I see fit, but that I would have to work as someone else wished and in the wrong way, or not work at all. When, the year before last, two councilmen there said that I should move to Serbia, that my pension would be raised, it was on the tip of my tongue to tell them all this, but I again restrained myself, mostly so people would not say that I slandered the Austrian Serbs in Serbia.

And such people so far have not allowed me to stay in Serbia and do my work, and now they want to forbid me even to come there. This spring I



meant to go there, for one reason, to travel along the southern and northeastern borders of present-day Serbia, to study our language, customs, and the more recent history, and for another reason, to tend to some of my private affairs. Now seeing how my enemies can freely do me these injustices, I do not dare go there until the Honorable Council convinces me that they did that without the knowledge of the Honorable Government, and that the Honorable Government, learning of that and recognizing that the injustice was done to me, takes me under its protection. Who could be surprised or even laugh when he hears that I say I do not dare to enter my own country, for whose benefit and glory I have worked all my life? But when one thinks and examines what is being done to me, then he will admit that I am right in thinking that he who is not ashamed and not fearful of God to distribute among the people such lies and injustices against me, he will not be ashamed and afraid to do any other evil; and when they are allowed to do that, everybody might think that everything else will be allowed to them, for whoever accuses me also sits in judgment on me.

I am very sorry that I must speak so against the Austrian Serbs in Serbia, because among them I have friends whom I love and honor with all my heart, and who, I am certain, also love and honor me. I hope that they, and all other sensible men, will not take this as being evil on my part; and even less, that they will say or think that I accuse all Austrian Serbs in Serbia, and that I believe that they should not be accepted in service. I complain about and accuse only those who to the Government's shame and the people's detriment unjustly persecute and hinder me, not only in private, but also in literary, or more precisely, in national affairs... .

As no human work can in any way be without error, so I do not think that there are no errors in my works, and at all times I have said, and I say now, that I will be pleased when somebody points them out to me, because through criticism, that is, when more people reveal their thoughts about certain matters, the truth is found. But whoever says that something is this or that way and forbids others to say something against his thoughts, shows that he fears the truth and that he would try to hide it from the people. And when, instead of pointing to mistakes in a book, someone attacks the author by slander and abuse, that is not criticism, but a shameless swearing.

Consequently I do not wish that the Honorable Council forbid the writing against me by others and the criticism of my works, but rather I ask that I be permitted to defend and justify myself freely, with just as much right as my enemies write against me.

From a letter to the Council, 17 March 1848.

*Donald Davenport*



### Jovan Sterija Popović (1806–56)

Sterija, as he is usually called, was born in Vršac, Vojvodina, into a merchant family of a Greek father and a Serbian mother. After finishing law school, he became a high school teacher and a lawyer in his hometown. At the same time he began to write historical dramas but soon switched to comedy. In 1840 he went to Serbia, where he was very active as a college professor, school administrator, and a theater organizer. He was instrumental in founding the Science Museum and National Library of the Serbian Academy of Sciences. He continued to write dramas, and he also organized, staged, and directed them. His own plays constituted the main repertory of the young Serbian theater. In 1848 he returned to Vršac. His increasing disagreement with the leading political figures and deteriorating health forced him to withdraw from public life in a strongly pessimistic mood. He died in Vršac in 1856.

Although Sterija wrote poetry, numerous historical plays, and novels, it is in comedy that he achieved his greatest successes. His *Laža i paralaža* (Liar and Super-Liar, 1830), *Kir-Janja* (The Miser, 1837), *Zla žena* (An Evil Woman, 1838), *Pokondirena tikva* (The Upstart, 1838), *Ženidba i udadba* (The Wedding, 1841), *Beograd nekad i sad* (Belgrade Then and Now, 1853), and posthumous *Rodoljupci* (The Patriots, 1903), are considered among the best in Serbian drama and are still staged. In his genuinely humorous plays Sterija depicts realistically the life of the middle class, championing the little man but also lampooning his foibles and idiosyncrasies, such as greed, falsehood, and pseudopatriotism. Some of his themes and types are admittedly borrowed from other writers (Shakespeare, Moliere, Kotzebue), but they are given local coloring and implications. *Kir-Janja*, modeled after Moliere's *Tartuffe*, is a fitting illustration of this.

*Kir-Janja* (Excerpt)

## Act II, Scene 3

KIR-JANJA: (*enters, does not look at anybody, only paces the room*) Hu, hu, hu!

MIŠIĆ: What is it, kir-Janja?

JANJA: Hu! I'm going to have a stroke.

KATICA: Dear me, let's call a doctor!

MIŠIĆ: To take a few more kreutzers out of my pocket, you puppy ?

KATICA: I did not want you to suffer, for God's sake!

JANJA: Let me perish! Let the wind rise, lift me by the hair and carry me into the air! Oh, my pretty horses Miško and Galin! Now I should take a cane and go begging in my old age.

MIŠIĆ: Not like that, kir-Janja. You are only endangering your health with an attitude like that.

JANJA: What are you talking about, Mr. Notary? My stall has fallen, cost me more than five thousand forints; my horses have been killed: two thousand forints. Show me the man who can lose so much money these days! Show me, do please! Poor Janja, your luck has run out. Take a stick, go in front of the church, sit down and beg for kreutzers in your misfortune.

MIŠIĆ: And who will take care of what remains at home?

JANJA: What is there at home? Empty walls, three pieces of firewood, two chairs.

MIŠIĆ: And those nine hundred gallons of wine and one sealed trunk.

JANJA: (Damned Eve!) It's easy for you to make fun of an old man. Eh, Mr. Notary, what a terrible loss!

MIŠIĆ: The loss is great, especially such good horses. In the whole town you could not find two more like them.

JANJA: And now they lie dead. If I could only cure their meat with salt; this way dogs will eat it for nothing. Oh, poor Janja, what will become of you?

KATICA: Sweet papa!

JANJA: Don't sweet papa me! Say "bitter papa," "unfortunate papa," "papa who will contract the fever, who will go down like a big galley on the wide sea."

- MIŠIĆ: Why do you torture yourself when you can find help?
- JANJA: Find help? To build another stall? To buy new horses? What will my children and I eat afterwards?
- MIŠIĆ: Wait until I tell you what I have read in the newspapers. Somebody in Berlin has discovered a new method of constructing a balloon exclusively with horse fat. Therefore it was announced that he who has such fat can earn a thousand forints in silver for a hundred pounds of fat. Since your horses were stout, you will get three hundred pounds for them, so that you will not only recoup the loss, you will profit.
- JANJA: Er, is that true, Mr. Notary?
- MIŠIĆ: Come to my house whenever you wish and I will give you the same newspapers to see for yourself.
- JANJA: He, he, he! Mr. Notary, that's a good speculation! Perhaps I should buy more horses, fatten them, and then slaughter them. What a nice profit!
- MIŠIĆ: (This one is crazy!) The reason the price of this fat is so high is because the imperial authorities have very strictly forbidden the killing of horses on account of their great usefulness to man. But since this has happened to you by accident, you are a lucky man.
- JANJA: He, he, he! The Greek wisdom ~~Where~~ <sup>Where</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~misfortune~~—there is fortune, too." You know what, Mr. Notary? I too would like to make a balloon and go to America. I've read in an old, wise Greek book that there is as much gold there as there's dry beans in Europe.
- MIŠIĆ: Yes, there are some birds there that lay pearls.
- JANJA: Oh, oh, oh! What a sweet word! And so, I too will see the world in my old age.
- KATICA: For heaven's sake, papa, what are you up to?
- JANJA: Quiet, puppy! I will bring you a pearl and a golden earring, you know. My poor Miško and Galin! Since they could not carry me to America when they were alive, let them carry me when they are dead. Mr. Notary, you're a wise man for telling me about this nice speculation. You must be Greek.
- MIŠIĆ: (Smiling) That could easily be.
- JANJA: What did I tell you, eh! A true Greek, real Greek mind! When I go through Athens, I will enter a note about you in the library.

And when I return from America I'll bring you a pipe, a pretty Turkish pipe. And for my Juca—a hat.

JUCA: I don't know what will happen when you return. I want my hat now.

JANJA: (His eyes bulging) There's no end to this! Do you have brains in your head?

JUCA: That is a good question.

JANJA: You don't have brains in your head but garbage. Don't you see the big damage in the house, huh? What do you want, to cover yourself with jewels? Take off the stockings and shoes, wretch, and make mud to patch up the stall.

JUCA: (Looking at Mišić) If Juca were a fool.

JANJA: A fool? He who works is a fool? And he who is all spruced up is wise? Oh, accursed, indifferent world, you must go under! Poverty and misfortune will trample on you, as they did on me, like a wild horse upon the green grass.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich*

### Petar Petrović Njegoš (1813–51)

Petar Petrović Njegoš was born in the Montenegrin village of Njegoš in 1813. Because of the unsettled conditions in Montenegro, he could not receive a regular education; instead, he was privately tutored, mostly by a gifted but eccentric poet named Sima Milutinović Sarajlija, who cultivated the young Njegoš's imagination and instilled in him a love for folk poetry. When his uncle, Bishop Petar I died, Njegoš ascended the throne and was ordained a Bishop of Montenegro in Petrograd in 1833. Njegoš tried to be a good ruler, but the isolated position of his country, the backwardness of his countrymen, and incessant pressure on the part of the Turks made the attainment of this goal very difficult. Concerned for his people and trying to find help, he traveled abroad extensively. He contracted tuberculosis and died in his thirty-eighth year in Cetinje. His tomb on the highest peak of Mount Lovćen has become a national shrine.

Njegoš is generally considered the greatest Serbian poet. He began to write early. His first collection of poems, *Pustinjak cetinjski* (The Hermit of Cetinje, 1834), is characterized by contemplative lyricism and imitation of folk poetry. In his next books of poetry, *Lijek jarosti turske* (The Cure for Turkish Madness, 1834) and *Svobodijada* (To Liberty, 1854), he dealt with the foremost topic of the day—the struggle against the Turks.

His more ambitious writings produced three works of lasting value: *Luča mikrokozma* (The Light of Microcosm, 1845), *Gorski vijenac* (The Mountain Wreath, 1847), and *Lažni car Šćepan Mali* (Tsar Šćepan the Small, the Impostor, 1851). *Luča mikrokozma* is a philosophical-religious epic, resembling Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Njegoš treats the problem of the meaning of human existence as a repentance resulting from man's rebellion, together with Satan, against God. However, while the body suffers, the soul preserves the link with God and immortality. Deep thought and sporadic poetic beauty made this work a significant contribution to the young Serbian literature.

Njegoš brought his poetic expression to perfection in *Gorski vijenac*. The epic drama describes a historic event that took place at the beginning of the 18th century. At a meeting of Montenegrin clan leaders to decide what to do with those Montenegrins who had become Moslems, it was concluded that their extermination was the best method of combatting the Turkish menace. The action takes place in long dialogues, during which the leaders expound their views and philosophy. In the meditative Bishop Danilo, Njegoš por-

trayed his own dilemma in which, as a bishop and Christian ruler, he had to support the policies of war and death. The local historical event offers the poet an opportunity to muse about the universal struggle between God and Satan, good and evil. The third large work, *Lažni car Šćepan Mali*, is considered the weakest of the three. It describes in dramatic form a visit to Montenegro in the 18th century by an adventurer who pretended to be Czar Peter of Russia.

Aside from purely literary merits, Njegoš's works were also of great significance at the time of their appearance—during the struggle of Karadžić for the reform of the language. His imitation of folk poetry, the use of the spoken language by way of proverbs and sayings, and his great poetic talent showed that even the highly contemplative and artistic forms of literature can be written in a language accessible to all people.



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*The Mountain Wreath* (Excerpts)

## KOLO

God is angry with the Serbian people  
because of their many mortal sins.  
Our kings and tsars trampled upon the Law.  
They began to fight each other fiercely  
and to gouge out each other's very eyes.  
They neglected the government and state  
and chose folly to be their guiding light.  
Their servants ceased to obey their masters  
and washed themselves in the blood of their tsars.  
Our own leaders, God's curse be on their souls,  
carved the empire into little pieces  
and sapped the strength of the Serbs wantonly.  
Our own leaders, may all their trace vanish,  
sowed the bitter seed of disharmony  
and thus poisoned the entire Serbian tribe.  
Our own leaders, miserable cowards,  
thus became the traitors of our nation,

O, that accursed supper of Kosovo!  
It would have been better had you poisoned  
all our chieftains and wiped out their traces,  
and left Miloš standing there on the field,  
along with both of his true sworn brothers;  
then would the Serb have remained a true Serb!  
Vuk Branković, O you shameful scoundrel,  
was that the way to serve your fatherland?  
Was that the way to uphold honesty?

O you, Miloš, who does not envy you?  
You are victim of your noble feelings,  
you, a mighty military genius,  
a terrific thunder that shatters crowns!  
The greatness of your noble, knightly soul  
surpasses the immortal, valiant deeds  
of great Sparta and of powerful Rome.  
All their brilliant courageous endeavors  
your knightly arm places in deep shadow.

Leonidas and Scaevola, can they  
match Obilić on any battlefield?  
His powerful arm with a single blow  
toppled a throne and shook all Tartarus.  
The wonder of all valiant knights, Miloš,  
fell victim at the throne of the world's scourge.  
So lies proudly the magnificent duke,  
bathed in the spurts of his noble blood,  
just as he walked proudly a while ago  
among the hordes of the savage Asians,  
his chest heaving with a fearsome thought,  
devouring them all with his fiery eyes  
just as he walked proudly a while ago  
to a sacred grave of immortal life,  
showing disdain for human worthlessness  
and the intrigues of the mad assembly.

God is angry with the Serbian people.  
A dragon with seven heads has appeared  
and devoured the entire Serbian nation,  
the slanderers, as well as the slander.  
On the ruins of the heroic empire  
Miloš shone forth with his holy justice.  
Made immortal and crowned was the glory  
of both the true sworn brothers of Miloš  
and the lovely wreath of Jugovićs.

The Serbian name has perished everywhere.  
Mighty lions have become meek peasants.  
Rash and greedy converted to Islam—  
may their Serb milk make them all sick with plague!  
Those who escaped before the Turkish sword,  
those who did not blaspheme at the True Faith,  
those who refused to be thrown into chains,  
took refuge here in these lofty mountains  
to shed their blood together and to die,  
heroically to keep the sacred oath,  
their lovely name, and their holy freedom.

Our heads withstood the hard test in battles!  
Our brave lads have shone like the radiant stars.  
Those who were born in these lofty mountains

fell day by day in the past's bloody wars  
and gave their life for honor, name, and freedom.  
All of our tears were always wiped away  
by the deft sounds of the lovely *gusle*.  
Sacrifices have not been made in vain  
since our hard land has now truly become  
of Turkish might the insatiable tomb.

What is the cause that for quite some time now  
our native hills are shrouded in silence  
and no longer echo with warlike cries?  
Our idle arms are all covered with rust.  
Our land has been left without its leaders.  
The high mountains are reeking with heathens.  
In the same fold are both the wolves and sheep,  
and Turk is one with Montenegrin now.  
Hoda bellows on the plain Cetinje!  
A stench has caught the lion in the trap,  
wiped out is now the Montenegrin name,  
no one crosses himself with three fingers.

[After the opening kolo of the second scene and the return of the chiefs, Bishop Danilo, who has called the assembly, joins the company. He is troubled and speaks the soliloquy that follows in an aside. At its end he calls for battle and then counsels more discussion, and the Moslem leaders are called to parley.]

BISHOP DANILO (among them, as if alone)

There where a seed has first begun to sprout,  
there it should find its rest and bear its fruit.  
Is it instinct or spiritual guidance?  
It is here that all human knowledge fails.  
Just as a wolf has the right to his sheep,  
so has every tyrant to a weakling.  
But to place foot upon tyranny's neck,  
to lead tyrants to knowledge of the right,  
this is the most sacred of man's duties!  
If you lay a kiss on a bloody sword  
and sail across the turbid waves of night,  
the memory of you deserves to live.

Europe's cleric from his holy altar  
scoffs and spits at the altar of Asia.  
The heavy club of Asia ravages  
the holy shrines in Crucifix's shadow.  
The blood of the just smokes at the altars,  
broken relics here are turning to dust.  
The earth groans, but the heavens are silent!

Awesome symbols, the Crescent and the Cross;  
their kingdoms are the realms of graveyards.  
Following them down the bloody river,  
sailing in the small boat of great sorrows,  
we must honor the one or the other.  
But blasphemy against the old relics  
that have nourished us like milk since childhood  
enkindles fires of hell within my chest.  
A smooth sapling has no need for a knot.  
So why, then, does the Crescent mar the Cross?  
Why this gray screen on the sun's white pupil?

O my True Faith, my poor, helpless orphan!  
Ill-fated tribe, O how long will you sleep?  
To be alone is not being at all;  
loneliness brings only more suffering.  
The devil's might has surrounded us all.  
If in the world somewhere we had brothers,  
their sympathy would be the same as help.  
Darkness now rules supreme over my head,  
and the moon seems to be my only sun.

But woe, where do I think I am going?  
Ripen, young wheat and corn, into the grain!  
Your harvest has arrived before its time.  
I see precious offerings piled up high  
at the altar of our Church and nation.  
Wailing echoes I hear in the mountains.  
We must uphold our honor and our name!  
Let the struggle go on without respite.  
Let it be what men thought could never be.  
Let Hell devour, let Satan cut us down!  
Flowers will sprout and grow in our graveyards  
for some distant future generation.

[One of the final scenes of *The Mountain Wreath* is set on Christmas Eve in a monastery, with Bishop Danilo in the company of the blind old abbot, Stefan. It continues to the next morning following the bishop's commitment to action and ends with the report of the hostilities between the Christians and the Turks. The passage that follows occurs early in this scene.]

ABBOT STEFAN

Young son of mine and my goodly Bishop,  
each thing tonight is joyous of itself.  
Since with a drop I've moistened my old soul,  
it now dances on the top of the wine  
as the pale flame flickers over brandy.  
Sometimes this wakes life within my old bones,  
reminding me of their much younger years.

BISHOP DANILO

There is no more lovely thing in the world  
than a man's face flushed with happiness,  
above all when it's as happy as yours,  
with silver beard falling down to your waist,  
and silver locks also down to the waist.  
Your face is free of wrinkles, filled with joy.  
That's the blessing of the Lord Almighty.

ABBOT STEFAN

I have passed through both sieve and colander.  
I have looked this troublesome world over.  
I have drunk to dregs its cup of poison  
and come to know the bitterness of life.  
With all that is, with all that still can be,  
I am, indeed, quite familiar now.  
I am ready for whatever might come.  
All the evils that are under the sun  
are man's burden to carry here on earth.

You are still young and inexpert, Bishop!  
The first few drops from the cup of poison  
are the hardest and most bitter to drink.

Oh, if only you knew what awaits you!  
This world is a tyrant to the tyrant,  
let alone to a truly noble soul!  
It is a work of infernal discord:  
in it the soul is at war with the flesh;  
in it the sea is at war with the shores;  
in it the cold is at war with the heat;  
in it the winds are at war with the winds;  
in it creature is at war with creature;  
in it nation is at war with nation;  
in it a man is at war with others;  
in it the days are at war with the nights;  
in it spirits are at war with heaven.  
The body groans under the spirit's weight,  
and the soul sways unsure in the body.  
The sea, too, groans under the heaven's weight,  
and heaven sways and trembles in the sea.  
One wave by force overtakes another,  
and then both break upon the rocky shores.

No one's happy, and no one is content,  
no one is calm, and no one is at peace.  
Man laughs with scorn at all his fellow men;  
a monkey sees himself in a mirror!

*Vasa D. Mihailovich*

**Branko Radičević (1824–53)**

Branko Radičević was born in Brod na Savi, in 1824. He finished high school in Sremski Karlovci, the setting of his best poems. He studied in Vienna. In 1847 his first book of poetry appeared, announcing a new era in Serbian poetry. He went to Serbia but soon returned to Vienna to study medicine. His second collection of poetry was weaker than the first. His awareness of his impending death from tuberculosis, in his twenty-ninth year, is manifested in *Kad mlidijah umreti* (When I Thought of Dying).

In his poetry Branko gave expression to simple emotions such as joy on a sunny morning or in a fishing boat, pleasure derived from flowers, the exuberance of school youth, patriotic fervor, and love's joys and sorrows. His youthful zeal is also expressed in unabashed eroticism and in the exultation of wine, women, and song. More importantly, he was the first to write poetry in the simple language of the common people. He attempted to recreate the rhythm of the folk song, thus supporting the belief of Karadžić that even poetry can be written in the language of peasants and shepherds.

Among his best poems are: *Đački rastanak* (The Parting of School-friends), *Put* (A Journey), *Tuga i opomena* (Sadness and Warning), and *Kad mlidijah umreti*.

The Maiden at the Well

When I came to this well last night  
To draw a jug of water,  
A dark-eyed youth, so fine and bright,  
Appeared on his quick trotter.

He greeted me, he asked of me,  
“May I have some water?”  
His words, like arrows so sweetly,  
Pierced both my breasts together.

I rose up quickly, went to him,  
Offered the jug so round;  
I trembled so, that down it came  
And broke upon the ground.

The broken potshards still lie here,  
But where, O youth, are you?  
Oh, how I wish that you'd come, dear,  
I'll break this pitcher too!

*Vasa D. Mihailovich and Milne Holton*



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As I Thought of Dying

Already on the trees the leaves are yellowing,  
Already yellowed, sink.  
I do not think  
That I shall see them green another spring.  
My head droops low, my face is ashen gray,  
From slow disease my eyes are hollowing,  
My knees, their strength departed, cave,  
My hand is frail, my body wastes away,  
The time has come to go to my grave.

Farewell then, life, all beauty's dreamy spell,  
Farewell then, dawn, O light of day unfurled,  
You earth that was my paradise, farewell,  
I must be gone now to another world.  
Ah, if I only did not love you so!  
I would yet see your sun's bright slivers,  
Hark tempests, mark the thunder's hail,  
And marvel at your nightingale,  
Your springs, your rivers—  
Alas, the whirltide of my life is ebbing.

O songs of mine, poor orphans that I mourn,  
Dear children of my younger years, good-bye,  
I meant to snatch the rainbow from the sky  
To clothe you with its varied lusters,  
I meant to spangle you with starry clusters,  
With rays of sunlight rim you and adorn.  
The rainbow spans its hour and dies,  
The constellations glitter and burn out,  
And the dear sun, too, sags  
And tumbles from the skies.  
All I intended for you is in rout:  
Your father leaves you in rags.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich*



**Đura Jakšić (1832–78)**

Đura Jakšić was born in Srpska Crnja, Vojvodina. The son of a priest, he studied painting, but the revolution of 1848 interrupted his schooling, which he was never able to finish. After moving to Serbia, he served as a schoolteacher and in various other capacities, although he was often unemployed. A political liberal, he was persecuted by authorities. He died in despair and ravaged by illness in 1878, after he had taken part in the uprising against the Turks in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Jakšić wrote poems, short stories, and plays. His best works are his poems and the short stories are the weakest. In all his works he was a typical representative of Serbian Romanticism. Among his few poems are several that belong to the best in the Serbian poetry of the nineteenth century: *Na Liparu* (On the Lipar), *Put u Gornjak* (The Road to Gornjak), *Mila* (Mila), *Otadžbina* (Fatherland), *Veče* (Evening), *Ponoć* (Midnight). Through them he expressed his pessimism and bitterness about the harsh blows life and people had dealt him. Jakšić was both the beneficiary and the victim of the romantic spirit, in his works as well as in life.

His stories and plays are, for the most part, attempts to revive the glorious Serbian past. Jakšić was also an accomplished painter.

## The Birthland

This rocky pile of Serbian earth which thrusts  
Up through the cloud, and menaces the sun,  
By the dark wrinkles of its sullen brow  
Tells of time infinitely far away  
And shows us, as in silent mimicry,  
The deep-sunk furrows on its face engraven.  
Ages of darkness—here behold their print  
In those black wrinkles, in those pits of gloom;  
This pile of stone is like some pyramid  
That springs out of the dust toward high heaven:  
—A heap, no more, of craggy skeletons  
Which, in their mortal combat with the foe,  
Thy fathers of their own free choice had raised,  
Cementing with the blood of patriot hearts  
Their shattered bones and sinews—to prepare  
For their sons' sons a place of ambushade  
Whence they, with scornful valor, should thereafter  
Await the foe, with all his ravening bands.

Thus far, no farther, to this pile of stone,  
This mighty rampart,  
Thy unclean foot may chance to penetrate!  
Wilt thou dare farther? ... Thou shall hear the thunders  
Breaking the quiet of this land of freemen  
With horrible clamor; thou shalt understand  
Then, in thy coward soul, their dauntless voice;  
And then, upon that hard and rocky wall  
Shalt break the bald crown of thy shaven pate  
In wild distraction and dismay; and yet  
Through the dread crash and rattle of that warfare  
Shalt hear one single utterance, one thought:  
“Behold the Serbians' birthland, now their own!”

*Oliver Elton*

## Night in Gornjak

Like a strong, solid wall black midnight hovers tall;  
None living dares to make the crossing o'er the wall.  
The monastery brothers in this holy place  
For their sinful bodies have long found peaceful grace.  
The muted rocks are now as soundless as before,  
And the beasts are all silenced by their awful fear.  
Not a single leaf stirs; the forest makes no sound.  
The black midnight threatens the empty mountain ground.  
Even deserted Mlava's sighs are subdued,  
So much so that its sighs can no longer be heard.  
Alone and in fear all nature is ashudder.  
Yet midnight its fearsome secrets does not utter.

Now the tower lightly shakes; now the bell tolls sound,  
And in the somber church a quiet prayer is found.  
Now the snuffed-out white candles once again are lit,  
And through the silent churchyard a lithe spirit flits.  
On the pale, high forehead where a bright crown once shone  
A saintly light begins to glimmer all alone.  
With a soft tread the spirit passes down the hall,  
Bows piously three times at the holy altar tall,  
And then it slowly fades into the midnight dark.  
Thus Tsar Lazar himself has visited Gornjak.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich and Milne Holton*



### Jovan Jovanović Zmaj (1833–1904)

Jovan Jovanović Zmaj was born into a distinguished middle-class family in Novi Sad. He studied law and medicine in Budapest, Prague, and Vienna. Upon completion of his education, he practiced medicine in various cities. He also served as an administrator, theater director, and journal editor (one of his satirical journals was entitled *Zmaj*—a name that later became a part of his own name). He expressed his happiness in married life in the collection of poems *Đulići* (Rosebuds, 1864); however, his happiness turned into tragedy when his wife and all their children died. He dwelt on this shattering experience in another collection, *Đulići uveoci* (Rosebuds Withered, 1888). After he had lost his own children, Zmaj turned increasingly toward writing juvenile literature; today, he is considered perhaps the foremost Serbian author of children's literature. He spent his last years practicing medicine, editing journals, participating in political affairs, and writing copiously. He died in Sremska Kamenica in 1904, as a celebrated author and public servant.

Zmaj's opus is considerable. He was most prolific in poetry and in literature for children, but he also wrote short stories, plays, and journalistic essays. In addition, he translated widely from German, Russian, and Hungarian literatures. His best poems are on the themes of love and patriotism. Here he combined sincerity and purity of heart with a gentle humor. His poetic idiom is direct and highly emotional. Beloved by children of all generations, he tried to teach them through understanding, unobtrusive but firm adherence to morality, and, at times, hilarious humor.

She Must Not Die!

I begin to pace, falter, go on, stop,  
Hold the pendulum of the rushing clock,  
I dash, run, and with a desperate sigh  
Utter senseless words, words that stupefy:  
    “She must not die!”

To God I cry: She is still a young sprout!  
She’s still full of hope! to Justice I shout.  
To the angels: Her virtuous heart you know!  
To the earth: She is not ready to go!  
No response from anywhere, to be sure.  
I cry to myself: Don’t you know a cure?  
I pace, stop, and with a desperate sigh  
Again speak senseless words that stupefy:  
    “She must not die!”

I pace, halt, my head droops, a tear tumbles  
Into the cradle where our child slumbers,  
The cherub wakes up, looks without a peep;  
We gaze at each other and start to weep;  
To him, also, with a desperate sigh  
I whisper senseless words that stupefy:  
    “She must not die!”

*Vasa D. Mihailovich*



### Laza Kostić (1841–1910)

Another leading Serbian writer from Vojvodina, Laza Kostić was born in Kovilj in 1841. After finishing law school, he occupied several positions and was very active in cultural and political life in Novi Sad, Belgrade, and Montenegro. He was among the leaders of *Ujedinjena omladina srpska* (United Serbian Youth) and was elected Serbian representative to the Hungarian parliament. Because of his liberal and nationalistic views he had to leave Hungary, but after several years in Serbia and Montenegro he returned home. He died in Vienna in 1910.

Kostić remained a Romanticist poet and playwright all his life. An erudite and connoisseur of European languages and literatures, he brought into Serbian poetry elements of wider horizons, boldness, and originality. In his lyric poetry he often touched upon universal human concerns, especially the relationship between man and God, society, and fellow man. Perhaps his most important contributions are stylistic and linguistic innovations; he experimented freely, often at the expense of clarity. Closer to European Romanticism than any other Serbian poet of his time. Kostić attempted unsuccessfully in numerous, unfortunately incomplete theological essays to combine the elements of the native folk song with those of European Romanticism. The lack of success can be attributed to the advanced nature of his poetry and the ideas of his time and to his eccentricity. Indeed, his exuberance prevented him from becoming a truly great poet. However, today he is beginning to be reevaluated and appreciated.

Of his plays, *Maksim Crnojević* (1863) represents the first attempt to dramatize an epic poem, and *Pera Segedinac* (1875) deals with the struggle of the Serbs for their rights in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Between the Real and the Dream

My heart, my self-sufficient heart,  
    who drew you into my stream?  
Oh, you tireless, clever weaver,  
of fine fabrics a conceiver  
    between the real and the dream.

My heart, my mad and hungry heart,  
    of your weaving what's the scheme?  
Day's weaving should the night unravel  
as does that weaver of old travel  
    between the real and the dream.

Oh, my heart, my vengeful heart,  
    may the thunder blast your scheme!  
For I have no conceiving  
of the secrets of your weaving  
    between the real and the dream.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich and Milne Holton*

### Milovan Glišić (1847–1908)

Milovan Glišić was born into a poor peasant family in Gradac, near Valjevo. He had to begin work at a very early age to support himself and the family, but he managed to get some education in Belgrade. He worked as a journalist, librarian, and translator. As a liberal he often attacked the establishment, but as he rose on the social ladder he became less critical. However, he never forgot his rural background. He died in Dubrovnik in 1908.

Glišić wrote short stories and two comedies, *Dva cvancika* (Two Zwanzigers, 1883) and *Podvala* (Fraud, 1885). As the oldest of Serbian realists, influenced by Russian writers, he started a long tradition of realistic stories about the Serbian village. On the one hand, he idealized the Serbian peasant, his moral conduct and strength; on the other, he criticized sharply the external forces that oppress the peasant and prevent his emancipation. Thus, straight realism, the borrowing from folklore, idealization, satire, and humor distinguish his style. His best stories are: “Glava šećera” (A Lump of Sugar), “Redak zver” (A Rare Animal), and “Prva brazda” (The First Furrow).

He was also a prolific translator from Russian and French literatures, thus enabling writers in these languages, especially the Russian, to exert a considerable influence on Serbian writers.

## The First Furrow



Further up from the upper end of the village Velika Vrbnica, near the mountain of Vratarna, a modest peasant's cottage could be seen with two or three other small buildings huddled around.

This is the home of the widow Miona. Her late husband, Sibin Džamić, was killed near Janko's Cliff in the Second War. Tales are still told of Sibin's courage, and whenever anyone mentions him at Vrbnica, they always say: "May God forgive his sins. His Miona was left alone to feed herself and three children, two small sons and a daughter. They were close to each other in size and age. Ognjan, the eldest, was only seven.

Nothing can be worse for a peasant family than to be left without a male head. The same misfortune had struck many other homes in the countryside. Many a widow had mourned for her husband, and had been consoled. Some had remarried after a year or two; others had gone to new families, taking their children to a stepfather.

Sibin's Miona would not follow the example of her friends in sorrow. An alert and industrious woman, she took on even the heavy farm work. It seemed all the time to Miona that Sibin would come back. If he were to come, how could she face him if he were to find his house deserted and ruined?

The late Sibin had had many brothers and relatives, but they had not lived with him. They were all hard-working people, intelligent and kind, and a day never passed without one of them coming to Miona's house to help her a little with her work.

Sibin's younger brother, Jelenko, helped her the most. Often he said to his sister-in-law:

"Why won't you listen to me, sister? Why won't you move to our house? Can't you see, poor thing, that with these three children you can never make ends meet! How are you going to do it all? You couldn't do everything even if you had a hundred arms. Why not come and live with us, at least until the children become big and strong?"

"I can't, brother," Miona answered, sighing.

"But why not? Everything would be easier and more comfortable for you in our house."

"But, brother, how can I let the fire die on the hearth, where these orphans were first warmed? What could I say to my children later when they ask me, 'Mother, whose house is that, smothered by bushes and weeds, which none ever dares enter even in daylight?' If I did that, every bit of food I shared with Sibin would turn to poison. God save me from that! Never, brother, never."

Jelenko could do nothing but shrug his shoulders and hire a plough and a pair of oxen to plough up as much land as Miona needed for the crop.

These good people always helped her with the harder field work that was too heavy for a weak woman's hands. They ploughed up part of her fallow land, harrowed and sowed it as carefully as if the fields were their own. Miona did everything else herself. She hoed, weeded, and harvested. She never complained about the hard work. When they wanted to help her even here, she almost was annoyed. She used to thank them by saying, "You helped me with the hardest part. I can do this alone."

➤ II ◀

The years passed, one after another, and Miona became so used to her loneliness and hard work that she felt that this could not be otherwise. Her children were growing up. Ognjan was almost fifteen and he was going to school. He was a good pupil. Dušanka completed her thirteenth year and relieved her mother of many household duties. If Miona went to the field early in the morning to bundle up some sheaves or to the meadow to stack up what Jelenko had mowed the day before, she would not miss her dinner when she returned home at noon. Dušanka was taking care of it like an old matron. She even knew how to bake unleavened bread well. The youngest, Senadin, was nine. He still made guns out of alder-shoots, but he could take care of the lambs, and could lead the sheep to pasture, making himself a little bit useful too.

Thank God Miona's children were healthy, happy, intelligent, and industrious. They were dressed as if they came from the best home. Her heart overflowed with happiness when she looked at them.

"My lovely little birds," she used to sigh, "may God Almighty keep me in health and strength until their wings become stronger."

God is good. He answered the fervent prayer of the lonely widow. The men of the village respected Miona for her determination. They praised her everywhere and used her as an example to their wives when scolding them for their idleness. Only one thing surprised them: Why should she, being self-supporting, send Ognjan to school, and support him there? This they resented, and Jelenko himself reproached her for it once. It was when he and his old uncle, Jezdimir, were at her house and after they had discussed many things, he said to his sister-in-law:

"To be honest, everyone is surprised at the burden you are struggling under. You are industrious, and sensible, and yet you did something foolish."

"But what, brother?" she asked, a little startled.

“Why didn’t you keep that child home to help you with at least some work? Many people who are richer and more prosperous than you are not able to do without their children. You are poor and you suffer, and yet...”

“I won’t ever let my children be the worst educated in the village, brother,” answered Miona, flushing a little. “My late Sibin—may God forgive him—often used to say that if nothing were to happen to him, he would send Ognjan to school. I am fulfilling his wish. I have suffered for it many years. It won’t do me any harm to suffer a little longer.”

“That is true, sister-in-law,” said old Jezdimir, “that is fine and good. But, on the other hand, you are alone in the house and any aid, no matter how small, is of value to you.”

“Ognjan will finish his school in July on St. Peter’s Day and after that he will stay with me. With God’s help, I will send Senadin to school next autumn. I don’t want my children to be blind when they have eyes.”

She spoke with conviction and so abruptly that Jelenko could say nothing. They talked a while of other things and then they went away.

“That isn’t a woman, that is a man,” said old Jezdimir slowly as they left Miona’s house.

### ➤ III ◀

Lent had started and winter was almost over. The harsh east wind and the icy north wind no longer blew. The wind from the south now stirred the bare branches of the giant beech trees, coming from Župa and going even as far north as Zeljin, Nerađa, and Kopaonik. The snow almost everywhere melted. Only that snow on the Suvo Rudište did not care about the south wind; it would not melt until later, under the June sun.

The industrious farmers swarmed everywhere. They were ploughing the fallow land singing as they worked, hoping for a good year.

It was noon one day when Miona got back from town, where she had gone at dawn to see Senadin.

She had kept her word. Ognjan had completed the fourth grade on the feast of St. Peter, and shortly after the Transfiguration Senadin had entered the first grade.

Miona was climbing up through the orchard to the house, when Dušanka suddenly came out of the house. She had something rolled up in a little mottled bag and was in a hurry.

“Where are you going, Dušanka?”

“Oh, it’s you. Back so soon?” Dušanka answered, a little confused.

“That’s good because the house will not be left empty. I am going to meet brother.”

“Yes? Where is he?”

“In the field, down beyond the clearing. He told me to bring him his lunch.”

“Isn’t he coming back to the house to eat?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“He went with the oxen and the plough.”

“Oh,” Miona almost shouted, “why didn’t you tell me right away?. Give me the little bag, I will take it to him myself.”

“No, let me, mother, you are tired and, besides...”

“Besides what, my child?”

“My brother begged me not to tell you right away. He said, ‘I want to make my mother happy.’”

“May God make him happy. I am not tired, child. I have not even noticed that I came back so quickly. It wasn’t very nice of you not to tell me immediately. Look what he is up to. Give me this little bag. See how late it is—already past noon. Has he been out long?”

“He probably just reached the field.”

Miona snatched Dušanka’s bag, looked into it to see what she had prepared, and hurried away. Dušanka, remained in front of the house, wondering and watching her mother go.

#### ➤ IV ◀

This field, beyond the clearing, needed not more than one day’s ploughing. The ground was not very rich and even in good years the harvest never produced more than two or three stacks of spring wheat.

Ognjan had just ploughed up the first furrow and was about to start the second when his mother suddenly appeared.

“Ah, just look at my old boy working!” cried Miona happily. Running up to Ognjan, she began to hug and kiss him. The boy was a little surprised.

“May your labor bring a good harvest, my landlord! What a superb little furrow and how deep it is! Oh, I’m silly, I am talking nonsense but you are tired, my toiler! Here, take this. Your little sister prepared your lunch for you.”

Miona quickly emptied everything from the cloth bag, spread the bag out, and sorted out on it some salt, onions, a few cooked potatoes, a thin loaf of bread, a bowl of pea soup, and a small gourd of wine, saying:

“Ah, see what a girl Dušanka is! She even thought of wine. My matron! She already knows what a tired man needs. Stop ploughing, my son. You have worked enough.”

And she burst into tears.

“What’s the matter, mother?” asked Ognjan, sitting down. “You are crying.”

“It’s nothing, my son, nothing. See, I am laughing. Eat! I know you are hungry. The truth is that I was delayed a little in town. You can’t imagine how pleased the teacher is with our Senadin!”

“You sit down, too, mother, so we can eat together,” said Ognjan breaking off a piece of the loaf for her.

“No, son, I will eat at home. Dušanka is waiting for me,” answered Miona, still standing almost as if waiting on him. “You think I am also tired, Ognjan, but I am not. I can be on my feet all day, my son. Take it easy, you have plenty of time, you don’t have to plough up everything today. Look at him. He ploughs like a grown-up! Dušanka told me, but I thought she was joking—the little rascal!”

Again her eyes filled with tears. She was wiping them away with her sleeve while laughing.

Ognjan became confused. He blushed and felt like saying something, but he didn’t know how.

Miona told him to eat again.

She began chatting with him as if he were a child, still standing in front of him. She said that she would save the wheat from that field to use only on feast days. She would use it to make the cake for the Patron’s Day. The best flour is made from old grain, she added.

“If only the seed will sprout!” said Ognjan. “You know well, mother, that this field is one of our worst ones. The grain from here is almost always rotten.”

“Oh, it will sprout, son, it must sprout! There is no better ground, even in Morava. There has never been anything bad from this field. You will see what good wheat will sprout here!”

Ognjan finished eating, stood up, took up the plough again, striking the oxen with his whip.

Miona stood looking at her son jumping from side to side like a rooster tugging at the handle, and directing the plough left and right. It was hard work and the boy’s arms were still weak.

Several times Miona wanted to run up and help him, but for some reason she did not dare, she herself did not know why.

She straightened the little bag again and slowly went back home.

She turned around to look back at Ognjan time and again. She could still see him as he was ploughing up even the third furrow.

A strange new joy seized her. She felt like crying and laughing. She didn’t know why. From time to time, she would whisper: “Is not God giving me my turn to rejoice? Am I not happy? Who could deny it! Oh, how happy I am! Look here, I have a son. I have a man in the house, haven’t I! Other



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hands won't work for me any more. Nobody has such a youngster. There he is, plowing! Even Jelenko could not do better. He is already a man. In one or two years, God willing, I shall have him married. My house will sing again."

Duška does not remember seeing her mother so cheerful as when she returned from the field beyond the clearing.

The mother came home, humming a gay little song.

*Branko Mikasinovich*



### Laza Lazarević (1851–1890)

Laza Lazarević was born in Šabac in 1851. A graduate of the University of Berlin Medical School, he practiced medicine in Serbian towns until his untimely death in 1890. In his student years he was attracted to progressive liberal ideas and movements, but later became a conservative, believing that only the patriarchal way of family life could form the basis for a political system. He saw the greatest danger for Serbian society in the attacks on this patriarchal way of life, as manifested in *Prvi put s ocem na jutrenje* (The First Matins with Father).

Lazarević wrote relatively little: only nine completed and several incomplete stories. A founder of psychological realism in Serbian prose, he was above all interested in the inner world of his characters. They are for the most part representative of the traditional morality under attack from outside forces, new ideas, and willful individualism—all these rebelling against the centuries-old operative family setup (*zadruga*). Lazarević was interested in village and small town life. He also depicted the young Serbian intelligentsia exposed to, and influenced by, the outside world. While defending the patriarchal way of life, however, he was not oblivious to its shortcomings.

Just as important is Lazarević's style. He is a careful fabulist who excels in fine detail, compact structure, and dramatic quality. He is considered one of the best prose writers of the 19th century. His main stories are: *Školska ikona* (The School Icon), *Švabica* (The German Girl), *Sve će to narod pozlatiti* (People Will Reward), *Verter* (Werther), *Na bunaru* (At the Well), and undoubtedly his best, *Prvi put s ocem na jutrenje*.

### The First Matins with My Father

I was only nine years old at the time. I don't remember the exact details of what happened, so I can only tell you what I recall. My sister who is older than I am remembers too, but my younger brother, on the contrary, knows nothing about it. I was never fool enough to tell him. When I grew up, I questioned my mother, who told me many things about the affair. My father, naturally, never breathed a word.

He, my father, was, of course, always dressed as a Turk. I can still see him putting on his clothes. He wore a short undervest of red velvet edged with several rows of gold braid, and over that a green cloth jacket. Behind his belt, which was stamped in gold, he stuck a thin walking stick with an ivory top and a dagger with silver scabbard and ivory handle. A fringed sash, tied on the left side, covered the belt. His trousers were ornamented with silk braid and embroidery, huge flaps hung half way down his legs, and he wore white stockings and flat shoes. A Tunisian fez, worn a little over the left ear, served as headgear. He carried in his hand an ebony pipe with an amber mouthpiece, and stuck in his sash on the right side was a tobacco pouch embroidered in gold and false pearls. He was a real dandy.

His disposition was peculiar, and though it is true that he was my father, since I have started to tell the story, there is no use in lying about it. He was extremely severe, he always commanded, and if his orders, given once for all, were not immediately executed, there was nothing left for you to do but to escape as fast as possible. Passionate and forcible, he required that everything should be done in his way; in short, no one dared to have the audacity to contradict him. When he was really angry, he would blaspheme the Alleluia. He never gave but one blow, but my dear fellow, you were on the ground as soon as you were hit! He was easily offended; when he scowled, bit his lower lip, and twisted his moustache, turning up the ends, his eyebrows joined across his forehead, and his black eyes gleamed. Woe, if at that moment someone came to tell him that I did not know my lesson. I don't know why I was so afraid. He might have boxed my ears once. But his eyes made me shiver, and when he turned them on you like a bullet from a sling, you would begin to tremble like an apple twig, without rhyme or reason.

He never laughed, at least never like other people. I remember one day, when he was holding my little brother on his knee. He had given the child his watch to play with, and Đokica insisted on jamming the watch into his mouth and yelling like one possessed because he couldn't open it. My sister and I almost died laughing, and the thing seemed amusing even to my father, for he several times partly opened his mouth on the left side and his face wrinkled at the corner of his left eye. This was an extraordinary event, and was his way of

laughing at a thing which would have made anyone else roar so that they could be heard at the Inn of Tetreb.

I remember the day that my uncle died, Papa's brother and partner, whom he cared for deeply. My aunt, my mother, my cousins, all of us children sobbed and groaned, with tears and lamentations, all, all, crying aloud. But Papa never faltered, he did not shed a tear, or even say an "Oh" of pain. Only as he went out of the house his lower lip trembled nervously and he shivered. He was white as linen and supported himself against the doorway, but he did not open his lips.

Even at the risk of his head, he would never go back on what he had said, though the thing might be required by his conscience. I remember the day that he dismissed his clerk, Proka. I saw clearly that he hated doing it, and that he was sorry for the man, but he did not give in. He liked Proka better than any of the other clerks. I remember that he had never struck him but once when, after drawing some brandy, Proka had closed the spigot so badly that almost the value of a keg had flowed away. Except that one time he had never laid a finger on him. He trusted him in everything, even sending him to the village to collect the money for things that had been sold on credit, and things like that. And why do you suppose he sent Proka away? For no reason at all! Just because he had seen him gambling for pennies!

But wait, you will soon be still more astonished!

It was shortly before the feast of St. George. Proka came into the shop to have his agreement renewed. Papa took ninety groschen out of his pocket and said, "Here is your money. I have no more need of you. Go and find a place where you can gamble for pennies." Proka, holding his fez before his eyes, and shedding a veritable rain of tears, began to plead for pardon. I could see that my father was touched, but do you think he yielded?

God forbid that it should be said that he was like some men who beat their wives, and do other things of that kind, but he was cold and churlish with my mother—worse than a stranger, he really was. Whereas my mother, good as any saint, brooded over him with her eyes as an ostrich does over her eggs. When he spoke harshly, and her tears choked her, she always hid them, not only from us but from him. He never went out with her, and she did not dare open her mouth to ask him to take her anywhere.

He would not tolerate any suggestions from her about the shop or about his business.

One day she said to him:

"Mitar, why don't you give any brandy to Stanoje? There will soon be plenty of the new, and where will you put it?"

He only answered this by shouting:

"Are you hungry, or do you need anything? The money is in your hands, if it runs out you have only to say so. But don't meddle in my affairs."

My mother bowed her head and was silent.

He talked very little with anyone. His group of friends met at the cafe, and it was only with them that he said a few words. He had a great respect for his partner, Ilija, the only man who ever spoke frankly to him, and of whom my father was in a certain way, a little afraid.

It could be seen that he loved us, his children, and my mother, but he held us under very severe control. I do not remember ever having received any mark of affection from him. It is true that at night he tucked us in again when we were uncovered, and he would not let us lean over the well or climb the mulberry trees, but what did that mean to me? Other fathers did as much, and also brought their children candy and gold paper and balls that bounced as high as the poplar trees.

He went to church only on the feast of St. George, but he went to the cafe every night. We had supper, and immediately after it he put his chibouk under his left arm, his tobacco pouch in his belt, and behold he was gone! In summer he came back at nine o'clock and in winter even earlier, though sometimes midnight had struck before he was at home.

This troubled my poor mother and sister, but I at that time knew nothing of what such revelry meant. They never went to sleep before my father's return even if he did not get back until dawn. Sitting up in their beds they dared not even light a candle. He went into a rage at once, you see, if he found one burning. One day when he had come in I heard him growl.

"What is the meaning of that candle burning at such an hour?"

"It is so that you can see to undress, Mitar," said my mother.

"Do you think that I don't know how to light a candle, or that I am too drunk to find one?"

"But no, Mitar," said my mother, soothingly, "I only thought..."

"You thought what? You wanted the neighbors to think that there was a corpse in the house!"

A corpse! Do you imagine for a moment that he meant that? He who cared so little about the neighbors? He merely did not want my mother to pay any attention to his goings and comings, and in his anger he did not know what to accuse her of. He would have preferred finding my mother asleep, or if she must lie awake, that he should at least be able to go on a spree without having any fuss made about it. That evidently irritated him.

He drank very little, and then only wine. When he had to taste the brandy that he bought, he always spit it out at once, making a grimace.

He cared no more, and God knows how little that was, for coffee. You ask me "What did he do all night in the cafe?"

It was a bad thing, that was what it was. It seems to me that if he had drunk hard it would have done only half as much harm. But you will see.

It shortened my mother's life by half. Sometimes she cried and choked, but she never complained to anyone.

One day he came home very late. Nothing happened. Again the next day, nothing. Do you suppose, my dear fellow, that my mother did not know that he no longer had a watch! At last the poor woman asked him, "Where is your watch, Mitar?"

He frowned, and turning away his eyes, answered.

"I have sent it to Belgrade to be repaired."

"But it worked quite well, Mitar."

"I don't think that I am one-eyed or an idiot, and I can probably tell whether a watch works well or not."

What could my mother do? She was silent, but later she said to my sister with tears, "This is very hard on me, he will throw away everything that we possess, and in my old age I shall have to live by washing other people's shirts."

Another time it was barely ten o'clock, when he suddenly returned from the cafe.

An astrakhan cap was cocked over one ear, a chain as thick as your finger hung across his breast, and a pistol encrusted with gold and precious stones was stuck in his belt. He came in, and from the look of the few wrinkles around his left eye, he seemed to be in a good enough mood.

As soon as he was in the house, he pulled out his watch, as if to see what time it was.

"You have come back?" said my mother, walking with a start. "And is your watch repaired?"

"It is repaired."

"And what is that chain?"

"It is a chain, like any other chain," he answered in a quiet voice without shouting.

"I know that," said my mother, "but where did you get it?"

"I bought it."

"And that cap? Only Miša the treasurer has one like it."

"I bought that also."

"He sold it to you?"

"He sold it."

"And what...?"

But here my father looked at my mother in a certain manner, and she was silent.

He began to undress. I risked an eye outside of my quilt.

He took out of his pocket a package as big as my fist, and tossed it onto the table, where it rang; nothing less than ducats, my dear fellow.

"Here, keep this," he said, and went into the kitchen.

My mother took up the paper between two fingers—as you might say—the way that she would have lifted dirty linen.

“What shall I do with this money?” she asked my sister. “It is accursed. It is from the devil, and the devil will take it back in the same way that he has given it.”

As you see there was neither life nor happiness in this thing. My mother was unhappy, and we were unhappy with her.

My mother has told us that he was formerly quite a different sort of man, and I remember myself, as if in a dream, that when I was tiny he held me on his knee, and that he made me a whistle out of a reed, and took me with him in the cart out into the fields. “But,” said my mother, “after he began to go with the treasurer Miša, Krsta who lives in Makevina Street, Albert the druggist, and a few others, everything was turned upside down, and went awry.”

He grew cross, and would allow no questions, always saying, “Mind your own affairs,” or “Have you nothing else to worry about?”

He was good at nothing, and as I have told you he realized that what he was doing was wrong, but that which had taken possession of him, and from which God preserve us, would not let him go.

And yet, though it seems absurd to say it, he was really a fine man. Yes, by the Lord he was! But...

One day when he came home he was not alone. My mother was surprised. He passed by the door with someone and they were whispering together. They went into the courtyard. Then we heard the neighing and stamping of a horse. I did not know what it meant.

When he came in later I began to snore and my sister pretended to be asleep. He said good evening, and nothing more. Both he and my mother were silent, and as for me, I waited. At last my mother said in a choked voice.

“He has taken the black horse!”

“He has taken him.”

Again they were silent, but my mother blew her nose several times, and I thought she was crying.

“Mitar, for the love of God, and in the name of our children here, stop this traffic with the devil. The man who leagues himself with him is damned in this world and the next. Look what happened to Jovan who gambled with cards, think of him! A man of his position, who has sunk until today he must pick up nutgalls for other people, and buy skins in the villages for the Jews. For the love of God, have you no pity for me, who when I grow old will have to seek my crust of bread in the houses of others, or these children of ours who will have to serve strangers?” And she began to sob.

“What’s the matter with you that you should call on me in the name of the children and you mourn me before I am dead? What makes you howl about a



wretched nag? It was not she that owned me, but I that bought her! Tomorrow, if you want them, I will buy ten.”

My mother only cried harder.

“I know, dear Mitar,” she said patiently, “but your enemies will take everything from you. O my beloved, leave those wretched cards alone. Remember that it was by the strength of our backs and the seat of our blood that we were able to raise this roof above our heads. Is it possible that some miserable moneylender will turn me out of my own house?”

“But who is turning you out?”

“No one is turning me out, my dear, but I shall be turned out if you go on as you are doing. It is a trade accursed of God.”

“Haven’t I told you a hundred times not to preach to me, or to whimper without cause. There is no reason to think that some crow has picked out my brain so that I need my wife for a guardian.”

She said no more, that brave soul. Her throat contracted and she shed no more tears. They ran down her breast and fell on her heart. and turned to stone there.

The days followed each other, and he kept on in just the same way. Sometimes he brought home rolls of money, which he lost again as he had won it. He often came back without his rings or watch or gold embroidered belt.

Again he would have two or three watches and several rings. One day it would be a pair of high boots, a cloak, a saddle, or a dozen silver spoons; once it was even a barrel full of liquorice, and all sorts of other trifles. One evening he brought a black horse, the same one that had belonged to us before.

The next day he bought a new harness; the false martingale hung below the knees of the beast, and the fringes beat against his jaws. My father harnessed him to the carriage, shut the door of the shop with a chair, and drove through the town! The pebbles flew from under the horse’s hoofs.

We were prepared for anything. My mother cried and was anxious. How could she be anything but unhappy? The shop was deserted. He sent away the clerks one after another. Everything went wrong in that unlucky house, and the money ran away like rain.

His companions, heaven help us, began to come to us. They shut themselves up in the big room and lighted several candles; ducats rang and cards slid on the table, pipes smoked, and our servant Stojan never stopped making them coffee (the next morning he showed us some ducats that had been given to him for fees). My mother stayed with us in the other room. Her eyes were red, her face pale, her hands dry, and she repeated over and over again, “O God, be with us!”

He became, at last, completely detached from household life. He never spoke. He never looked my mother in the face. He never caressed us, his children, and while not using really abusive words to us, he was very far from ever saying a kind one. Everybody kept away from the house. He did give us whatever we needed. If I asked for money to buy a slate pencil, he gave me enough to pay for a whole package. My clothes were the finest in the whole school, and for food he bought the very best to be found in the city. But all the same, something that I did not understand made me suffer whenever I looked at my mother and sister. They had become older, and grown pale and grave and sad. They went nowhere, hardly even to see a few neighbors at the *Slava*, and very few women came to us. Only the men came, and most of these were dissipated good-for-nothings as my mother called them. There was hardly any work done in the shop. "Do you expect me," said my father, "to amuse myself by selling twenty cents worth of indigo to a boor? That is good enough for the Jews."

My mother was no longer able to protest. She told me that he had said to her one day, "If you will listen, listen, and understand what I am telling you; if ever again you say one word of that kind to me, I will find another house and move into it, and then you can preach here to whoever you choose. Keep that clearly in your mind!"

She was as silent, poor soul, as if she had been ducked. Her heart was rent, she grew whiter day by day, and never stopped imploring God for help. "My God," she prayed, "do not abandon me."

And then ... you can probably imagine what the end of all this was!

One night they all came. A certain Pero Zelenbać was with them, a pig merchant who, as he expressed it, worked with Pest. His moustache was waxed and his hair, which was separated by a part in the back, was allowed to fall in curls over his cheeks. He was fat faced and corpulent and wore a curious little hat over one ear. He wore a gold chain on his waistcoat like the one papa had formerly owned, and on his hand was a ring that sparkled, really, my dear fellow, it sparkled so that you couldn't look at it. He waddled in his walk, and spoke in a hoarse bass voice, and you were confused before his little yellow-green eyes, which inspired a sort of dread, such as one feels when looking at an owl.

They arrived, as I said. Stojan was in his place at the stove making their coffee.

Four candles were lighted. The tobacco smoke rose as if from a chimney. They drank coffee in silence like Turks, but the cards fell, and you could hear the ducats ring.

It was a terrible night!

We were shut up in the other room with my mother. She no longer cried. Neither did my sister. With faces set and sunken eyes, they gazed straight in

front of them in deadly fear. What happened at my uncle's death was nothing compared to this.

My father came into our room several times. He was covered with sweat. He had unbuttoned his vest and unhooked his shirt, so that one could see the coarse hair on his chest. He was scowling like a Turk.

"Give me more," he said to my mother.

Her heart shrank. Silent, as if made of stone, she opened the chest and gave him handfuls of money which he tied in a handkerchief. He glanced nervously from side to side, and stamped his feet where he stood, as I do when the boys are waiting for me outside and I want my sister to cut me a piece of bread. He took the money, turned away his head, and muttered as he went out, "More than that."

After that you might have said that he ran away from the place.

But still saying, "More than that, more than that." He came, I think, five more times into our room, and this went on until it was almost three o'clock in the morning.

"Give," he said to my mother, and his face was livid.

My mother went to the chest, her legs trembled and she staggered.

Hidden under my quilt, I could still see how my father's tall figure was shaking and how he supported himself against the stove.

"Be quicker!" he said to my mother, losing all patience and with impatient gestures of his arms.

My mother handed him the money.

"Give me all of it," he said.

"These are the last ten ducats," she answered. It was no longer a voice or a whisper that we heard, but something like a death rattle.

He gathered up the money and rushed out of the room.

My mother sank beside the chest, and fainted. My sister screamed. I sprang out of bed. Đokica did the same. We sat down on the floor around her, and began to kiss her hand, crying, "Mamma, Mamma."

She put her hand on my head and murmured something. Then she rose and lit a small taper and the votive lamp before St. George.

"Come children, pray to God, that he may deliver us from misfortune," she said. Her voice rang like a bell, and her eyes shone like the star of the shepherds, radiant in the sky.

We ran after her to the icon, and all knelt down; while Đokica, kneeling in front of mother, turned his face toward her, crossed himself, and repeated, poor little chap, the half of the pater which he had already learned. Then he crossed himself again, kissed mother's hand, and gave himself up to gazing at her. Two rivers of tears poured from her eyes. Her look was upturned to the saint and to God. There, on high, was something that she could see, her God, whom she adored and who looked down again upon her. At that moment

there came over her face an expression of rapture, a sort of radiance, and it seemed to me that God caressed her with his hand, and that the Saint smiled, and that the dragon died beneath his spear. Then my eyes were dazzled, and I fell forward on the edge of my mother's dress and against her left arm which supported me, and I prayed for the hundredth time, "Oh God, you see my mother! My God, I beseech you for my father!" Then I added, I don't know why, "O God, kill that Zelenbać!"

We prayed like this for a long time.

At last my mother rose and climbing on a chair, kissed the image of St. George, my sister did the same, and lifted up Đokica and me so that we could kiss it also. Then my mother took the spray of dried basil which was kept behind the icon and the vial of water that had been blessed at the Epiphany from where it hung below the image. She dipped the basil in the water and murmuring something, with the spray she made a sign of the cross in the room. After that, opening the door very softly, she tiptoed down to the big room, on the door of which she made another cross with her spray of basil.

Ah, how light I felt then, and how happy, as if I had just come from taking a bath. Why is it that I never have that sort of feeling now?

My mother had hardly made her sign of the cross on the door of the big room, when a tumult began inside. It was impossible to distinguish anything, except that once we heard Zelenbać shout with all his might.

"Who can force me to go on with the game? Who is the man who will try that?"

Then there was more confused noise and violent disputing. We heard the door open, then a murmur, and steps...

But papa did not come back to our room. We waited in vain. The dawn began to break, we fell asleep, Đokica and I, but still he did not come.

When I awoke the sun was already high. I felt horribly tired, but couldn't close my eyes again, so I got up.

Everything seemed in some strange way solemn, but sad. Out of doors, the air was calm, a clear shaft of sunshine fell through the open window, and in front of the icon, a little flame still trembled in the lamp.

My mother and sister were as white as linen, their eyes were soft with tears and their faces seemed made of wax. Without letting even their fingers crack, they moved about on tiptoe, and in silence, except for a few whispered words of prayer. They did not give us any breakfast or ask if we were hungry, and my mother did not send me to school.

"What does it mean," I asked myself, "is there a death in the house, or has my uncle come back, and shall we have to bury him over again!"

Then I felt frozen with fear, remembering what had happened during the night, and I murmured mechanically, "Oh God, you know I prayed to you for papa," and again, "My God, kill that Zelenbać."

Without thinking I dressed, went out of my room, and turned naturally toward the big room, but recoiled at once as I felt my mother seize my arm. I turned to her, but she told me nothing, only putting her fingers to her lips; and then led me to the house door and left me there. She went back to her room, and I, following her with my eyes, did not know what to think. I slipped back on my toes to the big room, and put my eye to the keyhole.

I noticed carefully what I saw. The table was in the middle of the room, the chairs were scattered about and two or three were overturned. Strewn over the floor were thousands of cards, cigars, some whole and some trodden on, a broken coffee cup, and lying on a card gleamed one gold ducat. The tablecloth was pulled half off. On the table were scattered playing cards, overturned cups full of stubs and cigar ashes and some empty saucers into one of which someone had cleaned out his pipe. Besides this there were four empty candlesticks, in one of which the coarse paper which had been around the candle still burned with a line of black smoke that rose and broke against the ceiling.

On a chair by the table, with his back to the door, my father was sitting. His elbows were on the table, his head in his hands, he did not move.

I watched a long time but he remained motionless. I was frightened, and imagined some mysterious trouble. It seemed to me, I don't know why, that my father was dead, and I was surprised that a corpse could breathe. Then I thought that his strong arms were made of cardboard, and he could never use them to strike again, and other fancies of the same kind came into my mind.

God knows how long I would have stayed there watching if my mother's hand had not touched me again. She said nothing, but with her eyes she showed me the way to the house door.

And I, I don't know why, took off my hat, kissed her hand, and left the house.

That day was a Saturday.

When I went out into the street, all the world were following their ordinary lives and attending to their business. Sturdy peasants were bringing all sorts of things to the market place, merchants were examining the bags of vegetables and feeling of the lambs. Novak, the guard, shouted and directed where each man should put his cart. The children stole cherries. Sreten, the town crier, went through the streets, calling out that it was forbidden to let pigs run free in the streets. Trivko showed quarters of lamb, crying, "Come and buy roasts, and Jova the drunkard dabbled his feet in a puddle.

"What is the matter, is your shop closed?" Ignace the furrier who was passing at the moment asked me.

"Yes," I said.

"Mitar isn't ill?"

"No," I answered.

“He has gone away somewhere?”

“To the village,” I replied, and escaped from the courtyard.

And now there arrived two witnesses or boys of honor as they were called, that is to say two of my schoolmates who had been sent by the teacher to see why I had not come to school.

I never remembered until that moment that I should have gone. I caught up my books and a piece of bread, and looked at my mother and the witnesses.

“Say to the master, children, that Miša could not come earlier, that he was detained.”

That dear hand! Could I ever kiss it enough—when she was asleep—when she could not see me.

I do not know what happened at home while I was at school, but I know that when I returned everything was just as I had left it. My mother and sister were sitting with their hands on their knees, the dinner was not cooked, and they tiptoed by the big room and sighed as they had done when my uncle died. Đokica, out in the court, had tied a coffeepot to the cat’s tail and was watching it run. The clerks were sewing on blouses in their room, while Stojan had buried himself in the hay and was snoring as if it was midnight.

My father was sitting in the same place. He had not stirred. His fur-lined coat, fastened around his broad shoulders, gaped open at the waist from his heavy breathing.

Vespers had rung long ago.

The day was drawing to its close, and in our hearts reigned the same despair, to which no one could see any end, but only clouds that gathered thicker and thicker. Everything grew more intolerable, more terrible and more desperate.

“Return again, O my God, and have mercy.”

I sat on the doorstep, in front of the house. I held some schoolbook in my hand, but I did not read it. I saw in the window my mother’s white face, resting on her little feverish hand. My ears rang, and I could not think at all.

Suddenly a key grated in the lock. My mother disappeared from the window. I simply could not think.

The door of the big room was open. He stood on the threshold—he—my father!

His fez, pushed back a little, showed the hair which fell over his wide brow. His moustache drooped, and his face had grown sombre and much older. But his eyes, those eyes! They had not the least resemblance to what his eyes had been. They had simply vanished, sunk into his head; half covered by the lids, they moved slowly and looked out with no interest or expression. They looked for nothing and they noticed nothing. There was about them a sort of emptiness, like spectacles with the glass broken out. On his lips was a

sad gentle smile, such as had never been seen there before. It was the same expression that my uncle had had, when, just before his death, he asked for the sacrament.

He went slowly down the hall, opened the door of our room, looked in, and then passed through without a word. Having closed the door behind him, he went out into the street and walked slowly toward the house of his partner Ilija.

Toma, the latter's son, told me later that his father and mine were shut up together in a room, that they talked a long time about something in a low voice, that they had had paper brought in, and ink, and that they had written something and put seals on it. What this was he did not know, and no one ever found out.

At about half-past nine, we were all in bed except my mother, who sat with folded hands, gazing at the candle. At that moment the gate of the courtyard creaked. My mother blew out the candle and slipped into bed.

My heart beat under my blanket as if someone was hitting my chest with a hammer.

The door opened and my father came in. He moved once or twice across the room, and undressed without lighting the candle and went to bed. For a long time I heard him turning in his bed, and then I fell asleep.

I don't know how long I had slept. when I felt something damp on my forehead. I opened my eyes and watched. The full moon looked directly into our room and its rays fell on any mother's face, like spiderwebs.

Her eyes were closed, she had the look of a person who is very ill, and her breath came quick and short.

Above her stood my father, motionless, with his eyes riveted on her face.

After a little while he came to our bed, but merely looked at us and at my sister. Then he placed himself once more in the middle of the room, encircled it again with his eyes and muttered, "They are asleep.

But he shuddered at the sound of his own voice, and seemed to turn to stone. There, in the center of the room, he stood a long time without any change except that I saw his eyes soften from time to time as he looked, first at us and then at my mother.

We never made a move!

Then, moving quietly and without ever taking his eyes off us he carefully unhooked his silver pistol from the cloak stand where it hung, thrust it into his coat, pulled his fez over his eyes, and walking with quick long strides, went out of the house.

The door had hardly closed after him when my mother rose up in her bed. My sister did the same. You might have thought them spirits!

My mother got up quickly, but with caution, and went to the door. My sister followed her.

“Stay with the children,” whispered my mother, and went out.

I sprang up and started for the door. My sister caught me by the arm, but I slipped out of her grasp, and said:

“Stay with the children.”

As soon as I was out of the house I ran to the hedgerow and, slipping along it, hiding under the cherry trees, I got to the well, behind which I hid myself.

The night was divinely beautiful. The sky was clear, the moon brilliant, the air full of freshness, and nothing was moving anywhere. I saw my father look into the window of the clerk’s room, and then go on. At last he stopped under the shed roof, and drew out his pistol. But, just at this moment, my mother, coming from I don’t know where, appeared beside him.

The poor man was frozen with terror. He gazed at her with open mouth.

“Mitar, my dear, my Lord and Master, what do you mean to do?”

My father trembled. Stuck there like a candle, he looked at my mother with empty eyes, and said in a voice like a cracked bell:

“Go away, Marica, leave me, I am lost.”

“What! Lost, my Lord? May God help you, why do you say that?”

“I have thrown away everything!”

“But, my dear, it was you who first earned it!”

My father started back, and stood abashed before my mother.

“Yes, but all,” he said, “all, all.”

“And even if that is so?” said my mother.

“The horse too,” he replied.

“An old nag,” she answered.

“And the field!”

“Just dirt.”

He came close to my mother, and looked into the whites of her eyes, as if he would scorch her, but she stood like a saint of the good God.

“The house too,” he said, opening his eyes very wide.

“And what of it,” said my mother, “so long as you, yourself, are here strong and well?”

“Marica!”

“Mitar!”

“What do you mean, Marica?”

“I mean, may God grant you long life, and to our children. It is not the house nor the field that takes care of us, but you, our provider. We will never suffer from hunger while you are with us.”

My father seemed moved. Putting his hand on my mother’s shoulder he began:

“Marica! Do you...” His voice choked. He covered his eyes with his sleeve and was silent.



My mother took his hand.

“When we were married,” she said, “we had nothing but one blanket, just one, and only two or three tubs and barrels. While now, thank God, the house is full.”

I saw a drop fall, which shone in the moonlight, as it traced its path down my father’s sleeve.

“And have you forgotten that the garret is full of gall nuts?”

“Yes, it is full of them,” said my father, in a voice as soft as silk. He took his sleeve away from his eyes, and let his arms fall.

“What is that wretched ducat doing there? What is that money lying on the ground? Take it for your business!”

“We will put it into wheat!”

“Are we too old to begin again? By the grace of God we are well and our children are in good health. Let us pray to the good God and go to work.”

“Like the honest people we are!”

“You are not stupid like some men. I would not give your arms for all the money of Paranos and others like him.”

“And then we will buy another house.”

“We will bring up our children in the right path,” said my mother.

“So that they may not curse me when I am dead. How long it is since I have seen them!”

“Come and see them,” said my mother, and she led him like a child, by the hand.

In three bounds I was back in my room. I whispered to my sister, “get into bed,” and then pulled the blanket over my own head.

Those two crossed the threshold, just as the church bells rang for the early mass. They reverberate through the night and the Christian soul trembles. Like a bed of dry branches, their sound softens grief and pain, and breaks the chains of vanity, so that the contrite soul can speak with heaven.

“Rise, my son, and let us go to church!”



When I was in Belgrade last year, buying some merchandise, I saw Pero Zelenbać, at Topčider, in the dress of a convict. He was breaking stones.

*Pavle Popović*



### Simo Matavulj (1852–1908)

Simo Matavulj was born in Šibenik, Dalmatia, in 1852. He spent some time in a monastery, later finished a school of education. As a teacher, he served in various villages and towns in Dalmatia, Serbia, and Montenegro. He knew Italian and French well and in his later literary development showed influences of Italian verism and French naturalism. He spent the last years of his life in Belgrade, where he died in 1908.

Like many writers of his time, Matavulj was a strict realist, whose guiding principle was absolute truth and objectivity. In his stories and novels he described both peasants and city dwellers, depicting with cold objectivity the difficult, stifling life of sea fishermen and the middle-class malversations in Dalmatia; the heroic but backward people of Montenegro; and the machinations of the builders and makers in the bustling metropolis of Belgrade. His main collections of short stories are: *Iz Crne Gore i Primorja* (From Montenegro and the Seacoast, 1888, 1889), *Iz beogradskog života* (From Belgrade Life, 1891), and *Iz raznijeh krajeva* (From Various Parts, 1893). His best work, the novel *Bakonja Fra Brne* (1892) depicts in a humorous and satirical fashion the life in a Catholic cloister. His other novel, *Uskok* (The Rebel, 1892), describes the heroic struggle of the Montenegrins against the Turks.

Of interest is also Matavulj's autobiographical work, *Bilješke jednog pisca* (Notes of a Writer, 1903), in which he recorded his own thoughts and views on life, literature, and art.

## Povareta

Between the town and the island, the calm sea was as smooth as glass in the reflection of the hot sun, which was already sinking in the west. A boat was approaching the island, with two men in it, one rowing, the other sitting at the rudder. And although it was early in April, the sun was burning right in their eyes, and they turned their heads towards the hills, of which the more distant were still capped with snow. The boat was heavy. The rower, a man of middle age, looked more like a porter than a boatman, while the man at the rudder was young, tanned, and stalwart, dressed in naval uniform. As they were drawing away from the town, the old man plied him with questions, asking who he was, where he came from, whom did he know, how long had he been in the service, but receiving no answer, at length relapsed into silence. For the young islander, Juraj Lukešić from Krapan, was, like his fellow-islanders, taciturn, and disinclined to be conversational. He simply sat quietly and smoked, looking at the great world around him, and the sea and the sky.

Little by little the outlines of the island became discernible. First they distinguished a wood, and a high belltower; that is at one end of the island, while the village is at the other. An age-old pine forest with a monastery distinguish the island of Krapan from all the others.

The ruddy glow behind Krapan suddenly became more brilliant. The gulls began to dip into the surface of the water more frequently, and shoals of dolphins to shoot past the boat. That roused the young man from his reverie.

“In God’s name!” he muttered, and took the starboard oar from the old man.

Soon the boat’s keel grated on the sands of the landing place and at the same moment the bells of the monastery began to boom out their evening call to service. Juraj sprang ashore and stood for a moment bareheaded, in prayer. And the old man, before pushing off again, raised his cap in respect to the “Lord of Angels.”

With quick steps the sailor walked to the street which might be called the main one, as there are two others, but they are side streets and much shorter. The houses are of stone, dark with age, in one or more colors, with medium-sized windows and green shutters. Scarcely one was without a little courtyard for the donkeys and the store of dried old vine-stumps, dug up for firewood. If the young man had been a stranger who had chanced to come to the little island, he would certainly have been startled to find the village deserted, with not a living soul in sight, nor the sound of a human voice, as though a plague had carried off all the inhabitants, and the smoke was rising from deserted hearths. But Juraj never noticed this, for he knew that almost all his folk were

in their gardens, which are across the water in the villages of Razina and Jadrovac.

His home was at the end of the main street. He came to the back and walked quietly around, when he found a little girl of seven or eight standing on a high pile of vine-boughs over by the wall of the yard. When he came towards her, just as though he had fallen from heaven, the child wanted to scream, but the sailor whispered, "Joji!" and put his finger to his lips, and opened his arms, saying:

"Come, jump now, one! two! three!"

The little girl jumped into his arms. Interrupting her kisses, Juraj asked her:

"What were you doing on the woodpile? And where is Mummy?"

"Mummy is in the kitchen," answered Joji, holding his hand and dancing for joy. "And so you have come home! I jumped down because Miš said I would not dare."

Juraj took her into the yard, saying:

"You should not jump from so high, that is not good for little girls. And Miš is a young rascal to dare you. Come along now, quietly, and let's give Mummy a surprise."

"Let us jump at her," whispered Joji.

Juraj stood at the door behind the ground floor room, which occupied the whole length of the house. The two windows opposite were wide open and that gave light enough. His eyes took in everything; all was in its own place, just as he had left it, almost the same as his ancestors had left it: the shelves with the pots and pans, two big walnut chests, and a long oak table, with a large crucifix above it, a bench and some three-legged chairs. His glance rested on the outline of a woman who, near the hearth, had turned her face towards the fire. Juraj gave a little cough, the woman turned round, stood still a moment, and they met between the windows.

They called out at once:

"In God's Name, Juraj!"

"Mother! Dear mother!"

After a first embrace, they gazed into each other's eyes, those small, clear, blue eyes which each generation in our islands hands down faithfully to the next, just as they pass on a small head and rounded face, joy of life, sturdy faith, lack of imagination, and limited vocabulary. Juraj's mother, Luca, looked more like his elder sister, hardly ten years older, certainly not more. They both had a slightly blunt nose, short rounded chin, rosy and white cheeks. In fact, almost the only difference between them was in their earrings, which the mother wore in both ears, but the lad only in the right one.

Then they began a whole series of questions and answers, all beginning with "Why," as the islanders do when they are moved.

“Why, how are you, mother?”

“Why, I am well enough, Juraj, and how are you?”

“Why, I am fit and well. And how is dad?”

“Why, dad is quite well too.”

“Why, how is Miš?”

“Why, Miš is well too, and quite grown up.”

The mother was silent a moment, and took the biggest three-legged chair, which for centuries had been the special one of the head of the family, and dragged it near the fire. The lad sat down, and began to roll a cigarette. His mother began to scrape some fish in a bowl.

Luca stooped low over her work and when she spoke again, her voice was shaky, as though very tired.

“But you wrote that you would not come for another ten days.”

“Yes. I took you in ... to give you a little surprise.”

“And have you been right round the world?”

“Not quite round, but a very long way, right away to America.”

“And have you seen all sorts of countries?”

“All sorts.”

“And black men?”

“Yes, and yellow too ... And has the harvest been a good one?”

“No, hail spoiled the grapes and we had only thirty barrels of wine and six of oil.”

After another pause, Juraj said:

“Why, what news is there?”

As his mother did not reply at once, he added:

“And what news of Marica? Well, mother?”

“Not good news, my son,” muttered his mother in reply.

Juraj sprang up and cried:

“Lord of Angels! What is it?”

“It is not good news, no—no—,” repeated the woman, shaking her head, with a deep sigh.

“By Christ’s Passion! mother, what is the matter? Why don’t you speak? Is she ill?”

“She has been...”

“What—dead?”

“Yes...”

Juraj sank upon his chair. Livid, he stared aghast at his mother for a moment, and could scarcely utter: “Is it really true?”

“Yes, affirmed his mother, wiping a tear from her eyes. For a long time the lad sat and sobbed, exclaiming:

“Oh, mother! Oh, mother!”

At length he asked:

“By Jesus’ Wounds! What was the matter?”

“A tumor formed under the right arm. Old Matija took her to the town to the doctor, but he at once said, ‘It is not well.’ Then Matija took her to the wise women, old Grmina, and she said, ‘It is not well.’ Then Matja performed a vow and walked barefoot to the Lord of Angels. But nothing availed. It is now eight days since her sweet young body lies rotting in the blessed earth.

“Her—Oh, mother! Have you been to the poor girl’s grave?”

“God help you, my poor boy! Except myself, no one knows that you had chosen her; nor did she herself, poor child, know.”

“Povareta! Povareta!” cried Juraj, burying his face in his hands. “My poor little girl! And she never knew that I had vowed my soul to her, that I was ever thinking of her, on the sea, in America, and even when on duty. Look, yesterday in the town I bought a ring for her.”

He stood up and out of his breeches he took a box with a golden ring, which he handed to his mother. And again he sat down and wept.

“Mother, mother, I will die too.”

“God help you, crazy child!” cried Luca, putting the ring into the deep pocket of her skirt. “And are you a Christian or have you turned Jew? Are you going to work against God’s will? Come, here are our men. It would be a shame if you did not go to meet them. And it would be a greater shame if men knew why you are mourning, for you never claimed her hand, nor is it known that you intended to when you came home. Say your prayers for her soul, and go to meet the boats.”

She brought a basin of water, and he washed his hands and eyes, and rather abashed, taking his little sister, went out by the same way he had come.

“I have not been quite myself since yesterday.”

The villagers began to pass them, and even in the dark his uniform attracted attention. Voices could be heard saying: “Is that young Juraj?” “Why, yes, it is Juraj,” and “Hello, Juraj, how are you?”

As a matter of fact, Marko never hurried, even old Rišan the donkey knew this and when the crowd had passed by, he went on alone. Joji and Miš took their brother by the arm, while the father, crunching the gravel as he walked, began to tell his son all about the past summer, about their work, what they had spent, and all the little details of their daily life, which had occurred during the five and twenty months of the lad’s absence.

Luca was waiting for them in front of the house. On the bench there was a big earthen basin of water and towels. The children took Rišan to unload him and bed him down, but Marko quickly stripped off his jacket, waistcoat and shirt, bent his swarthy frame over the basin, showing all his ribs and spine. He washed his hands first, and then his face with clean water, and then his neck again with fresh water. When his wife had scrubbed and dried his back, he ran

indoors and put on clean clothes. Miš did the same, only Joji rubbed his shoulders.

On the supper table there were a bowl of greens, a dish of fried fish, crumbs of barley bread, and a jug of Abevanda or wine mixed with water.

Luca took from the foot of the crucifix two chaplets, giving one to her husband. All five of them turned to the sacred emblem, while the father said aloud: "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen." Then they all repeated together the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the other prayers that make up the rosary. This lasted about a quarter of an hour.

Supper lasted about twice as long. Nobody spoke. Luca nudged Juraj, who tried hard to swallow a few mouthfuls. Marko solemnly chewed each mouthful, resting his tired head on his palm. Only when they first poured out the wine, he looked quickly at Juraj, then at his wife, then took a drink, and finally said:

"Why, in God's Name, what a fine fellow this boy of ours is! What a grand young gentleman! Just wait a bit until we put a hoe in his hand."

All drank from the same jug, and then at a sign from the mother, the young folk went upstairs to bed. Luca brought a smaller jug and a glass, and when she poured it out it was obviously pure wine, black and thick. Marko drank to his son, "Welcome home!" and emptied his glass. Luca herself then drank half a glass to his welcome home, and stood the jug and glass before her son. At the same time his father put a pipe in front of him, filled it, and said:

"You spent the night in Zadar on the spree, I can see that; and today you had a good drink in town. Anybody can see that, eh?"

"Why?" asked the lad, forcing a smile.

"And what the devil did you see in America?"

"How do I know, dad? An order comes, and then it is forward! In front of us was a cruiser, the *Maria Teresa*, bound for Australia, a full six months' trip."

"And he has seen black and yellow men," added his mother, drumming on the table with her fingers.

"And do you really believe all the sailors tell you?" asked Marko, turning his head towards the ceiling with a yawn. "They are full of lies. But tell me, how much have you saved?"

"Fifteen thalers, father," answered Juraj.

"That's not much. Roko Tanfara brought back twenty. Give me another, and then to bed, and tomorrow after prayers, go and pay a visit to your uncle Josa and aunt Marija."

"Naturally," put in his mother.



As soon as his father had drunk his glass of wine, he stood up and lazily went out. Luca lit a little oil lamp and followed her husband. Juraj rested his head on his elbows, and remained in that position. From the room above there began to penetrate the deep and rhythmic snoring of his parents, which completed the picture of daily domestic life. Juraj, his head entirely occupied with one dreadful sentiment, began to listen attentively to the snoring. That everyday occurrence seemed to him something mysterious that marked the passage of the night, of everything that passes away forever, and he began to count the snores. He counted a hundred, two hundred, when a loud noise and a hoarse voice startled him from his reverie. Their cock was the first to decide to break the stillness of the village, and then the rest joined in rivalry.

As soon as all was quiet again, a terror gripped Juraj, and he remembered all the tales of his childhood, how the white graves around the Lord of Angels opened and the dead came out, especially the newly buried who had not yet grown accustomed to the solitude. There was the poor girl, Marica, who never knew of his love, who had only learned that very evening, and was now hurrying to him to receive the ring. A flame played upon the table, something crackled among the sparks, and Juraj, in terror, sprang to his feet. But that lasted only a second, for his real character, his farming and seafaring strength, overcame his momentary weakness, and with bowed head he began to recite prayers for her soul. Then he sat down again, put his weary head on his folded arms, and fell asleep.

Luca, as usual, was the first astir, and found her son thus. She lit the fire, brewed coffee, put it before him, and gently pushed him. The lad stood up, and looked sleepily, half-unconsciously at his mother. At last he took out his handsome new metal tobacco box, put some tobacco in a paper, rolled a cigarette, and began to puff. His mother sat opposite, with lowered eyes, tapping with her fingers on the table.

“Mother, I will not go out today.”

“Not even to church?” she asked, without raising her eyes.

“Nowhere. I will lie down in the little room, and you can tell people that I am ill.”

“That would be a sin. I had a dream last night, just before waking, at the dawn, when God sends dreams.”

Luca really wanted Juraj to ask what her dream was, but as she did not hear his voice, she continued in a low monotonous tone, her eyes downcast:

“I dreamt of the poor maid, of the Povareta. She came to me to the house when I was alone, at dusk. She came, poor child, pale and weeping, with her poor arm in bandages. She led me to the window, and with her whole arm pointed out to the sea, and to a great ship upon it, and you were on the ship. And she, poor girl, said sobbing, ‘There he is! He is coming! But I cannot ... this poor arm drags me down, down to the very depths. Let him take Pava!’”

Luca stopped, wiping her eyes upon her sleeve.

They were silent a long time. Then the mother raised her eyes, and looked at his face, on which there was gradually returning the joy of living.

At length he asked in a broken voice:

“Is that true, mother?”

“Yes, my son, and my witness is the blessed Lord of Angels.”

“Well, mother, let God’s will be done... Povareta... Poor child... Poor little girl...”

*Pavle Popović*

### Stevan Sremac (1855–1906)

Although Stevan Sremac was born in the Vojvodina city of Senta, he spent most of his life in Serbia proper. After graduating from the University of Belgrade, he served as a high school teacher in Niš and Belgrade. He died accidentally of blood poisoning in Sokobanja in 1906.

Sremac was a prolific writer of short stories and novels. A conservative by conviction, he attempted to revive the old historical legends in many of his early stories. His best works, however, deal with contemporary life in Niš, Belgrade, and Vojvodina. His best novels of provincial life, *Ivkova slava* (Ivko's House Patron Day, 1895), *Limunacija na selu* (Fireworks in the Village, 1896), *Pop Ćira i pop Spira* (Father Ćira and Father Spira, 1898), *Vukadin* (1903), and *Zona Zamfirova* (1907) are characterized by conventional realism, humor, and satire. Because of their high dramatic quality, many of these were later dramatized. Sremac's characters are usually small merchants, clerks, priests, artisans, and just simple people in small Serbian towns. A realist and a sharp observer, he was able to point out the changes sweeping Serbian society into a new era. Some of his stories, dealing with the vanishing way of life that had persisted for centuries, have an unforgettable nostalgic flavor. But it is his humor for which Sremac is best remembered. He is considered one of the best truly humorous Serbian writers.

Ivko's *Slava* (Excerpt)

The carousing guests again remained alone. In the yard they made a regular tent out of a rug and moved into it. By now they had officially usurped all the unfortunate Ivko's authority and rights, thus terminating his function as a host. The kitchen, the cellar, the food storage—everything was in their hands. Kalča took out his gun and cartridges and was killing chickens, while Kurjak, with the help of a drafted apprentice from the neighborhood, was plucking them, putting them on a spit, and roasting them. Everybody was busy. Kalča left for a short while (and then only with their permission), to run home quickly. Remembering, as a good family man, his dog Čapa, he went to fetch him. Čapa would be busy in the yard for three days.

"May I run home for a minute to get Čapa?" he begged. "It's three days since we've seen each other, and you haven't seen him either, so let me bring him. May I?"

On the way he would invite some other people to the *slava* and would send Gypsies over, should he run into some.

When he came back with Čapa, everybody rejoiced at the sight of the dog and greeted him; he, too, greeted them in his fashion, that is, wagging his tail. Immediately thereafter, he went to the corner where many leftovers had been thrown, quickly became lost in business, and did not bother to come over here any more.

In the afternoon of the third day, Ivko started for his home to make a last try, firmly resolved to send the guests away and get them off his chest, either with cajoling words or, if necessary, with force. And it was time! For, there had been no such carousal since Homer's time—then, in Ithaca, and now, in Ivko's home on April 23, 24, and 25. The pals took over in Ivko's house in the same way Penelope's suitors did in Ulysses' home. But, to Ivko's shame, Penelope's suitors treated themselves at least while Ulysses was away, whereas these here were doing it while Ivko was alive and present—and that was disgraceful indeed!

Upon arriving he entered his home slowly and cautiously.

"Oho, hi *pobratim*," yelled those in front of the tent.

"It's my *slava* and, you're nowhere to be found. Sit down, *pobratim*. Make yourself at home," shouted Smuk, who only now had thoroughly begun to feel the effects of drinking.

Ivko stopped and looked at them.

"People, have you ever seen that—my wife isn't here. Where are you coming from, *pobratim*?" Smuk asked him.

"I came from the market," Ivko muttered.

“Since you are coming from there, for God’s sake, have you seen my wife somewhere?”

“She is sitting at home like a good wife should and not like her husband, like you.”

“But where is she if she is at home?” Smuk insisted.

“At her own home, where else?”

“But whose house is this, nitwit?” Smuk asked grinding his teeth because it seemed to him that Ivko wanted to take away his house from him.

“Why, it’s mine, mine! What d’you think! Mine only. Not even this much”—and he pointed at the black under his fingernails—is mortgaged anywhere.

“What, this is your house?” Smuk wondered aloud. “People, did you hear the crazy man say this is his house? And where’s mine!”

“Well, your house is on your street.”

“Man, three days I haven’t stepped out of my house here, and he is teaching me which is mine! My Ivko, my poor *pobratim*.” Smuk felt sorry for him. “You better go and take a nap. Why d’you drink if it doesn’t agree with you! And whose is this street?”

“It’s my street!” Ivko said.

“Yes, yes, brother, yours the house, the street, the town, all Serbia is yours, too. Everything is yours, but we have nothing. Neither I nor Kurjak, nor Kalča, nobody has anything—only Ivko, the quilt-maker, is rich. And we’re homeless Gypsies. Thanks, thanks, *pobratim* Ivko, for what we have received from you.”

Ivko let out a groan and fell silent. He began to pace for a while in his yard, and suddenly returned as if a clever thought had occurred to him.

“Well, I was only joking.”

“It was no joke. I don’t allow any one to make fun of my home. That’s not for jokes.”

“Well, I admit it’s your house, yours alone, there.”

“It is!” Smuk affirmed resolutely. “Mine, and how! With this here gun I’ll kill every one who dares to take it away from me. Your house! Are you my wife’s brother that I should share it with you?” Smuk finished and put the gun across his knees.

“It’s yours, brother, yours,” Ivko condescended. “I only came to take you to my house a little. C’mon, company! C’mon, drop in to my place for drinks and eating!”

“Where to?” some asked him.

“To my house, didn’t I say?”

“Well, let’s go!” said Kalča and the Unknown.

“No, no,” Smuk refused. “I’m not like Ivko. He chases away his guests, but I don’t let them go. I’m a different man. To die together, if need be!”

"To die all together!" Kalča chimed in.

"Whoever moves one step from here will be shot down with this gun," Smuk was grinding his teeth. "Everybody stay here! Let Ivko go; he never was for company anyway," he added contemptuously.

"Please, *pobratim*, just one word," Ivko begged.

"Don't 'please' me for nothing. I'm not chasing you away as you're doing to us, but don't try to snatch away my quests, if you still like to live," Smuk told him. "And what I've gotten from you after so many years of friendship I regret very much... That I won't forgive you till I'm dead! Pour, Kalča! You are serving a gentleman, not a freeloader."

"Ho, ho, *pobratim*-Ivko," Kalča laughed at him, "you won't find a rabbit in that bush."

Ivko realized that he had gotten the short end again and that that gunpowder did not catch fire, so to speak. He left them alone and again began to walk around in the yard looking in a daze at its disarray. Without thinking he reached down and lifted a velvet collar, a cuff and a piece of somebody's cane. He turned around, looked at everybody and saw that no one was missing a collar. Who, in God's name, has forgotten this collar and broken his cane! Ivko asked himself. Did he drop his collar when he was being held back or thrown out? And who broke the cane and on what? It was no use asking them; who knows what they'll answer him? And devil knows whether they've seen it at all or whether they still remember it. We might never find out, Ivko thought walking perplexed, with his head lowered.

He was looking at the velvet collar and he became ashamed on account of his nasty neighbor Jordan, who even today was busying himself around the fence, sowing the morning-glory.

"*Pobratim*," somebody called, "come here for a glass of wine. We have washed the glasses to drink better."

"You leave me alone!"

"Well, go, go if you want to!" they all yelled back at him.

Ivko started to beseech them anew: "Please, brothers and friends, I beg you! Are you Christians and Serbs, or are you Turks or Tartars or something? Of what faith are you? Leave my house, that's all I'm asking of you."

"Well, well, listen to him talking!" Smuk sneered firing his gun in the air. "And since when is this house yours?"

"Since the day before yesterday it's no longer mine, I can see that," Ivko said. "Brothers, it's too much.

"Too much is only when someone is beating you," the Unknown answered and emptied his glass.

"You keep quiet, you bald devil!" Ivko shot back, but then calmed himself, took up a modest pose and continued: "Go away, haven't you had enough?!" he began to count on his fingers: "You came, sat down, drank, ate,

and drank again; you ate supper, breakfast and drank again; you slept, fired you guns, killed my chickens, beat my servants, upset the neighborhood, turned the house upside down, put me to shame... What else do you reckon to do? Are you Christians? Do you have a soul? I am not rich enough to afford such levy."

"No, no," everybody shouted, "you just go away!"

"Who is to go away?" Ivko flared up again. "Me? Well, you'll leave here, and singing! You'll jump like young brides when I summon the neighborhood ... and my boys and servants. Then I'll see what you'll do."

"To summon whom? Whom, man, speak!" Kalča roared at him. "Blood will flow like in olden times at Šele-kula, if that's what you want. I'll kill you off like a rabbit with this gun. Your feathers will fly all over the yard and neighborhood, like from a partridge, when I take aim with this here gun."

"Well ... you don't want to leave?"

"We won't!"

"Then I'll go and report you to the police."

"Have a nice trip!" Kalča laughed at him. "You are frightening a bear with a mouse. Ha, ha, ha... You won't catch a rabbit in that bush."

"O dear, what am I to do?" Ivko moaned walking off. "To complain—nobody'll believe me. I am ruined, through and through."

He went straight for the gate and began to pace to and fro in front of the house thinking hard and mumbling to himself: "To whom am I to tell of my disgrace! Is there in the whole world a complaint for something like this?" Then he returned. "Will you leave my house so that there'll be no scandal, neither about you nor about me?"

"We won't! We'll stay here," Kalča said.

"I beg you like this," Ivko pleaded taking off his cap and placing it before his feet on the ground. "Go home!"

"What are you talking about?" Kalča yelled. "Don't even mention it, Ivko. Stand behind that corner over there and don't come into the yard with those words 'cause you'll be killed ... you'll be as good as dead!" Kalča added loudly and took the gun from Smuk.

"God, am I to get killed on my *slava*?" Ivko lamented at the top of his voice, involuntarily stepping back behind the corner as if behind some demarcation line. "Why should I die? Go away!"

Kalča shouted even louder: "The books will be written and read about us: how *pobratim* killed *pobratim* and how a host was killed on his *slava*, see?"

Killed! Ivko shuddered peering from behind the corner, "and why killed?"

"Who killed him? the people will ask later.—Kalča, his *pobratim*, killed him because he was ashamed of their company and did not uphold his own *slava*.—Good that he killed him, they'll say, may his hand be consecrated. It

was not Kalča that killed him, it was his own *slava*. Didn't our ancestors, they'll say, respect and preserve the *slava* for five hundred years, even in those violent times, so that we Serbs, can be distinguished from the Greeks, Armenians, even Bulgarians?... And he to fritter it away in these free times! He had it coming to him, he deserved it, people will say. Kalča is not a heathen. Kalča did not kill a *pobratim*, he killed a mutt," he finished in the highest voice, rolling his bloodshot eyes and grinding his teeth.

"O St. George!" cried out Ivko, who was listening to all this behind the corner, beating his chest, "you caused all this. And now you keep mum instead of saving me. What tough luck I have! There is none other like me in the whole wide world. What should I do, to whom should I complain?" he wailed and started to go but immediately returned and stuck his head from behind the corner.

"I am asking you for the last time..."

"Not even a step this way!" Kalča shouted and aimed his gun, "otherwise you're dead this very minute."

"How long are you going to quarrel like Gypsies?" a voice of Jordan, the neighbor, was heard. "What is this, fellows? Were two days not enough for you? Are we in a Gypsy camp—so much shouting, arguing and scolding. I am a regular taxpayer..."

Ivko grunted. "Well, now I know it. It's to die, isn't it?"

"Why should I waste gunpowder for nothing. I'll sic Čapa on you," Kalča said and put the gun aside. "These shoes are killing me," he added taking off his shoes and putting on Ivko's slippers. "Your troubles are only beginning 'cause I need to loosen up a little."

"Ah, you stubborn oafs!" Ivko threatened again, starting off and buttoning his coat angrily when he saw how Kalča was making himself comfortable. "If you don't understand plain language, I'll see what you'll do when the cops come. If you want force, I know how to use it well, too."

"U-a-a-a! Sic on him!" it resounded from the yard. Kalča fired his gun after Ivko, who ran straight for the police hall.

"Did you see how ashamed he is of our company, the good-for-nothing mongrel!" Kalča swore.

"U-a-a-a! After him!" Ivko heard the howling behind him even though he was already at a safe distance from his house.

Vasa D. Mihailovich



**Vojislav Ilić (1862–1894)**

The son of a well-known poet, Vojislav Ilić was born in Belgrade. He failed to finish school and was forced to take various small clerical positions. Living for the most part in poverty, he wrote poetry extensively and soon became the leading Serbian poet in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Like so many Serbian artists of his time, he died young, of tuberculosis, in 1894.

His poetry represents a welcome change in the romantic poetry prevalent before him. He enlarged the thematic scope of Serbian poetry, and introduced formal innovations. He was especially successful in achieving harmony between idea and form. His poems can be classified into several distinct groups: elegiac poems; highly realistic descriptive poems, at times resembling prose descriptions; poems with love themes; patriotic poetry; social and satirical poems; and poems with classical motifs, in which Ilić tried to imitate the classical hexameter. The main characteristics of his poetry are intimacy and directness, depiction of nature as inspirational force, strong employment of sensory perceptions, and a firm control of form.

Ilić has influenced many poets immediately following him, thus paving the way for higher achievements in Serbian poetry in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

## Autumn

Like a proud, enchanting empress, with a sheaf of golden grain,  
There in the field Autumn stands. From her lovely head  
A wreath of leafy vines strangely descends  
Down to the sweet-scented grass.

In one hand she raises a cluster of grapes, frosted with dust,  
And kindly she smiles upon it; she is both tame and mild.  
She prepares the peace of evenings and days  
And offers a rich harvest.

How alluring it all is! In the old fireplace, quietly,  
Crackles the reddish flame, while fog covers the plains  
And fills the air with dew. The distant past comes alive  
With tales of olden times.

And late into the night, so softly, the murmur of speech,  
Till drowsiness holds sway; then a passionate whisper  
Sounds through the still home, but that fades quickly,  
And sleep descends slowly.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich*

## Tibullus

Before Venus' cold statue, there in the mild night's shadow,  
Stood young Tibullus the Quirite; astounded and speechless,  
Gazing at the strange figure. Under the wing of its rest  
In its peace slept the eternal city of Romulus.

But there stood the young Quirite  
And, fixing his sleep-dazed eyes there on the strange statue,  
Gazed at the wondrous sight.

Dawn has already broken, and there he stands, still awake.  
Once again dark night displays her luxurious beauty,  
But he dreams on. Then reproaches startle him from his dream;  
Subdued voices echo throughout the tumultuous city.

He hears them, all alone:  
"O, unhappy Tibullus, may mighty gods protect him,  
He loves the ice-cold stone!"

*Vasa D. Mihailovich*

## In Late Autumn

Listen, the wind is howling through our deserted pastures,  
It rolls dense layers of fog down into the humid dale.  
With a croak a raven flies up and circles over my head.  
The sky is dark like a veil.

Drenched wet, a colt snorts loudly, and gallops into the village,  
To the ancient and wretched house that he has already spied.  
On the threshold an old woman stands; she calls the wet chickens.  
A huge hound with a shaggy tail stands there at her side.

The wind whistles coldly through the dark and deserted pastures,  
It rolls dense layers of fog down into the humid dale.  
With a croak a raven flies up and circles over my head.  
The sky is dark like a veil.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich*



**Radoje Domanović (1873–1908)**

Born in the village of Ovsišće, Serbia, Radoje Domanović graduated from the University of Belgrade and spent his life teaching high school. Because of his liberal and critical views and his opposition to the prevailing political system, he was persecuted by the authorities. Only in the last years of his short life did he enjoy peace. He died mentally ill in his thirty-fifth year.

Domanović is the best Serbian satirist. Interested in politics but also a talented short story writer, he lashed out mercilessly at the wrongdoings and excesses in the political and social life of a society trying to find itself. In his allegories he castigated the ruthlessness of authority and the obsequiousness of its subjects (*Stradija*—The Suffering; *Danga*—The Stigma), incompetent leadership (*Vođa*—The Leader), and false promises of a better future (*Kraljević Marko po drugi put među Srbima*—Kraljević Marko for the Second Time Among the Serbs). Thus, Domanović satirizes not only the political conditions of the day but also some universal human weaknesses—a quality that has made his predominantly topical political satire retain its appeal to this day.

## The Leader

“Brothers and friends, I have listened to all your speeches, so I ask you now to listen to me. All our deliberations and conversations aren’t worth anything as long as we remain in this barren region. In this sandy soil and on these rocks nothing has been able to grow, even when there were rainy years, let alone in this drought the likes of which none of us has ever seen before.

“How long will we get together like this and talk in vain? The cattle are dying without food, and pretty soon we and our children will starve too. We must find another solution that’s better and more sensible. I think it would be best to leave this arid land and set out into the world to find better and more fertile soil because we simply can’t live like this any longer.”

Thus an inhabitant of some infertile province spoke once in a tired voice at some meeting. Where and when that was does not concern you or me, I think. It is important to believe me that it happened somewhere in some land long ago, and that is enough. To be honest, at one time I thought I had somehow invented this whole story, but little by little I freed myself from this nasty delusion. Now I firmly believe that all I am going to relate really happened and must have happened somewhere and sometime and that I could never by any means have made it up.

The listeners, with pale, haggard faces and blank, gloomy, almost uncomprehending gazes, with their hands under their belts, seemed to come alive at these wise words. Each was already imagining that he was in some kind of magic, paradisiacal land where the reward of backbreaking work would be a rich harvest.

“He’s right! He is right!” whispered the exhausted voices on all sides.

“Is this place near ... r ... by?” a drawn-out murmur was heard from a corner.

“Brothers! another began with a somewhat stronger voice. “We must follow this advice immediately because we can’t go on like this any longer. We have toiled and strained ourselves, but all has been in vain. We have sown seed that could have been used for food, but the floods came and washed the seed and soil away from the slopes so that only bare rock was left. Should we stay here forever and labor from morning to night only to remain hungry and thirsty, naked and barefooted? We’ve got to set out and look for better and more fertile soil where hard work will yield plentiful crops.”

“Let’s go! Let’s go immediately because this place is not fit to be lived in anymore!” Whispering arose, and each began walking away, not thinking where he was going.

“Wait, brothers! Where are you going?” the first speaker started again. “Sure we must go, but not like this. We’ve got to know where we’re going.

Otherwise we might end up in a worse situation instead of saving ourselves. I suggest that we choose a leader whom we'll all have to obey and who'll show us the best and most direct way."

"Let's choose! Let's choose somebody right away," was heard all around.

Only now did the arguing arise, a real chaos. Everybody was talking and no one was either listening or able to hear. They began splitting up in groups, each person mumbling to himself, and then even the groups broke up. In twos, they began taking each other by the arm, talking, trying to prove something, pulling each other by the sleeve and motioning silence with their hands. Then they all assembled again, still talking.

"Brothers!" suddenly resounded a stronger voice which drowned out all the other hoarse dull voices. "We can't reach any kind of agreement like this. Everybody is talking and nobody is listening. Let's pick a leader! Whom among us can we choose? Who among us has traveled enough to know the roads? We all know each other well, and yet I for one wouldn't put myself and my children under the leadership of a single person here. Rather, tell me who knows that traveler over there who's been sitting in the shade on the edge of the road since this morning?"

Silence fell. All turned toward the stranger and sized him up from head to toe.

The traveler, middle-aged, with a somber face which was scarcely visible on account of his beard and long hair, sat and remained silent as before, absorbed in thought, and tapped his big cane on the ground from time to time.

"Yesterday I saw that same man with a young boy. They were holding each other by the hand and going down the street. And last night the boy left the village but the stranger stayed here.

"Brothers, let's forget these silly trifles so we won't lose any time. Whoever he is, he's come from far away since none of us knows him and he most certainly knows the shortest and best way to lead us. It's my judgment he's a very wise man because he's sitting there silently and thinking. Anyone else would have already pried into our affairs ten times or more by now or would have begun a conversation with one of us, but he has been sitting there the whole time quite alone and saying nothing.

"Of course, the man's sitting quietly because he's thinking about something. It can't be otherwise except that he's very smart," concurred the others and began to examine the stranger again. Each had discovered a brilliant trait in him, a proof of his extraordinary intelligence.

Not much more time was spent talking, so finally all agreed that it would be best to ask this traveler—whom, it seemed to them, God had sent—to lead them out into the world to look for a better territory and more fertile soil. He should be their leader, and they would listen to him and obey him without question.

They chose ten men from among themselves who were to go to the stranger to explain their decision to him. This delegation was to show him the miserable state of affairs and ask him to be their leader.

So the ten went over and bowed humbly. One of them began talking about the unproductive soil of their area, about the dry years and the misery in which they all found themselves. He finished in the following manner:

“These conditions force us to leave our homes and our land and to move out into the world to find a better homeland. Just at this moment when we finally reached agreement, it appears that God has shown mercy on us, that he has sent you to us—you, a wise and worthy stranger—and that you’ll lead us and free us from our misery. In the name of all the inhabitants here, we ask you to be our leader. Wherever you might go, we’ll follow. You know the roads and you were certainly born in a happier and better homeland. We’ll listen to you and obey each of your commands. Will you, wise stranger, agree to save so many souls from ruin? Will you be our leader?”

All during this imploring speech, the wise stranger never lifted his head. The whole time he remained in the same position in which they had found him. His head was lowered, he was frowning and he said nothing. He only tapped his cane on the ground from time to time and—thought. When the speech was over, he muttered curtly and slowly without changing his position, “I will!”

“Can we go with you then and look for a better place?”

“You can!” he continued without lifting his head.

Enthusiasm and expressions of appreciation arose now, but the stranger did not say a word to any of it.

The ten informed the gathering of their success, adding that only now did they see what great wisdom this man possessed.

“He didn’t even move from the spot or lift his head at least to see who was talking to him. He only sat quietly and meditated. To all our talk and appreciation he uttered only four words.”

“A real sage! Rare intelligence!” they happily shouted from all sides, claiming that God himself had sent him as an angel from heaven to save them. All were firmly convinced of success under such a leader whom nothing in the world could disconcert.

And so it was decided to set out the next day at daybreak.

On the next day everyone who had the courage to go on a long journey assembled. More than two hundred families came to the appointed place. Only a few remained at home to look after the old homestead.

It was indeed sad to look at this mass of miserable people whom bitter misfortune had forced to forsake the land on which they were born and in which lay the graves of their ancestors. Their faces were haggard, worn-out and sunburned. The suffering of many long, laborious years showed its effect



on them and conveyed a picture of misery and bitter despair. But in this very instant there was seen the first glimmer of hope—mixed with homesickness, to be sure. A tear flowed down the wrinkled face of many an old man who sighed desperately and shook his head with an air of evil foreboding. He would rather remain for some time so that he too could die among these rocks instead of looking for a better homeland. Many of the women lamented loudly and bade farewell to their dead loved ones, whose graves they were leaving.

The men were trying to put up a brave front and were shouting, “Well, do you want to keep on starving in this damned land and living in these shacks? Actually they would have liked best of all to take the whole cursed region and their run-down houses with them if it had been possible.

There was the usual noise and shouting as in every mass of people. Both men and women were restless. The children were shrieking in cradles on their mother’s backs. Even the livestock were a bit uneasy. There were not too many cattle, a calf here and there and then a lean, shaggy hack with a large head and fat legs, on which they were loading old rugs, bags and even two sacks over the pack saddle, so that the poor animal swayed under the weight. Yet it managed to stay up and neigh from time to time. Others were loading donkeys; the children were pulling at dogs on leashes. Talking, shouting, cursing, wailing, crying, barking, neighing—all abounded. Even a jackass brayed a few times. But the leader did not utter a word, as if the whole affair were none of his business. A real wise man!

He just sat pensively and silently, with his head down. Now and then he spat; that was all. But on account of his strange behavior, his popularity grew so much that all would have gone through fire and water, as they say, for him. The following conversations could be heard:

“We should be happy to have found such a man. Had we gone ahead without him, God forbid! We would have perished. He has real intelligence, I tell you! He’s silent. He hasn’t said a word yet! said one while looking at the leader with respect and pride.

“What should he say? Whoever talks a lot doesn’t think very much. A smart man, that’s for sure! He only ponders and says nothing, added another, and he too looked at the leader with awe.

“It’s not easy to lead so many people! He has to collect his thoughts because he’s got a big job on his hands, said the first again.”

The time came to get started. They waited awhile, however, to see if anyone else would change his mind and come with them, but since no one came, they could not linger any longer.

“Shouldn’t we get going?” they asked the leader.

He got up without saying a word.

The most courageous men immediately grouped around him to be at hand in case of danger or an emergency.

The leader, frowning, his head down, took a few steps, swinging his cane in front of himself in a dignified fashion. The gathering moved along behind him and shouted several times, "Long live our leader!" He took a few more steps and bumped into the fence in front of the village hall. There, naturally, he stopped; so the group stopped too. The leader then stepped back a bit and rapped his cane on the fence several times.

"What do you want us to do? they asked.

He said nothing.

"What should we do? Tear the fence down! That's what we're to do. Don't you see that he's shown us with his cane what to do?" shouted those who stood around the leader.

"There is the gate! There is the gate!" screamed the children and pointed at the gate which stood opposite them.

"Hush, quiet, children!

"God help us, what's going on?" A few women crossed themselves.

"Not a word! He knows what to do. Tear the fence down!"

In an instant the fence was down as if it had never been there.

They went past the fence.

Scarcely had they gone a hundred steps when the leader ran into a large thorn bush and stopped. With great difficulty he managed to pull himself out and then began tapping his cane in all directions. No one budged.

"And what's the matter now?" shouted those in the rear.

"Cut the thorn bush down!" cried the ones standing around the leader.

"There's the road, behind the thorn hushes! There it is!" screamed the children and even many people in the back.

"There's the road! There's the road!" jeered those around the leader, mimicking angrily. "And how can we blind men know where he's leading us? Not everyone can give orders. The leader knows the best and most direct route. Cut down the thorn bush!"

They plunged in to clear the way.

"Ouch," cried someone who was stuck in the hand by a thorn and someone else whose face was struck by a blackberry branch.

"Brothers, you don't get something for nothing. You have to strain yourselves a bit to succeed," answered the bravest in the group.

They broke through the bush after much effort and moved forward.

After wandering along a little farther, they came upon a bunch of logs. These, too, were thrown to the side. Then they continued.

Very little ground was covered on this first day because they had to overcome several similar obstacles. And all this on little food because some had brought only dried bread and a little cheese while others had only some bread to satisfy their hunger. Some had nothing at all. Fortunately it was summer-time so that they found a fruit tree here and there.

Thus, although on the first day only a small stretch lay behind them, they felt very tired. No great dangers turned up and there were no accidents either. Naturally, in such a large undertaking the following events must be considered trifles: a thorn struck one woman's left eye, which she covered with a damp cloth; one child bawled and limped after he bumped into a log; an old man tripped over a blackberry bush, fell down and sprained his ankle; after ground onion was put on it, the man bravely endured the pain and, leaning on his cane, limped forward valiantly behind the leader. (To be sure, several said that the old man was lying about the ankle, that he was only pretending because he was eager to go back.) Soon, there were only a few who did not have a thorn in their arm or a scratched face. The men endured it all heroically while the women cursed the very hour they departed and the children cried, naturally, because they did not understand that all this toil and pain would be richly rewarded.

Much to everyone's happiness and joy, nothing at all happened to the leader. Frankly, if we are to tell the truth, he was very much protected, but still, the man was simply lucky. At the first night's campsite everyone prayed and thanked God that the day's journey was successful and that nothing, not even the slightest misfortune, had befallen the leader. Then one of the bravest men began to speak. His face had been scratched by a blackberry bush, but he simply paid no attention to it.

"Brothers," he began. "One day's journey lies successfully behind us, thank God. The road is not easy, but we've got to stick it out because we all know that this difficult road will lead us to happiness. May almighty God protect our leader from any harm so that he may continue to lead us so successfully."

"Tomorrow I'll lose my other eye if things go like today!" one of the women muttered angrily.

"Ouch, my leg!" the old man cried out, encouraged by the woman's remark.

The children kept on whining and crying, and the mothers had a hard time silencing them so that the spokesman could be heard.

"Yes, you'll lose your other eye," he burst out in anger, "and may you lose both! It's no big misfortune for one woman to lose her eyes for such a great cause. For shame! Don't you ever think about the well-being of your children? Let half of us perish in this endeavor! What difference does it make? What's one eye? Of what use are your eyes when there's someone who's looking for us and leading us to happiness? Should we abandon our undertaking merely on account of your eye and the old man's leg?"

"He's lying! The old man's lying! He's only pretending so he can go back," resounded voices from all sides.

“Brothers, whoever doesn’t want to go any farther,” said the spokesman again, “let him go back instead of complaining and stirring up the rest of us. As far as I’m concerned, I’m going to follow this wise leader as long as there’s anything left in me!”

“We’ll all follow! We’ll all follow him as long as we live!”

The leader was silent.

Everyone began looking at him and whispering:

“He’s absorbed in his thoughts!”

“A wise man!”

“Look at his forehead!”

“And always frowning!”

“Serious!”

“He’s brave! That’s seen in everything about him.”

“You can say that again! Fence, logs, briars—he plows through it all. He somberly taps his cane, saying nothing, and you must guess what he has in mind.”

Thus the first day passed, and there followed more days with the same success. Nothing of very great importance happened, only trivial occurrences: they tumbled headfirst into a ditch, then into a ravine; they brushed against hedges and blackberry bushes; they stepped on bottles; several broke arms and legs; some suffered blows on the head. But all this torment was endured. A few old men were left lying dead on the road. “They would have died even if they had stayed at home, not to mention on the road!” the spokesman said, encouraging the others to continue. A few smaller children, one to two years old, also perished. The parents stoically suppressed their heartaches because it was God’s will. And the smaller the child, the less the grief. “When they are younger, the sorrow is less. God grant that the parents never lose their children when they have reached the marrying age. If the children are so destined, it’s better that they die early. Then the sorrow is not so great!” the spokesman consoled them again. Many limped and staggered. Some wrapped cloths around their heads and put cold compresses on their bruises. Others carried their arms in slings. All were ragged and cut up. Their clothes hung in shreds, but they nevertheless pushed happily forward. All this would have been easier to bear if they had not been racked with hunger many times over. But they had to keep going.

One day, something more significant happened.

The leader was walking in front, surrounded by the bravest men in the group. (Two of them were missing, and no one knew where they were. It was the general opinion that they had betrayed their cause and fled. On one occasion the spokesman said something about their shameful treason. Only a few believed the two had died on the way, but they did not voice their opinion in order not to arouse the others.) The rest of the group was in line behind them.

Suddenly there appeared an exceedingly large and deep, rocky gorge—a real abyss. The slope was so steep that they did not dare take a step forward. Even the bravest ones stopped short and looked at the leader. Frowning, absorbed in thoughts with his head down, he boldly stepped forward, tapping his cane in front, first to the right, then to the left in his characteristic way. Many said it all made him seem still more dignified. He neither looked at anyone nor said anything. On his face there was no change of expression or trace of fear as he got nearer and nearer to the precipice. Even the very boldest men became pale as death but no one dared warn the valiant, wise leader. Two more steps and he was at the edge. In morbid fear and with wide open eyes, they all trembled. The bravest men were just on the point of holding the leader back, even if it meant a breach of discipline, when he stepped once, twice, and plunged into the ravine. There arose bewilderment, wailing, screaming; fear got the upper hand. Some began to flee.

“Hold it, brothers! What’s the hurry? Is this the way you keep your word? We must follow this wise man because he knows what he’s doing. He would be insane to ruin himself. Forward, after him! This is the biggest and perhaps the last hazard, the last hurdle. Who knows? Maybe on the other side of this ravine we’ll find a magnificent, fertile land which God meant for us. Forward! Without sacrifice we’ll get nowhere!”

Such were the spokesman’s words of advice and he too took two steps forward, disappearing into the ravine. The bravest followed and then everyone else plunged in.

There was wailing, groaning, tumbling, moaning on the steep slope of this vast gorge. One would have sworn that no one would ever get out alive, much less unhurt and in one piece. But human life is tenacious. The leader was unusually lucky. He hung onto bushes as he fell so that he was not hurt. He managed to pull himself together and climb out. While wailing, moaning and weeping resounded below, he sat motionless, pensively silent. A few who were battered and angry began to curse him but he paid no heed. Those who luckily were able to grab hold of a bush or a tree while falling began trying strenuously to climb out. Some had cracked heads so that blood was gushing out of their faces. There was nobody in one piece except the leader. They all sullenly frowned at him and groaned in agony, but he did not even lift his head. He was silent and assumed the reflective pose of a real sage!

Some time passed. The number of travelers was becoming smaller and smaller. Each day took its toll. Some left the group and turned back.

Of the large number that started, only about twenty remained. Their haggard, exhausted faces mirrored signs of despair, doubt, fatigue and hunger, but no one said as much as a word. They were as silent as their leader and kept plodding along. Even the spirited spokesman shook his head desperately. The road was difficult indeed.

Their numbers diminished daily until there were only ten. With despondent faces, they only groaned and complained instead of conversing.

They looked more like cripples than men. Some were on crutches. Some held their arms in slings fastened around their necks. On their heads were numerous bandages and compresses. Even if they had wanted to make new sacrifices, they could not because there was almost no room on their bodies for any new wounds.

Even the strongest and bravest among them had already lost faith and hope, but they still struggled farther; that is, they somehow hobbled along with great effort, complaining, racked with pain. What else could they do if they could not go back? So many sacrifices and now to abandon the journey!

Twilight descended. Limping along on crutches, they suddenly saw that the leader was not in front of them anymore. Another step and they all plunged into another ravine.

“Oh, my leg! Oh, my hand!” resounded the wailing and groaning. One weak voice even cursed the worthy leader, but then became silent.

When the sun came up, there sat the leader, the same as on that day when he was chosen. There was not the least change in his appearance.

The spokesman climbed out of the ravine, followed by two others. Disfigured and bloody, they turned around to see how many were left, but they were the only ones. Deathly fear and hopelessness filled their hearts. The region was unknown, hilly, rocky—no paths anywhere. Two days before they had come upon a road but left it behind. The leader led them that way.

They thought about all the many friends and relatives who had died on this fantastic trip. A sadness stronger than the pain in their crippled limbs overcame them. They had witnessed their own destruction with their own eyes.

The spokesman went up to the leader and began speaking with a tired, trembling voice full of pain, despair, and bitterness.

“Where are we going now?”

The leader was silent.

“Where are you taking us and where have you brought us? We placed ourselves and our families in your hands and we followed you, leaving behind our homes and our ancestors’ graves in hopes that we could save ourselves from ruin in that barren land. But you have ruined us in a worse way. There were two hundred families behind you and now look how many there are!”

“You mean not everyone is here?” mumbled the leader without lifting his head.

“How can you ask such a question? Look up and see! Count how many of us are left on this unfortunate journey! Look at the shape we’re in! It would be better to have died than to be crippled like this.”

“I can’t look at you!”

“Why not?”

“I’m blind.”

A dead silence.

“Did you lose your sight during the journey?”

“I was born blind!”

The three hung their heads in despair.

The autumn wind blew sinisterly through the mountains and brought down the withered leaves. A fog hovered over the hills, and through the cold, misty air fluttered ravens’ wings. An ill-boding cawing resounded. The sun was concealed behind the clouds, which were rolling and hurrying along farther and farther.

The three looked at each other in utter horror.

“Where can we go now?” mumbled one gravely.

“We don’t know!”

*W. Murray Linker*





**Branislav Nušić (1864—1938)**

Branislav Nušić was born in Belgrade. He served as a consul in various Balkan cities. He spent the rest of his life active at several Serbian theaters, mostly in Belgrade. He died in that city, celebrated as the greatest Serbian playwright since Jovan Sterija Popović.

Nušić was a prolific writer of plays, stories, novels, and travelogs. He achieved his greatest success with comedies. He wrote his first comedy, *Narodni poslanik* (A Member of the Parliament), in 1883 and his last, *Pokojnik* (The Deceased), in 1937. Nušić had a great sense for humorous situations and unexpected turns of events, for genuinely funny lines, and for popular topics. Whether he depicted corruption among primitive politicians (*Narodni poslanik*), misuse of power by provincial authorities (*Sumnjivo lice*, A Suspect, 1888), false morality (*Ožalošćena porodica*, A Bereaved Family, 1934), or intellectual dishonesty (*Dr*, A Ph.D., 1936), Nušić was always on target, eliciting hearty laughs from the spectators. Yet, in his frequent satire of social mores, he was without rancor. His plays have lost little of their appeal and are still performed often today.

## The Cabinet Minister's Wife

## Act III

## XIV

## VASA, ŽIVKA, THE FAMILY

- VASA: *(coming in from the street)* Živka, here they come.
- ŽIVKA: Who?
- VASA: The family.
- DARA: I'll withdraw! *(Leaves.)*
- VASA: *(opening the back door)* Come in! *(A complete gallery of various comic characters in old-fashioned dress comes in. The older women, Savka and Daca, wear fezes and libades (traditional velvet jackets; Soja has a small hat adorned with feathers. Aunt Savka, Aunt Daca, Nova, Reverend Father Arsa's son, Uncle Panta and his son Mile, Uncle Jakov, Sava Mišić and Pera Kalenić present themselves. They all come to Živka, the men shaking hands with her, and the women kissing her.)*
- SAVKA: *(kissing Živka)* And you, Živka, you forgot me.
- DACA: *(kissing Živka)* Oh, my sweet Živka, how long it's been since I last saw you. You look so well, ts, ts, ts *(spitting)*—against the evil eye!
- PANTA: Eh, Živka, I want you to know that no one was so happy to hear about your good luck as I was.
- JAKOV: I've come to see you several times, Živka, but you always seemed to be busy.
- SOJA: *(kissing her)* My sweet little Živka, of all the family you've always been my favorite.
- ŽIVKA: *(having shaken hands with all of them)* Thank you for coming. Sit down, will you. *(The elders sit down and the young remain standing.)* Forgive me, please, for receiving you all together like this. I can see for myself that this isn't very nice, but you simply can't imagine how terribly busy I am. I had no idea that being a cabinet minister's wife was such a hard task. But you'll come again, God willing, you'll visit me some time again.

- VASA: *(who remained in his feet, stands by Živka)* Of course we'll call on you again. This is just a ... well, we'll see you again.
- ŽIVKA: How are you, Aunt Savka!
- SAVKA: *(somewhat ruffled)* Well, I'm fine ...
- ŽIVKA: Oh, there ... I know why you're cross with me, but don't think I've forgotten you. And you, Aunt Daca?
- DACA: Oh, I beg you, my sweet, to forgive me. I've been telling my Christina for a long time: "Let's go to Živka, we should congratulate her, who else will do it if not the family? And she tells me: "No, mother, we haven't crossed her doorstep for over a year, and she'll say we're rushing to see her now because she's a minister's wife! It's true that we didn't cross your threshold, but that's because you've been spreading gossip about Christina, but I told her: "Well, let people say that we rushed to her because she is a minister's wife, who should rush to see her if not we, her closest kin!"
- ŽIVKA: And you, Uncle Panta, I haven't seen you for ages, how are you?
- PANTA: Well, what should I tell you, Živka, not too well: everything seems to be turning against me. I said to myself I hope things will begin to clear up for me now you're in authority. I reckon you'll take care of your own kin and support them.
- VASA: Of course she will, who else would do it?
- ŽIVKA: I haven't seen you either, Soja?
- SOJA: Strange, for they say I'm being seen too much. You can't please everybody. If I stay at home, they tell tales about me, if I go out, they do the same. If it were people in general, I could take it, but the family, my own family!
- VASA: Who else would do it if not the family!
- DACA: *(maliciously, as if to herself)* No one would tell tales if there were no tales to tell.
- SOJA: *(irritated)* Yes, you're right, Aunt Daca; would they slander your house if there were no reason for it?
- DACA: The likes of you have slandered it!
- SOJA: I may be this or that, but I at least have not taken my school leaving certificate the way your daughter has.
- DACA: *(jumps to her feet, bursting out)* You've taken all the exams in the world, you bitch!

- SOJA: (*jumps up too, thrusting her face into Daca's*) Maybe, but I haven't taken that one.
- DACA: Oh, oh, oh, let go of me!... (*Runs toward her to grab her by the hair.*)
- VASA: (*steps between them, trying to put an end to their quarrel*) Stop it, aren't you ashamed of yourselves! Can't you talk to each other for five minutes like civilized members of a family! (*The other men also come to restore peace among them.*)
- DACA: Of course, that's what happens when you have the likes of her in the family.
- SOJA: Sweep the dirt in front of your own house first, and throw it on others afterwards.
- VASA: Stop it, shut up, you two! It's shameful, really, and you pretending to be a minister's family too!
- ŽIVKA: (*to Vasa*) There! Didn't I tell you ?
- VASA: Quite! And they're nagging at me: "Come, Uncle Vasa, take us to Živka! What for? To disgrace both me and yourselves. Go now, each of you two to her own place, and once you go out of here you may tear each other's hair as long as you wish. (*The two women return to their respective places.*) And you, Živka, forgive them. Just a small family argument.
- ŽIVKA: It was hardly pleasant for me, but ... (*intent on brushing off the incident*) How are you, Uncle Jakov?
- JAKOV: Oh, you know how it is when one lives in parts, so to say. The devil only knows what kind of fate mine is: I was educated on and off, bit by bit, I've always been like that—nothing succeeds with me. Yet I've always been comforting myself, saying: "Wait, Jakov, your day must come sometime too! And that's what I'm doing—waiting, what else can I do?
- ŽIVKA: And you, Sava?
- SAVA: (*a burly man with a big belly*) Don't ask me that—I'm wearing myself out with worry.
- ŽIVKA: What's eating you?
- SAVA: Injustice. I've been a victim of injustice all my life. I'll tell you about it in good time.
- ŽIVKA: (*to Pera Kalenić*) And ... (*embarrassed*) you ... ? (*to Vasa*) Is this gentleman related to us?
- VASA: He says he is.

KALENIĆ: Of course I am.

ŽIVKA: I don't remember you.

VASA: Neither do I! Maybe you, Savka...

*(They all stare at Kalenić.)*

SAVA: I'm not sure that the gentleman is of our family.

DACA: Nor am I!

*(several of them shrugging their shoulders)* Nor I.

KALENIĆ: You know, I'm related to you through the distaff side.

SOJA: Well, I'm the distaff side too, but I don't know you.

DACA: *(through her teeth)* Strange!

VASA: All right, since it's the distaff side, tell us whose son you are.

KALENIĆ: My mother died twelve years ago and she told me on her deathbed: "My son, I'm not leaving you alone in the world; if you find yourself in need, turn to Aunt Živka, the cabinet minister's wife, she's your relative!"

VASA: What was your mother's name?

KALENIĆ: Mara.

VASA: And your father's?

KALENIĆ: Krsta.

VASA: I can't remember any Mara or Krsta in our family, for the life of me.

ŽIVKA: Neither can I.

KALENIĆ: All this confusion may be caused by the fact that we weren't called Kalenić before: our surname was Marković then.

VASA: Marković? I know even less now.

KALENIĆ: It doesn't matter anyway. I know that you're my family, I don't deny it. I'd die here this very moment rather than repudiate my family.

VASA: Oh, well, it's not a question of dying, but... .

ŽIVKA: Well, since the man says... .

VASA: Right, since he says so, there's nothing to be done.

ŽIVKA: Well then, how are you?

KALENIĆ: Thank you, Aunt Živka, thank you for your interest in me. I'm so glad to see you looking so fresh. You're in wonderful shape, Auntie.

- VASA: Look, Živka, you have little time to spare, we all know it, so, if you agree we had better get to the heart of the matter. Go ahead, ask each one of us for our wishes and you'll see what you could do for us.
- PANTA: If she won't have things done for us now, there's no knowing when she would.
- VASA: Let each one of us tell her what's on his heart, I'll note it down, and Živka will see then; what can be done—can be done, what can't be done—can't.
- DACA: When one really wishes to help anyone, everything can be done, the question is only whether everyone deserves to be helped, for there are people who....
- SOJA: (*cutting in*) I have just one request, Živka—I beg you to help me pass my final examinations.
- DACA: (*exploding*) There she goes again wagging her tongue.
- VASA: Silence, I tell you!
- SAVA: Silence, for if I should see red, I'll silence you both easily!
- KALENIĆ: Listen, Aunt Daca and you, cousin Soja. As you see, Aunt Živka has received us kindly, as is fitting for a family to be received. And we shall now tell her our wishes and beg her to act on our behalf. I'm sure Aunt Živka will do that. You all know what a kind heart she has. But we, for our part, are obliged to respect both her and her home, which is, in this case, a minister's home. But if we go on as we started, and hurl insults at each other, we'll show that we don't pay due respect to this home. So I'm begging you, Aunt Daca, and you, cousin Soja, to control your tempers.
- DACA: (*to Savka sitting next to her*) I wonder how I came to be this man's aunt.
- SAVKA: I've no idea, I don't know him.
- DACA: Neither do I.
- PANTA: (*to Jakov sitting at his side*) For God's sake, do you know who this is?
- JAKOV: I've never seen or heard of him in my Life.
- VASA: Well then, we'd better stop wasting time and come to the point, for Živka can only spare us a little time.
- ŽIVKA: Quite true, I've no time. I'm just expecting some important visitors from the diplomatic corps.

- VASA: Of course! Here we go! (*He takes out a sheet of writing paper.*)  
Now, Aunt Savka, what is it you'd like to ask Živka for?
- SAVKA: (*still ruffled*) Let Živka ask me that and I'll tell her.
- ŽIVKA: Well, Aunt Savka, you're sitting on the top of my head with those two hundred dinars of yours! Leave her out, Uncle Vasa, since she's unwilling to talk to me in a friendly family way, but has to go against the grain all the time.
- SAVKA: There's no going against the grain, I just want what's mine.
- ŽIVKA: All right, you'll get it. Write it down, Uncle Vasa,—she's to be given her two hundred dinars. There!
- VASA: (*having written it down*) And you, Daca, is there anything you'd like to ask of Živka?
- DACA: Well, there is something, for my Christina. I'd like to ask you, Živka, to have the exam acknowledged and to have the child admitted to the school again for—as it is—she's been left in the middle of the road, so to speak. She made a mistake, I admit it—I beg a certain person not to cough—there, I admit it, but high school lady teachers also make mistakes nowadays, so why shouldn't their pupils do the same? And she didn't make the mistake because she was wanton or fast, as some people are, but she did it for the sake of science. I beg a certain person not to cough!
- VASA: Soja, stop coughing!
- DACA: For the sake of science, of course! She and a friend of hers, a boy, were preparing themselves for the final examinations; the poor children shut themselves in a room and studied, they nearly killed themselves with studying. And afterwards ... he got a certificate and she remained in the middle of the road. That's what I've been thinking, Živka—you should issue an order for this affair to be forgotten.
- KALENIĆ: (*who feels quite free now and examines family issues as if he had always been there*) Did that happen a long time ago?
- DACA: Oho, well ... last year.
- KALENIĆ: A year ago. Oh, even greater errors are forgotten in a year, let alone such a trifle. Put it down, Uncle Vasa: it's to be forgotten.
- ŽIVKA: And you, Jova? You had a stretch in prison, didn't you?
- JOVA: Yes, I did, Aunt Živka, and I thus rendered the State its due, so I think it's right that the State should give me my due.

- ŽIVKA: How is the State supposed to give you your due?
- JOVA: Well—I mean, I should be appointed a civil servant.
- ŽIVKA: But such a job led to your being sentenced to imprisonment!
- JOVA: Every living man errs, Aunt Živka, and I've paid fully for my mistake. And, believe me, Auntie, I honestly don't regret having been in prison. I learnt many things there, which I couldn't have learnt so easily otherwise. How I wish the authorities would send a candidate to prison first, and give him a job afterwards.
- JAKOV: Oh, what an idea!
- JOVA: Yes, yes, Uncle Jakov. I know criminal law better than any High Court judge. University professors can never explain criminal law to you as well as can those who were sentenced under it. Every single one of them knows the articles of that law by heart, he knows the intention of every paragraph, and he also knows how this or that paragraph may be circumvented. A man would say, for instance, I've been sentenced according to article 235, in connection with 175a, but mitigating circumstances from article 206 have been taken into consideration. And so on, and so forth—I know all the articles by heart. That being so, why shouldn't the State make use of my knowledge?
- KALENIĆ: Quite! Put it down, Uncle Vasa—to get a job for Father Arsa's Jova in order that the State may be given the opportunity to profit by his knowledge.
- ŽIVKA: And what's your wish, Uncle Panta?
- PANTA: To tell you the truth, Živka, I wish nothing for myself. I'll go on somehow, in much the same way as up to now, but it's for this child. (*Mile, a grown-up boy, stands behind him.*) God didn't give him the aptitude for learning—he's been expelled from all schools, forever. He can't stick at any craft, or trade or any kind of job either. So I wanted to ask you to arrange for him to get a scholarship from the State
- ŽIVKA: But what would he study?
- PANTA: Oh, let the State just provide him with board and lodging and then it doesn't matter a bit what he studies. He may study to be a vet if he wishes, or a band-leader, or a professor at the Theological Seminary, or a pharmacist. Whatever you wish, only let him get a scholarship.



KALENIĆ: Well, the boy being so bright, it would be a pity for the State not to make use of his abilities. Put it down, Uncle Vasa: to grant him a state scholarship.

ŽIVKA: And you, Soja?

SOJA: I'd prefer to tell you in private.

ALL: (*protesting*) Oh, no, you've got to say it in public, like the rest of us!

DACA (*louder than the others*) If we could all speak in public, then why can't she ?

(*Vasa gives her a cutting look.*)

SOJA: After all, why should I be secretive about it, I'm not asking for anything unsuitable. As you well know, Živka, I divorced that wretched husband of mine and he's already remarried, whereas I'm still alone, only because the Ecclesiastic Count decided unjustly that he may marry a second time, but I was unfairly denied the right to do the same. Of course, I was bound to lose that suit when they handed me over so young . . . .

DACA: (*coughing*)

SOJA: to the priests and all the Consistory were squinting disapprovingly at me. Even the lawyer who was defending me said one thing when he was at my place, and quite another at the Ecclesiastic Court of Justice—so, of course, I had to lose the lawsuit. So that's what I wanted, Živka—to beg you to have that decree set right so that I too should have the right to marry again. There, you see, that's not much to ask; as for certain persons coughing, I don't give a straw for that, because, as they say—dogs bark and the caravan goes on.

KALENIĆ: This could really be done. The lady feels the urge to marry, but some formalities are in her way. Put it down, Uncle Vasa—cousin Soja is to be married disregarding those formalities.

SOJA: That's all I ask, nothing more.

ŽIVKA: And you, uncle Jakov?

JAKOV: I've already told you, Živka, whatever I try, I never succeed. I should've gotten some schooling when I was younger, but it didn't work. I was a clerk—that didn't work either. I tried my hand at commerce, but that too went wrong. And I've kept on saying to myself: "Wait, Jakov, your day must come too! So it has now, I believe! I thought you could get 'em to grant me some kind of concession—for instance, the permission to cut

some State wood down—I reckon, you know, since I failed in everything else, I may succeed with this concession.

KALENIĆ: You may indeed be successful with it, and it wouldn't cost the State anything at all. The State has not planted those woods, so why should it feel sorry about having them cut. That's quite feasible. Put it down, Uncle Vasa: a State wood to be cut down, for, after all, what kind of a minister's relative would he be if he weren't entitled to have at least one forest to cut down?!

ŽIVKA: And you, Sava?

SAVA: I'll be brief, Živka. I beg you, as my very close relative, to get me a State pension.

ŽIVKA: But you've never been in the civil service?

SAVA: No, I haven't!

ŽIVKA: Nor in any other kind of service?

SAVA: No!

ŽIVKA: Why should you be entitled to a pension then?

SAVA: (*with conviction*) Well, as a citizen. So many people get pensions from the State, and I don't see why I shouldn't get one too?

VASA: Yes, Sava, but those who get pensions have served the State, haven't they?

SAVA: Well, had I served it, I wouldn't have come to Živka to ask for a pension, but I'd ask it of the State. Moreover, why is she a minister's wife if she can't do such a trifling service for her own kin?

KALENIĆ: This is a little bit more complicated. Put it down, Uncle Vasa: a pension for Uncle Sava, and Aunt Živka and I will see whether there's any way to arrange it. (*Turning to Živka*) Allow me now, Auntie, to present my case. I was sacked from my job last year. Some official papers disappeared from my drawer which prevented an execution, that is—confiscation of property for debts. I don't see why I should be blamed for it, because, after all, documents are documents; a live man may disappear and why shouldn't official papers disappear, too? After all, official papers had been disappearing from my drawer before that, too, but this time an inspector had a grudge against me and nearly initiated a lawsuit against me. But that's over now, and as you can see, I've been patient and waited a whole year for it to be forgotten. I don't know, maybe it hasn't been forgotten yet, but now Aunt Živka's a minister's wife, she can order the thing to be forgotten.

All I'm asking is just that the injustice of which I was victim should be set right by my being received into the civil service again. Only, I have to add this: I couldn't agree simply to being received into the service again without any compensation for that injustice committed against me. I'd have to have a promotion in order that I, too might forget the injustice against me. That's all I demand. Uncle Vasa, put it down, please: Pera Kalenić to be received into the service again, but with compensation. (*Peering at Vasa's notebook.*) Have you written with compensation?

- VASA: Yes, I have.
- KALENIĆ: Allow me now, Aunt Živka, to thank you on behalf of all the family for listening to our wishes, and to beg you to do your very best to have them fulfilled! As you see, our wishes are modest, and you are in a position to have them fulfilled, so why shouldn't you make your family happy, and have us all remember you with gratitude?
- ŽIVKA: All right, all right. I'll do what I can. Why shouldn't I?
- KALENIĆ: Well then, allow me to kiss your hand and take my leave, for we've kept you too long. (*He kisses her hand, and they all rise.*)
- ŽIVKA: (*remembering*) Wait, I'll give you each my visiting card to remember me by. (*She takes a box from the table and gives each of them a card.*) Here, here ... for remembrance.
- SOJA: I'll stick it in the frame of my mirror.
- JAKOV: Thank you, thank you very much indeed.
- KALENIĆ: Will you, please, give me two?
- SAVKA: (*after they have all received cards from Živka*) Well now, goodbye, Živka.
- ŽIVKA: Well there—don't be so touchy
- DACA: (*kissing her*) Try, will you, Živka?!
- PANTA: I trust God and your kind heart—do that for me!
- SOJA: (*kissing her*) Please, Živka, do what I asked you, it would be a good deed.
- SAVA: Please don't forget me, Živka.
- JAKOV: Only you and God can help me! (*All these sentences, just like the ones spoken on their arrival, overlap and cross each other.*)
- KALENIĆ: (*kissing her hand*) Only now do I understand my late mother who told me on her deathbed: "My son, I'm not leaving you

alone in the world; if you should ever be in need, turn to Aunt Živka, the Cabinet minister's wife, she's related to you!"

SOJA: *(as they have all moved to the door, trails behind them)* If nothing comes of my plea, I'll sit for the final examinations.

DACA: You passed them the moment you were able to walk!

SOJA: Dogs bark and the caravan goes on!

*(They go out quarrelling and the moment they have all left the house, cries, shrieks, and the shouting of those trying to calm the angry women are heard.)*

ŽIVKA: *(to Vasa who is lingering)* Run, Vasa, they're fighting!

VASA: Bitches! *(He runs after them.)*

## XV

ŽIVKA, ANKA

ŽIVKA: *(sinking into her armchair, exhausted)* Oh!

ANKA: *(running in from the street)* Those two cousins of yours, Madam, are tearing each other's hair out!

ŽIVKA: Let'em—that doesn't concern me. I'm as tired as if I'd been digging all day long. I'll go and lie down for a while; see that no one disturbs me.

*Nada Ćurčija Prodanović*

**Aleksa Šantić (1868–1924)**

A native of Mostar in Herzegovina, Aleksa Šantić was born in 1868 into a wealthy middle-class family. After attending trade schools in Trieste and Ljubljana, he returned to his native city, where he spent the rest of his life participating in the cultural life of the city, editing literary journals, and writing poetry. His first poems were imitative of the older Serbian poets: Njegoš, Zmaj, Jakšić, and Ilić. The Belgrade critic Bogdan Popović was instrumental in pointing out his shortcomings and setting him on a more original course. Šantić wrote love, elegiac, patriotic, and social poetry. His love poems are written in a low key, depicting the sincere, earthy emotions of an average man for his chosen woman. As a patriotic bard, he remained close to his soil and uncluttered by foreign influences, giving expression to a fervent desire for the unity of all Serbs. However, in his poems with predominantly social themes he showed that he was very close to his people, not unaware of the serious problems facing them. Not a poet of wide scope and keen perception, Šantić compensated for it by writing pure and highly emotional lyrics, some of which were set to music and are still very popular. Šantić also wrote plays in verse, two of which are still performed: *Pod maglom* (In the Fog) and *Hasanaginica* (The Lady of Hasan-aga). He also translated successfully from German.

### We Know Our Fate

We know our fate; what waits for us we can  
now watch with hearts devoid of fears that scare.  
Not humans—oxen like the yoke to bear:  
God has created liberty for man.

Our mountain rivers lend us force and breadth.  
There's no obstruction we would not defy:  
the people of this land art wont to die—  
to consecrate, if need be, life through death.

We know our way, the way of God and man.  
Hence powerfully like a rolling stream  
we'll crush all rocks, however hard they seem.

Thus on we go up to Golgotha hill,  
and if you shed the blood of all our clan,  
our very graves will scorn and fight you still.

*A. Lenarčič and J. Lavrin*

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Evening on the Isles

The purple deep  
is asleep,  
    chilly darkness falls

The last ray  
dies away  
    across black cliffs and walls.

There sounds the knell  
of a bell,  
    the cliffs with it are loud

With sigh and moan  
monotone  
    prays the humble crowd.

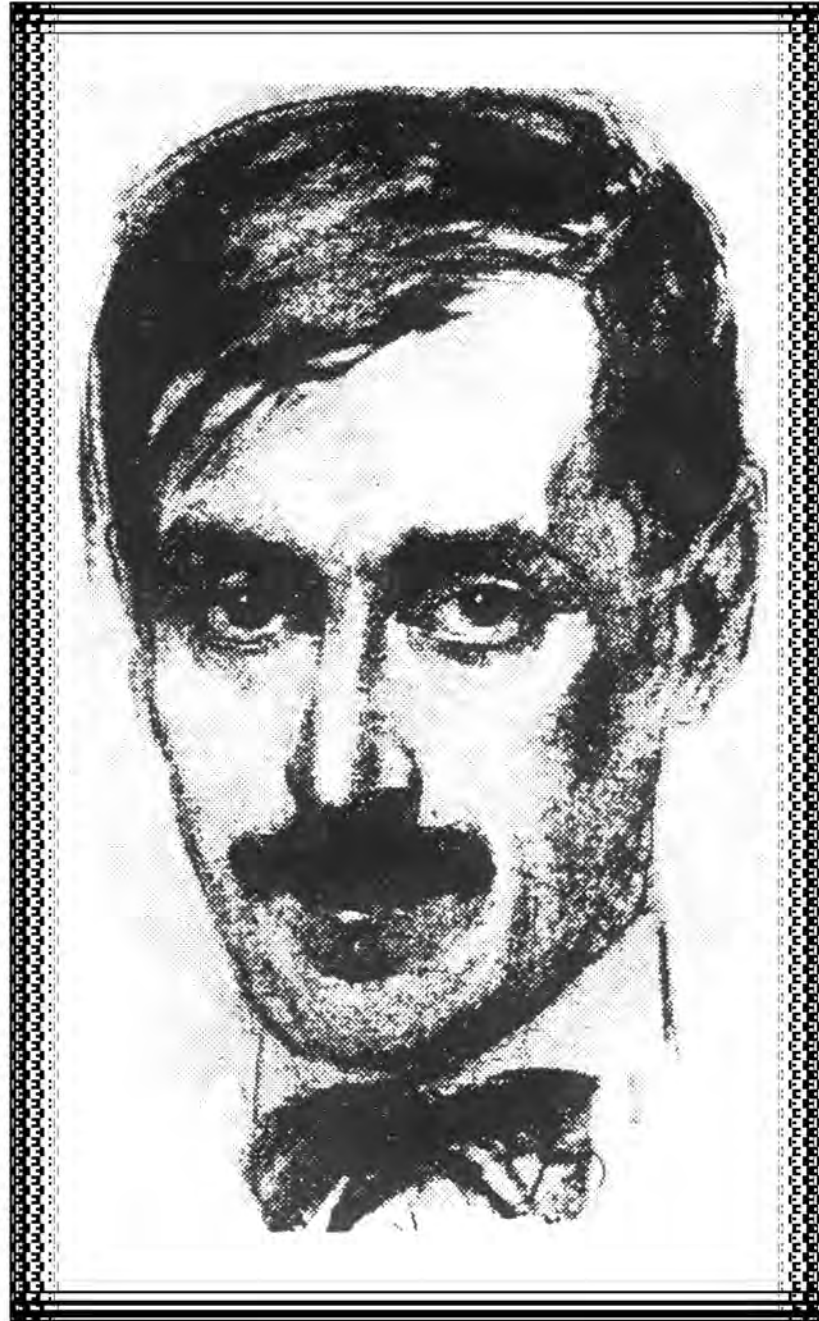
Their heads low bent,  
penitent,  
    before their God they kneel.

But he is mute,  
absolute,  
    deaf to their appeal.

Nearer creep,  
dreams of sleep,  
    chilly darkness falls.

The last ray  
dies away  
    across black cliffs and walls.

*A. Lenarčič*





**Jovan Dučić (1874–1943)**

Born in Trebinje, Herzegovina, Jovan Dučić, together with Aleksa Šantić and Svetozar Ćorović brought this province into the mainstream of Serbian literary life at the beginning of this century. After studying at the teacher-training school, he taught for a while in Mostar, and afterwards studied in Geneva and Paris for several years. In Paris he became thoroughly acquainted with the poetry of the French Symbolist and fell under their influence. He spent the rest of his life in the diplomatic service in various European capitals. In 1941 he emigrated to the United States, and died in Gary, Indiana in 1943. Dučić is considered to have been one of the finest craftsmen in Serbian poetry at the beginning of this century. An erudite and esthete, with a refined taste and aristocratic selectivity of subject matter, he wrote poetry in the manner of the French decadent poets, secluded in his isolated poetic world. He was often criticized for his inclination toward art for art's sake. Nevertheless, he was recognized for his lyric poetry on pseudo-philosophical themes, for the poetry evoking the beauty of the Adriatic, *Jadranski soneti* (Adriatic Sonnets, 1898–1906) and the glorious past of Serbia *Carski soneti* (Imperial Sonnets, 1930), and for his unique poems in prose *Plave legende* (Blue Legends, 1902). He enriched poetic expression in the Serbian language, lending it the brilliance of a sensitive man with richly felt experience. Dučić also wrote a sophisticated travelogue, *Gradovi i himere* (Cities and Chimeras, 1930) and a book of essays of popular philosophy, *Blago cara Radovana* (The Treasure of Tsar Radovan, 1932).

## Sunset

The sky, like copper in the furnace, shines;  
The river crimson in the evening glow;  
And now, from that dark wood of ancient pines  
Does not a stealthy flame begin to show?  
And listen, somewhere in the distance, turns  
The waterwheel, with droning hoarse and deep;  
But while the heaven above the valley burns,  
The mayfly on the water lies asleep.

Another evening!... in my Mind I see  
beyond three oceans, in some land alas,  
In the first hush of sunset, mournfully  
Sitting, where shadowy emerald mountains are,  
Pale as Desire, a woman I do not know,  
Thinking of me, and crowned, and shining bright;  
Heavy, perpetual, boundless is her woe,  
There, on the verge of stillness, gloom, and night.

Before the gardens lies the sea outspread;  
The dark-blue gulls fly off, a scattered throng,  
And in the rosebush, withered now and dead,  
Once More the wind is murmuring its sad song;  
And two huge sphinxes face the golden sky  
And keep their mute and voiceless watch, while she  
Weeps, and the tired sun slowly from on high  
Sinks down behind the vast and spacious sea.

To me her name, her features, are unknown;  
Yet, standing here, I fill her every thought;  
For those pale lids declare true faith alone,  
Faith mighty as death, as love that hopes for nought  
Ah, never tell me 'tis not so, nor say  
That my poor heart on lies itself hath fed;  
For I should weep, for ever and a day;  
No, never again should I be comforted!

*Oliver Elton*

## The Sea Willow

A lonely willow stands above the sea.  
She plaits the tresses of her long green hair  
like to a nymph that's doomed to be a tree,  
a tree that spreads but sadness and despair.

At dawn she hears the singing mountain-side,  
At evening time the melancholy ocean;  
and motionless she stands where all is motion:  
the clouds, the winds, the weather, and the tide.

Midst these she stands and to the gale would part  
With many a leaf, with branches to the billow,  
and like a pulsing sorrow-ridden heart  
sad life she echoes. Lonely stands the willow.

*A. Lenarčič and J. Lavrin*

## Wine of Dubrovnik

Quiet as silver, motionless, the sea  
beyond the lawn— one hears the fountains dance,  
the flash of spray; behind the laurel tree peers  
marble Pan with wanton countenance.

Bright music sounds, for now there are guests here.  
Out in the garden all the faces shine,  
amused and happy, playful, free from care—  
such a fine meal; insidious, that wine!

Gambolings, gentle turmoils now begin;  
disorder grows—such doings in this crowd!  
A friar (Dominican) twangs a mandolin;  
a fervent captain says the Psalms out loud.

Then Ana de Doce, gray dame of note,  
who stands for flawless virtue, perfect *ton*,  
can be heard, 'midst her group of ladies, quote  
a roaring tale from the Decameron.

*Oliver Elton and Milne Holton*

## Shadow

Always beside me my shadow moves,  
A fire's specter, a giant, blue  
Before me, a guide I'll never lose,  
Behind me, a spy, and silent, too.

At the forest's edge he's there no more;  
On the other side he waits again.  
Perplexed, he stops at the church's door,  
Confused by a primal fear of men.

This sign that darkens, this sign that shines,  
He is the son a speech of heaven.  
How far will he go? What does he gain  
From this bitter game played by the sun?

Everything under the sky shines on,  
But shadow and man, these brothers twin,  
Must stop at some crossroads, far along,  
Both to cast away their chains' burden.

Yet always they'll seek each other, these two,  
These, whose fates are forever entwined,  
Infinite shadow, than earth more so,  
And man, lighter than his shadow-kin.

*Ivan V. Lalić and Milne Holton*

**Milan Rakić (1876–1938)**

Milan Rakić was born in Belgrade into a distinguished family. After receiving a good education at home, he studied law in Paris, where, like Jovan Dučić, he came under the influence of French poets. He spent his entire mature life in the diplomatic service, first in the southern Serbian regions still under the Turks, and then in various European capitals. He died relatively young in Zagreb in 1938. Rakić wrote only about sixty poems, collected in three books. His poetry is mainly on love and philosophical themes. Like Dučić, he shows signs of a decadent spirit acquired in Paris, but he is more profound in his sensitivity and perception of reality. He is also more pessimistic in outlook, resigned to the basically tragic nature of existence as expressed in man's inability to truly enjoy his experiences and to halt the inexorable passage of time. Rakić is also more pensive and subdued than Dučić, finding it difficult to rejoice amidst decay, the flight of time, and approaching death. Even his patriotic poems reveal this pessimistic outlook, although he also expresses hope for the revival of Serbian spiritual glory. Rakić is considered one of the best Serbian poets of the twentieth century.

## A Commonplace Poem

That love of ours had all too brief a date;  
    it lived, what secured an instant, just one year.  
Then, to divide us, some rude sudden late  
    Came, with never a word, or sigh, or tear.

For half our days in wrangling had flown by;  
    Half our vexed nights, in making peace, at best;  
And so from our abode at last fled I,  
    And in the lonely country sought for a rest.

All this endured but for a little space,  
    And we became as strangers, dull and dazed  
Like children cloyed with sweetmeats; so we gazed  
    In long unbroken silence, face to face.

All is over, now, and ended, nor may I  
    Blaspheme my destiny, or heaven's decree,  
Or clench my fists, or plunged in sorrow cry  
    Curses on all women and their infamy.

But hadst thou known, if only for an hour,  
    The fatal name in which my soul is caught,  
The love that cancels, like some monstrous power,  
    All other hopes, all dreams and every thought;

If once, distracted soul, thou hadst desired  
    To speak some tender word, with its caress  
Like silk, and by thy burning heart inspired,  
    Long, long, perchance, had been our happiness.

But time now flows at a sluggish patch;  
    We have remained as strangers; in a daze,  
Like children cloyed with sweetmeats, now we gaze,  
    In long unbroken silence, face to face.

*Oliver Elton*

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The Abandoned Church

See, Christ upon the Cross, an antique image, lies.  
All down His shattered side a trickle of blood is shed.  
Death's self is here; the lips are pale, and dead the eyes;  
A halo, beaten silver, hangs above His head.

A gift from noble folk and godly peasant came;  
For there, about His neck, the strings of ducats shine;  
Pure silver filigree is wrought upon the frame.  
That frame a man of Debar cut some craftsman fine.

Thus lies the Christ, within the empty temple there  
With darkness, shade by shade, descending everywhere,  
Amidst the swarm of night-birds ranging for their prey.

Sole in that empty church, and ringed by phantom bands,  
The dreadful Christ, despairing, reaches out His hands,  
And waits forever for His flock—but where are they?

*Oliver Elton*

Simonida

They have dug out your eyes, you lovely image,  
Alone in this marble place where evening lies.  
They knew no one would witness their pillage;  
A Shiptar with a knife dug out those eyes.

He didn't touch your mouth, your noble face;  
To touch your golden crown he would not dare.  
Nor would he mar that fine and queenly face  
Which lies beneath the luxurious hair.

Today in the church, on the stone pillar,  
Bearing serenely your terrible night,  
Standing in your mosaic robe, you glitter.  
I see you, sad, somber, and white.

Like a star burned out, already in past time,  
 Which still sends man its light in brilliant glow,  
 So man can see light, color, and line,  
 From stars lost to him a long time ago.

On me today, from your still regal height,  
 And from this ancient wall all mired in grime,  
 You, sad Simonida, send me that light  
 From eyes thus blinded in an earlier time.

*Kosara Gavrilović and Milne Holton*

Chinese Madrigal

Celle que j'aime est à présent en Chine.

Gautier

In deepest China the one I love resides,  
 In the cold mountains of perpetual snows,  
 Alone. But moonbeam-like she sometimes glides  
 Through distant palace rooms, where no one goes.

She waits there for me; sorrow fills her days,  
 And from those snowbound hills she breathes a sigh  
 For me, and sits, and stares when no one's by;  
 Her piteous gaze and sigh of longing fades.

But when, in palaquin, she comes to town,  
 In a gown of white, through junipers and pines,  
 All veiled, on cushions the sad one reclines,  
 And pigtailed move in longing, up and down.

*Oliver Elton and Milne Holton*



**Borisav Stanković (1876–1927)**

Born in Vranje, southern Serbia, Borisav Stanković became the poet of this quaint and picturesque town at the crossroads of Europe and the Orient. He received some Western education (in Paris), but returned unchanged to his native region and subsequently made it immortal in his works. He also finished law school in Belgrade and served as an official in various government institutions in Belgrade, where he died in 1927. Stanković is one of the raciest writers in Serbian literature. His short stories, novels, and plays have basically the same theme—life in Vranje a few years after liberation from the Turks. This life is depicted through the clash between the centuries-old traditions and the new way of life. The patriarchal spirit, preserved during the long Turkish occupation, grudgingly gave way to new ideas from the West. Stanković describes this through his simple but emotional characters, who are either slaves to their passion or unable to adjust to the changing world. He has indeed created some unforgettable characters. His best work, the novel *Nečista krv* (The Tainted Blood, 1911), depicts the plight of a young woman unable to free herself from old customs and restrictions. The play *Kostana* (1902) is a delightful musical about the sway a beautiful gypsy girl holds over all entire town. In practically all his works Stanković presents unusually strong characters who are at the same time victims of a strange weakness stemming from the realization that their time has irrevocably passed. His other main works are: short story collections, *Iz starog jevanđelja* (From an Old Gospel, 1899) *Stari dani* (The Old Days, 1902), and *Božji ljudi* (God's Children, 1902); and a play *Tašana* (1910).

*The Tainted Blood* (Excerpts)

But certainly the worst thing of all was that with every advent of spring and passing of summer she noticed, although she never admitted it to herself, a fear like a sly serpent ever more powerful in her waiting to strike, that at last some public gathering, or in the after church parade, there would appear the girl, who by her fresh beauty, would cast her aside forever, Sofka the old maid.

And yet she was sure that could never happen. She did not deny that another might attract attention by the novelty of her first appearance; but none could ever surpass her in beauty; even if her face with the years became treacherous, she knew she could triumph over all. Yet God preserve her from that happening, for she knew that if life thus outwitted her, she would become a savage and desperate creature, and scorn the ways and decencies of her fathers to prove what she knew to be true, and show the blind and crass that even in her withered age no woman was her peer. That it would be a terrible thing to do, but she would not be Sofka if she did not do it when the moment came. At other moments, shamed by her thoughts, terrified by them, she would be full of guilt and blame herself and scold herself, for letting such things come into her mind, and for dwelling thus on things that others no doubt never even thought of.

How long were those inward struggles to last? Why could she never be happy, never at ease? When would she be able, like other girls, not to think, but merely to live and be happy thereat? She whole day, from morn to night, she, too, to work and think of naught but how to snatch sweet tidbits without the others seeing; and then with sweet pleasure to eat a gorging meal and after eating it lie down on a soft bed and sink into a bottomless sleep of sweet fatigue and so day after day. To leave everything to fate; blooming in health and strength to wait with delight to be asked for in marriage, and then for the wedding day, when she would possess a husband, and when she would have her house, like her friends already married and be mistress of it and go with her husband visiting his relations and to the household feasts and to the public assemblies, having as good a time as possible.

And whenever thoughts of this nature plagued her she tried to force herself to remain calm; she would take a piece of work, a piece of difficult embroidery, one of the famous old designs, and try to let it excite her, to be pleased by it and to enter into it. She thus stitched on all day long, without looking up from her work, and her mother had to drag her away from it to eat. She would maintain the effort of this discipline day after day, week after week; and, as the piece of work grew clearer under her fingers and the designs rose up on the linen like living things, she would grow deeper and deeper into

it, and gradually be changed by it, sleep more peacefully and in the morning be fresher, no longer with bloodless cheeks Her food tasted sweeter to her; the air around her seemed fresher; and she could fall asleep whenever she wanted into a sweet and deep sleep. But yet when such a piece of work neared completion it always lost its hold on her, and her industry failed; her mornings lost their freshness, each day grew heavier with headaches and broken sleep. She imagined then that this came from the strain of such intense work, her head heavy, her body racked as from weakness.

Then there began days of aimless wandering about, of dragging herself about, as if she were ill ... until, with a sudden onslaught, those thoughts would begin again, her whole torso throbbing and she full of a curious self-delight, a sensation as of melting in sweet feelings, even her mouth dripping with a sweetness, so that every moment she found her tongue feeding on her moist lips, and in her immense desire for something a longing to cry out.

Then she knew quite well that was come on her, felt that she was not one Sofka, but two, one herself, the other that other self outside her, round about her. Then, like a criminal, Sofka waited for nothing but the coming of night, to lie down and, feeling herself alone in her bed, give her body over to that other Sofka. And she would dream of the coming of that other one, with the glory of the August sun, in the dry days, when dust was on the world, the burning globe gently but steadily sinking, drawn to the scented bosom of the billowing hills, sweetly breathing above the town, above the evening haze. And while yet the teeming town wrestled with repose, stirring uneasily in the first dark, night engulfed the drowsy sun; and Sofka slept, dreaming still. And in the morning was idle to wake, but very tired from dreaming.

For a day after *that* she would shrink from her mother and from any other women and sit till night fell in the garden at the back of the house, and there, as if she were mad, would turn to the flowers, and in each flower find one of her lusts and in each twitter of a bird one of those inexplicable unsung yearnings and the voice of a song.

Then she sometimes felt something which often happened to her, but which she could never explain. Everything, that is, the garden and the flowers and the trees and the sky above, and on the earth the heights of the hills around her beyond the town and herself, and she herself dressed just like that, sitting like that, in front of that very same flower, and the house even like that, and those voices coming from it and her mother's footsteps and the other footsteps she could hear and the very words they were saying, what they wanted, the tone in which they spoke—everything, exactly like that, had been there before, and moved round her before, like that once before. And with the approach of night the whole of it, and she with it, seemed no more to be earthly, but clearer, more detached, more ecstatic, and stronger, so that when she came into the house from the garden out of all that suffusion of delight

and happiness, she would fling her hands in the air and be nigh to singing a song aloud, though afraid to. All her efforts were concentrated on not letting her mother know anything of it; and even though in such moments of bliss she was not hungry she would force herself to eat so that her mother did not notice anything unusual, and then leave the table as soon as she could.

She would not say that she was going to bed, but what she wanted was not rest, but to be alone and then, alone in the night beneath her bed coverings, to be like the sun in the strong arms of the hills, lulled by the enchantment of her virginal dreams; and it was most remarkable that, though she was sure she would never marry, all her dreams melted into a vision of married happiness, their bedroom, their furniture, their bed...

And the dream was always the same: a great luxurious room full of intercrossing multicolored rays of light. Around her the other rooms, furnished in the same way, bright with the bridal towels and other gifts she had brought. Down in the courtyard a fountain, the streams from which and the spray from which showed amber yellow as they rustled in the light of her room. Marriage music could be heard. He, her husband, as if winding up the bridal route, wearily but merrily, was fitfully and delightedly writhing his body in tune to the rhythm of the song the wedding guests were singing as they left.

He was lofty-browed, with rather long ebony mustaches, clothed in silk and homespun, and his clothes were aromatic of the bloom of his flesh; and she was there, on the bed, in her bridal shift, in the sea of that light and the murmur of the fountain and the song, waiting for him. And though he still had not come, she could already feel the form of his body near her and the pain to come, the touch of his hands and his lips and his head on her bosom, and she heard the soft words breathing from his lips... Then he came, they led him in, exactly as she had drawn him, tall and slender like a green poplar, but yet with the glory of the oak in massive shoulders, and conquering jaw, and calm tread.

That was why she was so fond of solitude. Even when she was quite alone in the house, and her mother had gone to the cemetery or on some business, and did not return until very late at night, she even enjoyed suffering the terror of darkness. She would on such occasion retire to the upper rooms and then, the outer gates and the walls enclosing her and making her safe, she would submit to herself. She would unfasten her stiff embroidered *jelek* [a vest], parting its harsh walls that imprisoned her gentle flesh, and would free the fast belting that constrained her waist, and thus lounge. For her linen, no longer fiercely held to her, then softly caressed her, and there was a delight in the air that crept over her skin. Her white shirt was then tender to her, and almost with a man's exultation did she gloat on her breasts' ripe forms, rising half hid from the eye, below the satin cream of her neck.

Once she nearly did a foolish thing. It was some time at the end of the summer. It was a Saturday, a market day. Her mother had gone with Magda to the cemetery. Night fell, a warm, stifling night. Still her mother did not come, and she was alone in the way she so often was, walled in by the silent bricks around her, having nothing to do, afraid to walk about; she was sitting in the upper room, as usual, in *deshabille*, and even more fiercely than usual that madness of hers came upon her; but on this occasion, as never before, she suddenly began to feel an immeasurably deep, disquiet fluttering in the very depths of her being, clutching her heart as to what this would all end in? Would not, indeed, would not the end of it all be death? Then why all this?

And at that moment she heard Vanko the mute coming in from the garden, and singing, probably drunk, as he was every Saturday, on the tips he got running errands in the market, and as he saw nobody downstairs in the kitchen he began to come upstairs, towards her. She started nervously. She covered herself quickly and began to fasten her belt, but suddenly a wild thought came on her, and sweat broke out on her. Why not? He was drunk, he would not know; he was a mute, he could not tell. Why not the one thing she had so often thought and dreamed? Why should she not once know what it feels like to have a man's hand upon you?

And when Vanko had reached the top of the stairs and saw her, delighted at finding a woman, happy and drunk, he mumbled and made signs to tell her how much he had earned that day, and from whom—all with his “baa, baa, baa!”

But when he saw that there, on the couch, among her cushions, her clothes unfastened, she lay, and did not get up, did not answer him, or smile, he stood petrified in front of her. But she called him, “Give me your hand!” “she said.

He reached out his hand without hesitation, the fingers stretched and spread out, and the left hand, which was nearer to her. She took his hand, but not as she usually did, by the fingers; but by the wrist, by his square and bony wrist. Then she saw the spread-out fingers clenching, for he was surprised at the way she had taken his hand, so that when she drew the hand towards her it was black and hard with the veins on it, like an animal's paw.

But she was not the one to hold back once she had made up her mind. Quickly she pulled him towards her, and held him to her. She imagined a sense of all-consuming delight, and foolishly thought that her madness would end in repose. But she felt pain, and nothing else. In horror, she quivered, and started up, and pushed the idiot from her.

But now the idiot was excited. Something had served to madden him, and, with distorted features, he clung to her, clutching at her, pulling her towards him as if with giant pincers, uttering spluttering savage cries.

Any other girl in her place would have lost her head, and fainted from terror, at the mercy of the madman, but she in her disgust glared at him, amazed, and then tossed him from her and went quickly from the room.



What exactly took place between Marko and Stana no one could hear. Yet Sofka was sure, from the tortured, hissing, hollow sounds that came from behind the closed door, that Marko was, in his agony, cross-examining his wife, trying to make her admit she had lain with her father-in-law her first night. And Sofka felt that everything hung on her mother-in-law's admission. He needed that now; that would be his excuse; and if she confessed, in sheer perversity he would go to avenge himself against her with Sofka, and take Sofka.

"Man! man!" she heard Stana, "shhh! the Lord will destroy you! Ohhhhh! You, her father-in-law!"

Then the old woman prayed.

"Open, o earth, for us all to be swallowed up, oh, what have I come to! O! O Lord God, Lord God!"

Then there was Marko's terrible voice:

"I am your Lord God!" and a dull, heavy blow, and a faint moan from old Stana.

Then Arsa's voice crying,

"The master's killed the mistress."

Sofka nearly lost consciousness, for now there seemed no way out, no hope, no saving herself. Blood would flow, he would destroy anything, everything, but she should be his... And then a curious grating noise outside her door brought her quickly to again. It was some animal rolling about, croaking by the threshold. It was Marko. And she knew then that he had not fallen there by stumbling, but by his own fear of himself his legs were refusing to bear him. He had crawled, groveling, to her door.

And from the great room, where Sofka's mother-in-law lay with a blood-splattered head, came a constant quiet whimper, hopeless and defeated. In her desolation the old woman was whimpering for her long-dead mother and her home.

But for him there, at Sofka's very feet, that whimper had no meaning. Nothing had meaning. Everything seemed ended, destroyed: his whole life, his childhood, his father, his mother, all were accursed.

And as in his self-agony Marko groaned on Sofka's threshold, his supple nostrils quivered, as if they were aroused by the very scent of her. He seemed to feel her heavy heart beating, her ripe and passionate lips burning. Her hair, spread over the bed, he pictured winding over her body full and rich...

And as he croaked and rolled on the ground in his agony of self-thwarted longing he strove to push open the door and come to her; but he could not, and he fell back. Hands and arms and legs betrayed him. The whimpering of his wife, which he had thought he could ignore, was like a rope around his neck. Holding him back as on a leash from crossing that threshold to his prey. Yet go back to his wife into that room he could not—that was all over! The beams and timbers and bricks and tiles of the accursed house seemed to be falling about him and crushing his head; with great difficulty he scrambled to his feet and mastered his legs and staggered away from Sofka's door over the courtyard.

“Arsa!” he called, “my belts!”

His voice was faint and hoarse. He dragged himself to the house, and leaned on one of the timbers of it, and thus held himself up, waiting for Arsa to belt Milan.

Arsa ran up and, struggling, managed to belt him, though the whole of the lower part of Marko's body, from hips down, trembled and shook. Only by holding his shoulders against the house did he prevent himself from falling, and he could scarcely raise his arms for Arsa to put the belt on him. Then he croaked, “the chestnut!”

Arsa finished winding his cummerbund on him, and went for the horse. Though Marko strained his ears, he could not catch any sound from the little room; not even Sofka's sobs. From the great room, though, came Stana's whimpering, and it seemed to Marko that her bloody face must be sunk in the earth of the beaten floor.

The night was dark, the stones in the yard were coldly still. From the corner of the yard used for rubbish came the stench of droppings and decay, and Marko took deeper and deeper breaths of that stink, for it pricked his nostrils and revived him. Arsa led up the chestnut. A shudder shook Marko. He wiped his running brow. His body was limp, and from his emotion a dull deep croaking came from within him, as if he were choking. Arsa guided his heavy feet to the stirrups, and helped him, heaving him up into the saddle. And the feel of the saddle seemed to put life into Marko, and a last flood of fury welled up in him. A knife flashed from out of his cummerbund, and with sudden strength he rose in his stirrups and slashed the chestnut over the flanks with the keen blade. The blood spurted, and the chestnut leapt madly into the night.

Sofka heard Arsa go into the kitchen and tell her mother-in-law. When Marko had gone they brought Sofka's husband in to her, but she had already fallen into a fevered oblivion. She did not come to herself till morning light. It was shortly after dawn. The great tallow candle in the stick above her head had just burned down and extinguished itself, with a vile smell of tallow. He, her husband, was sleeping at her feet, practically on the bare floor.

He had evidently fallen asleep the moment they brought him in; and he was still sleeping soundly, his arms stretched out and his knees drawn up. Sofka could see that he had been afraid, if he fell asleep, of putting his head on the eider down that covered Sofka, and so of dirtying it and harming it; and he had carefully folded the edge away from him.

Through the window the well head showed its black outline, and from the stables came the sound of animals waking and moving about; but no sound came from the house; everything there was dead.

And, so that the cook, when she came to inspect, should find everything as it should be in marriage, Sofka had to get her husband up and undress him. She could not waken him for some time, so deeply was he asleep. She unwound his belt from him, and undressed him, and drew him into the bed with her, and wrapped him and herself in the great red eider down, and waited for full day to come. She felt the hairs of his head pricking her neck and checks; for the hair was short cut as on a child. It had been recently washed, and smelled of soap.

Sofka did not get up again that day. A fever came over her, and she was delirious at times, and at night only came to herself again for a while. When she opened her eyes once she saw, beside her, the candle burning in its spattered stick, and a dish of food and drink that her mother-in-law had brought in quietly while she was in fever; because from her shame for all that had happened she dared not yet face Sofka awake. And at the foot of the bed, on a bare rush mat, lay Tomča, her husband, half-undressed only, curled up, sound asleep again. Sofka got up, and contrived to make the bed, and then took her husband to her, because she would have none of sparing herself and keeping him at arm's length. She would have none of being spared or pitied; for she had now gone through so much that the thing should be complete.

And so, weeping, she embraced the sleeping Tomča and kissed him; and then, burning with a new excitement, half-conscious of what she was doing, she got up and went out into the courtyard, in the empty and silent walled-in night. Arsa was there crouching in a corner to protect her, and he came up to her to help her; but not only did she give him no orders, she stared at him as if she did not know him, and her dull and thirsting lascivious eyes made the hair of his scalp stiffen, and shivers course down his backbone.

This happened more than once. She would stride about in the night to tire herself, hair disheveled, clinging to her moist temples, a demented sight as she held up her unbelted *šalvari* [loose trousers worn by men and women] and her bosom showed beneath her unbuttoned shift. Then she would go back to her room and lie down again, and enfold and kiss her husband, and pray to God for it always to be like that, calm night.

Whole nights passed like that, till, by morning, worn out, she fell into a deep though fevered sleep, which would last on through the following day.



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And that fever was a good thing for her, since it allowed her to avoid all the customs that follow the bridal night—the inspection of the sheets and the coming of the women visitors, to whom she would have to pretend she was well and happy.

*Alec Brown*



**Petar Kočić (1877–1916)**

Petar Kočić was born in the village of Stričići near Banja Luka, Bosnia, into the family of an Orthodox priest. He came in conflict with the Austrian authorities already in high school in Sarajevo—a plight that plagued him for the rest of his life. He graduated from the University of Vienna and came back to his native region to teach but soon realized that his liberal, nationalistic views were incompatible with the entrenched foreign authority. He devoted the rest of his life to politics. He was even less successful in that endeavor even after he had moved to Serbia. He returned to Banja Luka, was persecuted and jailed for his nationalistic stance, and died in a mental hospital in Belgrade during World War I. Kočić wrote three books of short stories: *S planine i ispod planine* (From the Top and Bottom of a Mountain, 1902–05), *Jauci sa Zmijanja* (Cries from Zmijanje, 1910), and *Sudanija* (Judgment Day, 1912). His best work is the play *Jazavac pred sudom* (The Hedgehog in Court, 1904). In all his works Kočić described realistically and poetically his countrymen from Bosnia, their strength and weaknesses, and their struggle with the Austrian occupation. He treats his peasants with warmth and understanding, although at times he tends to idealize them. This is best evidenced in the satirical *Jazavac pred sudom*, where an uneducated Bosnian peasant berates and outwits the great Austrian Empire. Though uneven and somewhat limited, Kočić remains one of the most popular Serbian writers.

## Jablan

Dusk had fallen long ago.

In the stubbled field, below the village, on the sheltered side of the hill, Lujo snuggled up under his coat. Only his freckled face, with his large pale gray eyes, and a few little tufts of yellowish hair spread across his forehead were visible. Jablan grazed a few steps in front of him.

Every evening since the heat had started, Lujo had grazed Jablan deep into the night. He cared for him as he cared for his own eyes. He gave him salt twice a week. He even divided his lunch with him. He loved Jablan—for Jablan was the strongest bull in the whole vicinity. Lujo was proud. He disdained all the other cattle herders and their bulls. He would dare spend a night in the middle of a cemetery if Jablan were with him.

“Only tomorrow,” Lujo trembled as if in dream; and threw off his overcoat, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

He got up, went to the bull, and started patting him, coddling him and whispering to him:

“Eat well, Jabo. Eat as much as your soul can stand. Only tomorrow, my dear Jabo, only tomorrow.”

Lujo’s little hoarse voice trembled softly, tenderly pleading. The bull swung his tail, as was his habit, switching Lujo a bit on the cheek.

“Me, Jabo,” he asked him reproachfully. “Now, I am going to cry.”

He moved aside a bit, as if crying. Jablan raised his head. “I am not, I am not, Jabo. I am kidding. You did not hit me. Well, don’t get mad right away for nothing. Let’s kiss each other.”

They kissed. Lujo put on his overcoat and sat down again on the wet grass to dream of tomorrow.

His Jablan was to fight the Imperial bull tomorrow. For a long time he had harbored within him a burning desire for Jablan to fight Rudonja. He had begged the *Knez* [regional official] to grant his wish. The elders too had begged the *Knez*.

“Well, my people, it is not so easy—it is the Imperial bull. But I will send a request. If the Emperor decrees that they should fight, let it be so. I would not prevent it; if he does not, it is as if nothing happened. Is it not so, brothers?”

“It is so, *Knez*. Just do it properly and do not fear.”

The request had been sent and the *Knez* had received the reply: it had been permitted. The following day was Transfiguration Day and also the Emperor’s birthday, and at the *Knez*’s place Jablan and Rudonja would fight.

Now Lujo began to dream about it. At one moment he saw Jablan falling down, at the next, he saw him gored and expiring; and, then again, he saw

him as the winner, standing proudly on the field of battle. He heard Jablan roar so loudly that the hills resounded. He sang:

My dear little bull is stronger  
than that miserable cow of yours,  
than that big ugly cow.

“Are you cold, my Jabo?” one could hear Lujo ask from under his coat.

Jablan grazed silently, and did not answer. Lujo got up, patted him, dragged two bundles of oats out of the hay stack, put them in front of the bull and then lay down next to him. After a time of fitful dreams and restless tossing, sleep overcame him. When Jablan had eaten the grain, he lay down next to his good friend.

The silence was profound. A humid freshness spread through the night. The soft wind sighed about homes spread in a semicircular row at the bottom of the mountain. Their roofs, covered with moss, could barely be distinguished from the full, green orchards in the moonlight, through which they protruded. The village slept quietly, sweetly, like a sturdy, healthy, gruff mountain boy, whom mother has fed and rocked to sleep.

The sun began to show behind the mountain peaks, still sleeping tiredly in the morning dusk. Soon the mountain air glistened with light, and the meadow trembled iridescent. Only far away at the bottom of the mountain could there be seen remnants of foggy blueness. Everything arose, awakened. Everything steamed like hot blood, breathing with strength and freshness.

“Oh, it’s sunrise already!” Lujo stretched, rubbed his eyes, and looked around.

“My Jabo, my brother, why didn’t you wake me up?”

Jablan had gotten up early, very early, and had already finished grazing. Lujo was pleased when he saw Jablan’s round stomach.

“Well, since you’ve eaten so well, brother, here’s something for dessert,” Lujo said cheerfully, and threw several bundles of oats to the bull.

Jablan ate. They started walking toward the *Knez*’s home.

The crows were flying out of the surrounding small woods, landing on the corn, which had just started to ripen. The watchman chased them off. The scarecrows on the fences around the cornfields were fluttering in the breeze. The herds were being driven to pasture. Shouting and calling was heard from all sides. Lujo walked thoughtlessly behind Jablan. Lost in thought, he did not hear the commotion of the life going on around him. He was thinking of Jablan and the fight. Suddenly he started, as if he had remembered something. He extended his palm and started to measure a stick.

“My Jabo will win-won’t-he will-won’t; he will-he won’t; he will!” exclaimed Lujo, and his eyes sparkled with excessive joy.

From sheer delight, he began hugging and kissing the bull. "Isn't it so, my Jabo, that you'll win? Even though he's the Imperial bull. It doesn't matter to my dear Jabo. Isn't it so?! Yes, tell it to your little Lujo."

In this manner, talking to Jablan, Lujo arrived at the *Knez's* home, where many people had gathered. It was a holiday, and people had gathered to talk a bit, and, as mountaineers, they liked to watch a bullfight.

Lujo's heart contracted when he saw Rudonja. He seemed horrible, huge; far stouter and bigger than Jablan.

"My Jabo, my brother, if you have to pay for this with your head today, don't blame me," Lujo exclaimed and nestled up to the bull, starting again to measure the stick, hiding this from the view of the crowd. Once again it showed that Jablan would win. His face brightened.

"Are you scared, my little one?"

"My son, do not fear anything. Your bull is an old fighter," an old man cheered him.

"I'm not afraid at all," said Lujo confidently.

"I bet you will howl, little boy, when Rudonja cuts Jablan's guts," a field-hand said, frightening him. "To be sure, Jablan has tortured me a lot."

"Well, that remains to be seen," laughed Lujo, with a measure of defiance and sarcasm.

"People, put aside the empty talk. Women and children on the side," ordered the *Knez* sharply in his most official manner.

"Lead the bulls onto the field, put down the fence."

They were led out. The people circled the bulls from all sides. The bulls started sniffing each other, as if they were make each other's acquaintance.

"Go ahead, Jablan."

"Get him, Rudonja!"

The bulls started roaring, digging into the ground with their forelegs, swaying and shoving, until their horns struck against each other powerfully. There was a detonation, then a breach. The land melted, yielding under them.

Lujo trembled in fear. His every nerve tingled. He stared with his large, pale eyes, not even blinking. He followed each movement; each clash resounded in his trembling heart. He flinched, crouched down a little. He would have helped Jablan if he could have. His eyes became dazed. He saw only vaguely that something turned around, twisted and yielded before him.

Rudonja attacked with all his might.

"Get him from below," shouted Lujo, as if beside himself.

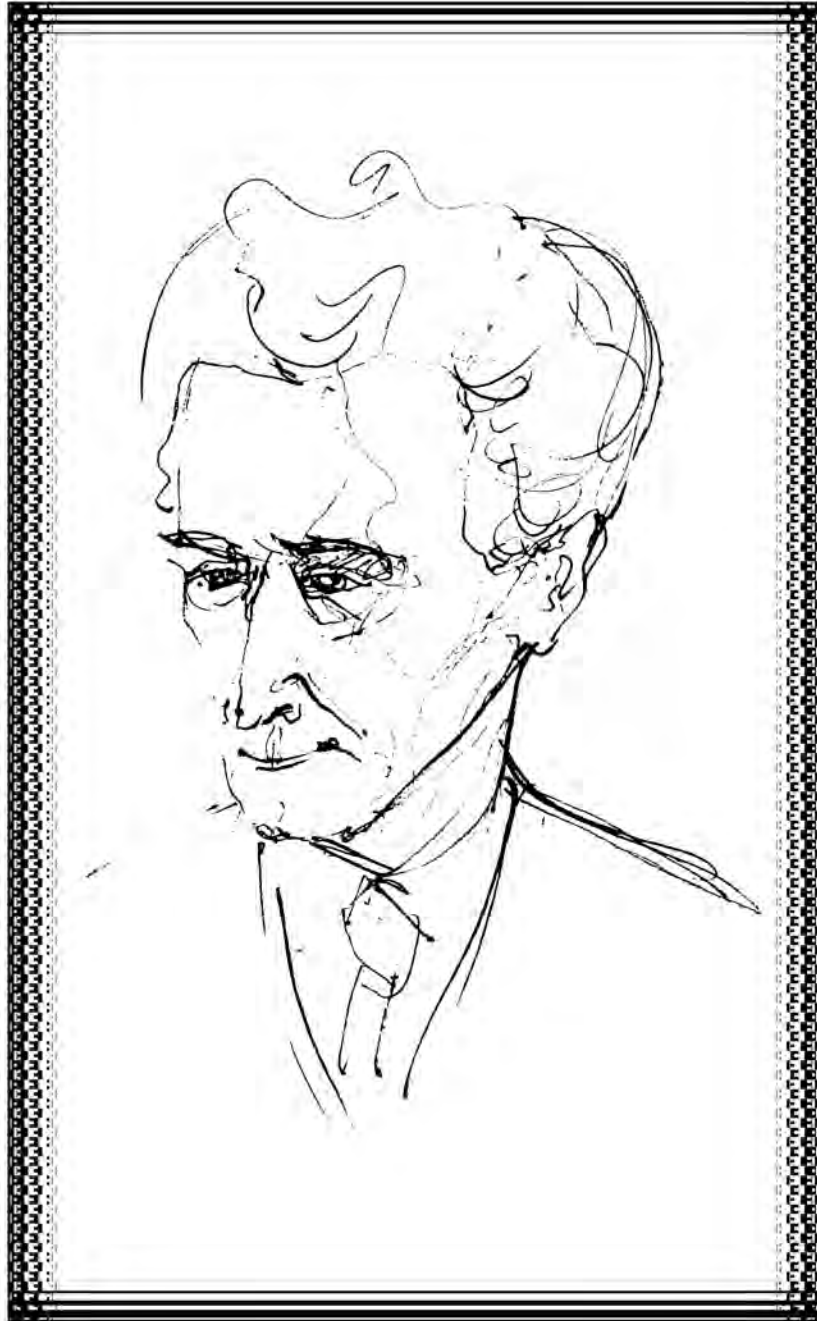
Jablan, an old cunning fighter, made a move as if stumbling on his right foreleg and caught Rudonja under the neck.

"Don't let him do it, people, he will maim the bull," shouted the *Knez*, frightened. Blood gushed forth out from under Rudonja's neck. Lujo sang;

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Jablan stood proudly on the field and roared, and the mountaintops resounded strongly, powerfully.

*Branko Mikasinovich*





**Momčilo Nastasijević (1894–1938)**

Born in Gornji Milanovac in 1894, Momčilo Nastasijević became a high school professor and spent most of his life in that capacity in Belgrade, where he died in 1938. Nastasijević is perhaps the most enigmatic of Serbian poets. From the very beginning he endeavored to create his own idiom, to which he remained faithful all his unfortunately brief, creative life. In his poetry and short stories he drew from the rich folklore and from the distant past, both of which he interpreted in his own way, as well as from his mystical outlook on life. He also attempted to formulate through his works a national and religious philosophy whose roots, again, he found in the dark recesses of the soul of his nation. As a poet, Nastasijević remained a loner, understood and admired only by his closest friends. Lately, however, his work has begun to exert a noticeable influence on younger Serbian poets.

## To the Lady

Ever more alone.  
You visit me in dreams, a stranger.  
More sinful, I call you in my loneliness.  
To children of others you have given the first cry.

Have pity.  
Your physic poisons and does not heal.  
You pierced me mightily with gall.  
My wretched days, o Lady,  
I squander in song.

I wail  
but the voice trails off.  
Mellifluous salvation is on some far-off star,  
of which I, ailing singer, stammer here below.

There is no hand to loose our knot for us.  
But even then, and for ever,  
will your glance hurt?  
Strange creatures born of you will I hold dear?

Have pity.  
Your physic poisons and does not heal.  
You pierced me mightily with gall.  
My wretched days, o Lady,  
I squander in song.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich*

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The String

Dimly, something  
Deaf  
Within me secretes.

Broken, silenced  
In death  
The string gives voice.

With honey or bile  
The glass is full.

Pain

I drink it  
And die with dumbness  
Into word.

Not only I, but  
A stranger,  
Darker brother  
Through this dumbness  
Is tied.

I know  
Where the heart beats  
Of gold or pewter  
Slowly the Son is crucified.

Singing or weeping  
Secretly  
His crown is woven.

Dimly, something  
Deaf  
Within me secretes.

Broken, silenced  
In death  
The string gives voice.

*Charles Simic*



**Ivo Andrić (1892–1975)**

Ivo Andrić was born near Travnik, in Bosnia. He received his education in Zagreb, Graz, and Vienna. During World War I he was imprisoned by the Austrians because of his open pro-Yugoslav stand. After the war he served as a diplomat in many European capitals. Following World War II he became the leading living Yugoslav author. In 1961 he received the Nobel Prize, the first and only winner of the Nobel Prize in all of Southeastern Europe. He died in Belgrade. His first works, poems in prose, *Nemiri* (Unrest, 1918) and *Ex Ponto* (1918), showed early his predilection for musing about the human condition, man's suffering, and his attempts to find rapport with nature, his fellow man, and himself. That remained his main theme. In many short stories between the wars he consistently chose his native Bosnia at the crossroads of many nations, religions, and creeds, as a microcosm of man's difficult existence. His heroes—Moslems, Christians, and Jews—constantly face violence and alienation, struggling to achieve elusive goals and preserve their dignity. The pronounced local color, taken from the Bosnia of the distant and recent past, is used by the author as a stage for dealing with universal problems and concerns. This method is brought to unusual excellence in his best works, the novels *Na Drini ćuprija* (The Bridge on the Drina, 1945) and *Travnička hronika* (The Chronicle of Travnik, 1945). They form the first two parts of what would have been his Bosnian trilogy. In the first, in addition to offering an epic panorama of the life of a Bosnian town during the last several centuries, with all its joys and sorrows, conflicts and suffering, Andrić uses the metaphor of a bridge—his favorite image—to symbolize the need for man to reach agreement with fellow men of different persuasions. The alternative has often brought man death and destruction, whereas the bridge endures or rises out of ruins anew. *Travnička hronika* offers a skillful presentation of the historical, philosophical, religious, and cultural atmosphere in one period during the turbulent history of a Bosnian town at the meeting point between the East and the West. Andrić's penetration into the profound dilemmas that face his native Bosnians, and through them all men, and his ability to distill his artistic expression to perfection have brought him deserved laurels. His style is characterized by keen observation, serenity, a sagelike calmness, and an economy of words. Other important works are: *Gospođica* (Miss, 1945), *Prokleta avlija* (The Accursed Courtyard, 1954), and many short stories of anthological value.

*The Bridge on the Drina* (Excerpts)

Outside it was growing light. The sun had not yet risen, but the whole horizon was clear. Deep among the hills the clouds lay in long dull purple bands and between them could be seen the clear sky almost green in color. Scattered patches of mist lay over the moist earth out of which peeked the tops of fruit trees with sparse yellowish leaves. Still striking at his boot with his whip, Abidaga gave orders. The criminal should continue to be interrogated, especially about those who had helped him, but he should not be tortured beyond endurance lest he die. Everything must be made ready so that at noon that same day he should be impaled alive on the outermost part of the construction work at its highest point, so that the whole town and all the workers should be able to see him from the banks of the river; Merdžan was to get everything ready and the town crier to announce the execution through all the quarters of the town, so that at midday all the people might see what happened to those who hindered the building of the bridge, and that the whole male population, both Turks and *rayah*, from children to old men, must gather on one or other of the banks to witness it.

The day which was dawning was a Sunday. On Sunday work went on as on any other day, but this day even the overseers were distraught. As soon as it was broad daylight, the news spread about the capture of the criminal, his torture and his execution which was to take place at midday. The hushed and solemn mood of the stable spread over the whole area about the building works. The men on forced labor worked silently, each one avoided looking his neighbor in the eyes, and each man looked only to the work before him as if that were the beginning and the end of his world.

An hour before noon the people of the town, for the most part Turks, had collected on a level space near the bridge. Children were hoisted on to high blocks of building stone which were lying about. The workmen swarmed around the narrow benches where the meagre rations which kept them alive were usually distributed. Chewing at them, they were silent and looked uneasily about them. A little later Abidaga appeared, accompanied by Tosun Efendi, Mastro Antonio and one or two of the more prominent Turks. All stood on a small dry hummock between the bridge and the stable where the condemned man was. Abidaga went once more to the stable, where he was told that everything was ready; lying there was an oak stake about eight feet long, pointed as was necessary and tipped with iron, quite thin and sharp, and all well-greased with lard. On the scaffolding were the blocs between which the stake would be embedded and nailed, a wooden mallet for the impalement, ropes and everything else that was needed.

The man from Plevlje was distraught, his face earthen in color and his eyes bloodshot. Even now he was not able to endure Abidaga's flaming glances.

"Listen, you! If everything is not as it should be and if you disgrace me in public, neither you nor your bastard of a gypsy will ever appear before me again, for I will drown you both in the Drina like a pair of blind puppies."

Then, turning to the shivering gypsy, he said more kindly:

"You will get six grosh\* for the job, and another six if he stays alive till nightfall. See to it!"

The hodža called out from the main mosque in the marketplace in a clear sharp voice. Uneasiness spread among the assembled people and a few moments later the door of the stable opened. Ten guards were drawn up in two ranks, five on either side. Between them was Radisav, barefooted and bare-headed, alert and stooping as ever, but he no longer "sowed" as he walked but marched strangely with short steps, almost skipping on his mutilated feet with bleeding holes where the nails had been; on his shoulders he carried a long white sharpened stake. Behind him was Merdžan with two other gypsies who were to be his helpers in the execution of the sentence. Suddenly from somewhere or other the man from Plevlje appeared on his bay and took his place at the head of the procession, which only had to go about a hundred paces to reach the first scaffolding.

The people craned their necks and stood on tiptoe to see the man who had hatched the plot and destroyed the building work. They were all astonished at the poor miserable appearance of the man they had imagined to be quite different. Naturally, none of them knew why he hopped in so droll a manner and took abrupt little steps, and none of them could see the burns from the chain which crossed his chest like great belts, for his shirt and cloak hid them. Therefore he seemed to all those there too wretched and too insignificant to have done the deed which now brought him to execution. Only the long white stake gave a sort of gruesome grandeur to the scene and kept everyone's eyes fixed on it.

When they reached the spot on the bank where the excavation work began, the man from Plevlje dismounted and with a sort of solemn and theatrical air gave the reins to a groom, then disappeared with the others in the steep muddy track which led down to the water's edge. A little later the people saw them again as they appeared in the same order on the staging, climbing upwards slowly and carefully. On the narrow passages made of planks and beams the guards closely surrounded Radisav and kept him very near them lest he should leap into the river. They dragged their way along slowly and climbed even higher till they reached the top. There, high above the water,

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\* a copper.

was a boarded space about the size of a small room. On it, as on a raised stage, they took their places, Radisav, the man from Plevlje and the three gypsies, with the rest of the guards posted around them on the platform.

The people watching moved uneasily and shifted about. Only a hundred paces separated them from those planks, so that they could see every man and every movement, but could not hear words or distinguish details. The people and the workmen on the left bank were about three times farther away, and moved around as much as they could and made every effort to try and hear to see better. But they could hear nothing and what they could see seemed at first only too ordinary and uninteresting and at the end so terrible that they turned their heads away and many quickly went home, regretting that they had ever come.

When they ordered Radisav to lie down, he hesitated a moment and then, looking past the gypsies and guards as if they were not there, came close up to the man from Plevlje and said almost confidentially as if speaking to a friend, softly and heavily:

“Listen, by this world and the next, do your best to pierce me well so that I may not suffer like a dog.”

The man from Plevlje started and shouted at him, as if defending himself from that too intimate approach.

“March, Vlach! You who are so great a hero as to destroy the Sultan’s work now beg for mercy like a woman. It will be as it has been ordered and as you have deserved.”

Radisav bent his head still lower and the gypsies came up and began to strip off his cloak and his shirt. On his chest the wounds from the chains stood out, red and swollen. Without another word the peasant lay down as he had been ordered, face downward. The gypsies approached and the first bound his hands behind his back; then they attached a cord to each of his legs, around the ankles. Then they pulled outwards and to the side, stretching his legs wide apart. Meanwhile Merdžan placed the stake on two small wooden chocks so that it pointed between the peasant’s legs. Then he took from his belt a short broad knife, knelt beside the stretched-out man and leant over him to cut away the cloth of his trousers and to widen the opening through which the stake would enter his body. This most terrible part of the bloody task was, luckily, invisible to the onlookers. They could only see the bound body shudder at the short and unexpected prick of the knife, then half rise as if it were going to stand up, only to fall back again at once, striking dully against the planks. As soon as he had finished, the gypsy leapt up, took the wooden mallet and with slow measured blows began to strike the lower blunt end of the stake. Between each two blows he would stop for a moment and look first at the body in which the stake was penetrating and then at the two gypsies, reminding them to pull slowly and evenly. The body of the peasant, spread-ea-



gled, writhed convulsively; at each blow of the mallet his spine twisted and bent, but the cords pulled at it and kept it straight. The silence from both banks of the river was such that not only every blow but even its echo from somewhere along the steep bank could be clearly heard. Those nearest could hear how the man beat with his forehead against the planks, and, even more, another and unusual sound, that was neither a scream, nor a wail, nor a groan, nor anything human; that stretched and twisted body emitted a sort of creaking and cracking like a fence that is breaking down or a tree that is being felled. At every second blow the gypsy went over to the stretched-out body and leant over it to see whether the stake was going in the right direction and when he had satisfied himself that it had not touched any of the more important internal organs he returned and went on with his work.

From the banks all this could scarcely be heard and still less seen, but all stood there trembling, their faces blanched and their fingers chilled with cold.

For a moment the hammering ceased. Merdžan now saw that close to the right shoulder muscles the skin was stretched and swollen. He went forward quickly and cut the swollen place with two crossed cuts. Pale blood flowed out, at first slowly and then faster and faster. Two or three more blows, light and careful, and the iron-shod point of the stake began to break through at the place where he had cut. He struck a few more times until the point of the stake reached level with the right ear. The man was impaled on the stake as a lamb on the spit, only that the tip did not come through the mouth but in the back and had not seriously damaged the intestines, the heart or the lungs. Then Merdžan threw down the mallet and came nearer. He looked at the unmoving body, avoiding the blood which poured out of the places where the stake had entered and had come out again and was gathering in little pools on the planks. The two gypsies turned the stiffened body on its back and began to bind the legs to the foot of the stake. Meanwhile Merdžan looked to see if the man were still alive and carefully examined the face that had suddenly become swollen, wider and larger. The eyes were wide open and restless, but the eyelids were unmoving, the mouth was wide open but the two lips stiff and contracted and between them the clenched teeth shone white. Since the man could no longer control some of his facial muscles the face looked like a mask. But the heart beat heavily and the lungs worked with short, quickened breath. The two gypsies began to lift him up like a sheep on a spit. Merdžan shouted to them to take care and not shake the body; he himself went to help them. Then they embedded the lower, thicker end of the stake between two beams and fixed it there with huge nails and then behind, at the same height, buttressed the whole thing with a short strut which was nailed both to the stake and to a beam on the staging.

When that too had been done, the gypsies climbed down and joined the guards, and on that open space, raised a full eight feet upright, stiff and bare

to the waist, the man on the stake remained alone. From a distance it could only be guessed that the stake to which his legs had been bound at the ankles passed right through his body. So that the people saw him as a statue, high up in the air on the very edge of the staging, high above the river.

A murmur and a wave of movement passed through the onlookers on the banks. Some lowered their eyes and others went quickly home without turning their heads. But the majority looked dumbly at this human likeness, up there in space, unnaturally stiff and upright. Fear chilled their entrails and their legs threatened to give way beneath them, but they were still unable to move away or take their eyes from the sight. And amid that terrified crowd mad Ilinka threaded her way, looking everyone in the eyes and trying to read their glances to find from them where her sacrificed and buried children were.

Then the man from Plevlje, Merdžan and a pair of guards went up to the impaled man and began to examine him more closely. Only a thin trickle of blood flowed down the stake. He was alive and conscious. His ribs rose and fell, the veins in his neck pulsed and his eyes kept turning slowly but unceasingly. Through the clenched teeth came a long drawn-out groaning in which a few words could with difficulty be distinguished.

“Turks, Turks, ...” moaned the man on the stake, “Turks on the bridge ... may you die like dogs ... like dogs.”

The gypsies picked up their tools and then, with the man from Plevlje, came down from the staging to the bank. The people made way for them and began to disperse. Only the children on the high blocks of stone and the bare trees waited a little longer, not knowing if this were the end or whether there would be more, to see what would happen next with that strange man who hovered over the waters as if suddenly frozen in the midst of a leap.

The man from Plevlje approached Abidaga and reported that everything had been carried out correctly and satisfactorily, that the criminal was still alive and that it seemed that he would go on living since his internal organs had not been damaged. Abidaga did not reply but only gave a sign with his hand to bring his horse and began to say good-bye to Tosun Effendi and Mastro Antonio. Everyone began to disperse. Through the marketplace the town-crier could be heard announcing that the sentence had been carried out and that the same or a worse punishment awaited anyone who would do the like in the future.

The man from Plevlje remained in perplexity on the level space which had now suddenly emptied. His servant held his horse and the guards waited for orders. He felt that he ought to say something but was not able to because of the wave of feeling that only now began to rise within him and choke him. Only now did he become conscious of all that he had forgotten since he had been too busy carrying out the sentence. He remembered Abidaga's threat that it would have been he who would have been placed upon the stake had he

not succeeded in catching the criminal. He had escaped that horror, but only by a hair and only at the last moment. But things had turned out otherwise. The sight of that man, who was hanging, bound and still alive, over the river filled him with terror and also with a sort of painful joy that such a fate had not been his and that his body was still undamaged, was free and able to move. At that thought burning pains shot through his chest and spread into his legs and arms and forced him to move about, to smile and to speak, just to prove to himself that he was healthy, that he could move freely, could speak and laugh aloud, could even sing if he so wished, and not merely mutter useless curses from a stake, awaiting death as the only happiness which could still be his. His hands and arms moved of their own volition, his lips opened and from them flowed unwittingly a strangled laugh and a copious flow of words:

“Ha, ha, ha, Radisav, thou mountain vila,\* why so stiff?... Why not go on and undermine the bridge?... Why writhe and groan? Sing vila! Dance, vila!”

Astonished and bewildered, the guards watched their leader dance with outstretched arms, heard him sing and choke with laughter and with strange words, saw the white foam oozing more and more from the corners of his lips. And his bay horse, in fear, cast sidelong glances at him.



In the darkness could be heard the voices of two youths who were walking on the bridge. They were moving slowly and just then halted by the *kapija*\* behind the angle of the parapet, so that Stiković and Glasinčanin could not see them, or be seen by them, from their seat on the sofa. But they could hear every word and the voices were well known to them. They were two of their younger comrades, Toma Galus and Fehim Bahtijarević. These two kept themselves a little apart from the group which comprised most of the other students which gathered every evening on the *kapija* around Stiković and Herak, for, although younger, Galus was a rival of Stiković both as a poet and as a nationalist speaker. He did not like Stiković nor admire him, while Bahtijarević was exceptionally silent, proud and reserved as befitted a true grandchild of a family of *begs*.

Toma Galus was a tall youth with red cheeks and blue eyes. His father, Alban von Galus, the last descendant of an ancient family of the Burgenland, had come to the town as a civil servant immediately after the occupation. He had been a forestry inspector for twelve years and now lived in the town on pension. At the very beginning, he had married the daughter of one of the lo-

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\* a fairy tale maiden.

\* gate.

cal landowners, Hadži Toma Stanković, a robust and full-blown young woman of dark skin and strong will. They had had three children, two daughters and one son, all of whom had been christened into the Serbian Orthodox church and had grown up like real townsmen's children and grandchildren of Hadži Toma.

Old Galus, a tall and formerly very handsome man, with a pleasant smile and masses of thick white hair, had long ago become a real townsman, "Mr. Albo," whom the younger generation could not think of as a foreigner and a newcomer. He had two passions which harmed no one: hunting and his pipe, and he had made many old and true friends, both among the Serbs and among the Moslems, throughout the whole district who shared his passion for the chase. He had completely assimilated many of their customs as if he had been born and bred amongst them, especially their habit of cheerful silence and calm conversation, so characteristic of men who are passionate smokers and who love hunting, the forests and life in the open.

Young Galus had matriculated that year at Sarajevo and that autumn was due to go on to Vienna to study. But in the matter of these studies there was a division of opinion in the family. The father wanted his son to study technical sciences or forestry and the son wanted to study philosophy. For Toma Galus only resembled his father in appearance and all his desires led him in a completely opposite direction. He was one of those good scholars, modest and exemplary in everything, who pass all their examinations with ease as if playing at them, but whose real and sincere interests are taken up with satisfying their somewhat confused and disordered spiritual aspirations outside school and outside the official curriculum. These are students of serene and simple heart but of uneasy and inquisitive spirit. Those difficult and dangerous crises of the life of the senses and emotions through which so many other younger men of their age pass, are almost unknown to them; therefore, they find difficulty in stilling their spiritual anxieties and very often remain all their lives dilettantes, interesting eccentrics without stable occupation or definite interests. As every young man must not only fulfill the eternal and natural demands of youth and maturity and also pay tribute to the current spiritual moods and fashions of his time, which for the moment reign amongst youth, Galus too had written verses and was an active member of the revolutionary nationalist student organizations. He had also studied French for five years as an optional subject, taken an interest in literature and, more especially, philosophy. He read passionately and indefatigably. The main body of reading of the young men at school in Sarajevo at that time consisted of works from the well-known and enormous German publishing house Reclams Universal-Bibliothek. These small cheap booklets with yellow covers and exceptionally small print were the main spiritual food available to the students of that time; from them they could become acquainted not only with German literature, but with all

the more important works in world literature in German translation. From them Galus drew his knowledge of modern German philosophers, especially Nietzsche and Stirner, and in his walks in Sarajevo along the banks of the Miljacka held endless discussions about them with a sort of cold passion, in no way linking his reading with his personal life, as so many youths often do. This type of young scholar just through his examinations, ripened too early and overloaded with all kinds of varied, chaotic and uncoordinated knowledge, was not rare among the students of that time. A modest youth and a good student, Galus knew the freedom and the unrestraint of youth only in the daring of his thoughts and the exaggerations of his reading.

Fehim Bahtijarević was a townsman on his mother's side only. His father had been born in Rogatica and was now Kadi (Moslem judge) there, but his mother was from the great local family of Osmanagić. From his earliest childhood he passed a part of the summer vacation in the town with his mother and her relatives. He was a slender youth, graceful and well formed, fine-boned but strong. Everything about him was measured, restrained, controlled. The fine oval of his face was sunburnt, his skin browned with light touches of a dark bluish shade, his movements few and abrupt; his eyes were black with blue shadings in the whites and his glance burning but without sparkle. He had thick eyebrows which met, and a fine black down on his upper lip. Such faces are reminiscent of Persian miniatures.

That summer he too had matriculated and he was now waiting to get a state grant to study oriental languages in Vienna.

The two young men were continuing some conversation begun earlier. The subject was Bahtijarević's choice of studies. Galus was proving to him that he would be making a mistake in taking up oriental studies. In general Galus spoke much more, and more animatedly, than his companion for he was accustomed to be listened to and to lay down the law, while Bahtijarević spoke shortly, like a man who has his own fixed ideas and feels no need to convince anyone else. Like most young men who have read much, Galus spoke with a naive satisfaction in words, picturesque expressions and comparisons, and with a tendency to generalize, whereas Bahtijarević spoke dryly, curtly, almost indifferently.

Hidden in the shadows and reclining on the stone seats, Stiković and Glinčanin remained silent as if they had tacitly agreed to listen to the conversation of their two comrades on the bridge.

Finishing the conversation about studies, Galus said belligerently:

"In that you Moslems, you begs' sons, often make a mistake. Disconcerted by the new times, you no longer know your exact and rightful place in the world. Your love for everything oriental is only a contemporary expression of your 'will to power'; for you the Eastern way of life and thought is very closely bound up with a social and legal order which was the basis of

your centuries of lordship. That is understandable, but it in no way means that you have any sense for orientalism as a study. You are orientals but you are making a mistake when you think that you are thereby called upon to be orientalists. In general you have not got the calling or the true inclination for science.

“Really!”

“No, you haven’t. And when I say that, I am not saying anything insulting or offensive. On the contrary. You are the only nobles in this country, or at least you were; for centuries you have enlarged, confirmed and defended your privileges by sword and pen, legally, religiously and by force of arms; that has made of you typical warriors, administrators and landowners, and that class of men nowhere in the world worries about abstract sciences but leaves them to those who have nothing else and can do nothing else. The true studies for you are law and economics, for you are men of practical knowledge. Such are men from the ruling classes, always and everywhere.”

“You mean that we should remain uneducated?”

“No, it does not mean that, but it means that you must remain what you are or, of you like, what you have been; you must, for no one can be at the same time what he is and the contrary of what he is.”

“But we are no longer a ruling class today. Today we are all equal.” Bahtijarević broke in once more with a touch of irony, in which was both bitterness and pride.

“You are not, naturally you are not. The conditions which at one time made you what you were have changed long ago, but that does not mean that you can change with the same speed. This is not the first, nor will it be the last, instance of a social caste losing its reason for existence and yet remaining the same. Conditions of life change but a class remains what it is, for only so can it exist and as such it will die.”

The conversation of the two unseen youths broke off for a moment, stifled by Bahtijarević’s silence.

In the clear June sky, above the dark mountains on the horizon, the moon appeared. The white plaque with the Turkish inscription suddenly shone in the moonlight, like a dimly lit window in the blue-black darkness.

Bahtijarević then said something, but in so low a voice that only disjointed and incomprehensible words reached Stiković and Glasinčanin. As so often in young men’s discussions, in which changes of subject are rapid and bold, the conversation was now about another matter. From the study of oriental languages, they had now passed on to the content of the inscription on the white plaque before them and to the bridge and he who had built it.

Galus’s voice was the louder and more expressive. While agreeing with Bahtijarević’s praises of Mehmed Pasha Sokolović and the Turkish administration of his times, which had made possible the building of such a bridge, he

now developed his nationalist views on the past and present of the people, their culture and civilization (for in such student discussions each follows his own train of thought).

“You are right,” said Galus. “He must have been a man of genius. He was not the first nor the last man of our blood who distinguished himself in the service of a foreign empire. We have given hundreds of such men, statesmen, generals and artists, to Istanbul, Rome and Vienna. The sense of our national unification in a single, great and powerful modern state lies just in that. Our own forces should remain in our own country and develop there and make their contribution to general culture in our name and not from foreign centers.”

“Do you really think that those ‘centers’ arose by chance and that it is possible to create new ones at will whenever and wherever one likes?”

“Chance or not, that is no longer the question; it is not important how they arose, but it is important that today they are disappearing, that they have flowered and decayed, that they must make way for new and different centers, through which young and free nations, appearing for the first time on the stage of history, can express themselves directly.”

“Do you think that Mehmed Pasha Sokolović, had he remained a peasant’s child up there yonder at Sokolovići, would have become what he became and would, among other things, have built this bridge on which we are now walking?”

“In those times, certainly, he would not. But, when you come to think of it, it was not hard for Istanbul to put up such buildings, when it took from us, and from so many other subject peoples, not only property and money, but also our best men and our purest blood. If you stop to think what we are and how much has been stolen from us through the centuries, then all these buildings are merely crumbs. But when we finally achieve our national freedom and our independence, then our money and our blood will be ours alone, and will stay ours. Everything will be solely and uniquely for the improvement of our own national culture, which will bear our mark and our name and which will be mindful of the happiness and prosperity of all our people.”

Bahtijarević remained silent, and that silence, like the most lively and eloquent speech, provoked Galus. He raised his voice and continued in a sharper tone. With all his natural vivacity and all the vocabulary then prevalent in nationalist literature, he set out the plans and aims of the revolutionary youth movement. All the living forces of the race must be awakened and set in action. Under their blows Austro-Hungarian monarchy, that prison of the peoples, would disintegrate as the Turkish Empire had disintegrated. All the anti-national and reactionary forces which today hinder, divide and lull to sleep our national forces will be routed and trampled underfoot. All this can be done, for the spirit of the times in which we live is our strongest ally, for

all the efforts of all the other small and oppressed nations support us. Modern nationalism will triumph over religious verities and outmoded prejudice, will liberate our people from foreign influence and exploitation. Then will the national state be born.

Galus then described all the advantages and beauties of the new national state which was to rally all the Southern Slavs around Serbia as a sort of Piedmont on the basis of complete national unity, religious tolerance and civil equality. His speech mixed up bold words of uncertain meaning and expressions that accurately expressed the needs of modern life, the deepest desires of a race, most of which were destined to remain only desires, and the justified and attainable demands of everyday reality. It mingled the great truths which had ripened through the generations but which only youth could perceive in advance and dare to express, with the eternal illusions which are never extinguished but never attain realization, for one generation of youth hands them on to the next like that mythological torch. In the young man's speech there were, naturally, many assertions which could not have stood up to the criticism of reality and many suppositions which could not, perhaps, have borne the proof of experience, but in it too was that freshness, that precious essence which maintains and rejuvenates the tree of humanity.

Bahtijarević remained silent.

"You will see, Fehim," Galus enthusiastically assured his friend as if it were a matter of the same night or the next morning, "you will see. We shall create a state which will make the most precious contribution to the progress of humanity, in which every effort will be blessed, every sacrifice holy, every thought original and expressed in our own words, and every deed marked with the stamp of our name. Then we will carry out work which will be the result of our free labor and the expression of our racial genius, put up buildings in comparison with which all that has been done in the centuries of foreign administration will appear like silly toys. We will bridge greater rivers and deeper abysses. We will build new, greater and better bridges, not to link foreign centers with conquered lands but to link our own lands with the rest of the world. There can no longer be any doubt. We are destined to realize all that the generations before us have aspired to; a state, born in freedom and founded on justice, like a part of God's thought realized here on earth."

Bahtijarević remained silent. Even Galus's voice lowered in tone. As his ideas became more exalted, his voice became lower and lower, hoarser and hoarser, till it became a strong and passionate whisper and was finally lost in the great silence of the night. At last both young men were silent. But none the less Bahtijarević's silence seemed a thing apart, heavy and obstinate in the night. It seemed like an impassable wall in the darkness which by the very weight of its existence resolutely rejected all that the other had said, and expressed its dumb, clear and unalterable opinion.



“The foundations of the world and the bases of life and human relationships in it have been fixed for centuries. That does not mean that they do not change, but measured by the length of human existence they appear eternal. The relation between their endurance and the length of human existence is the same as the relation between the uneasy, moving and swift surface of a river and its stable and solid bed whose changes are slow and imperceptible. The very idea of the change of these ‘centres’ is unhealthy and unacceptable. That would be as if someone wished to change the measure and the sources of great rivers or the sites of mountains. The desire for sudden changes and the thought of their realization by force often appear among men like a disease and gain ground mainly in young brains; only these brains do not think as they should, do not amount to anything in the end and the heads that think thus do not remain long on their shoulders. For it is not human desires that dispose and administer the things of the world. Desire is like a wind; it shifts the dust from one place to another, sometimes darkens the whole horizon, but in the end calms down and falls and leaves the old and eternal picture of the world. Lasting deeds are realized on this earth only by God’s will, and man is only His blind and humble tool. A deed which is born of desire, human desire, either does not live till realization or is not lasting; in no case is that good. All these tumultuous desires and daring words under the night sky on the *kapija* will not change anything basically; they will pass, beneath the great and permanent realities of the world and will be lost where all desires and winds are stilled. In truth great men and great buildings rise and will rise only where they are appointed to arise in God’s thought, in their right place independent of empty transient desires and human vanity.”

But Bahtijarević did not utter a single one of these words. Those who, like this Moslem youth of noble family, carry their philosophy in their blood, live and die according to it, do not know how to express it in words, or feel the need to do so. After this long silence Stiković and Glasinčanin only saw one or the other of the pair of unseen comrades throw a cigarette stub over the parapet and watched it fall like a shooting star in a great curve from the bridge into the Drina. At the same time they heard the two friends slowly and softly moving away towards the marketplace. The sound of their footsteps was soon lost.

*Lovett F. Edwards*

*The Bosnian Chronicle* (Excerpt)

Quite early then, horses were heard trotting and neighing under the windows. Solemn and formal, the Consul received the commander of the Vizier's Mamelukes, in the company of d'Avenat. Everything was as had been agreed and arranged beforehand. Here were the Vizier's twelve Mamelukes from the unit which Mehmed Pasha had brought from Egypt as his personal bodyguard. He was particularly proud of them. Their dexterously wound turbans of fine cloth, woven with threads of gold and silk, their curved sabres which hung in a picturesque manner by their horses' sides and their wide cherry-colored uniforms attracted everyone's attention. The horses provided for Daville and his retinue were covered from head to tail with thick velvet cloth. The manner of command was brisk and the order perfect. Daville endeavoured to mount his quiet, ageing, broad-crouped horse as naturally as possible. The Consul was dressed in ceremonial uniform. His dark blue greatcoat was wide open on his chest, displaying his gilt buttons, silver trimming and medals. He looked well with his upright bearing and fine, manly head.

All went well and the Consul had every reason to be pleased until they turned into the main street. Then as soon as they reached the first Turkish houses they began to hear curious sounds: people calling to one another, slamming their courtyard gates and the shutters of their windows. At the very first doorway, a small girl opened one of the double gates a crack and, muttering some incomprehensible words, began spitting rapidly into the street, as though she were laying a curse on them. One after the other, gates opened and shutters were raised to reveal for a moment faces possessed with fanatical hatred. The women, veiled, spat and cursed, and the boys shouted abuse, accompanied by obscene gestures and unambiguous threats, slapping their buttocks or drawing their hands across their throats. As the street was narrow and the upper storeys of the houses jutted out on both sides, the procession was riding between two rows of insults and threats. At the beginning, taken by surprise, the Consul had slowed down his horse's trot, but d'Avenat urged his horse closer to him and, without moving or changing his expression, began to implore Daville in an excited whisper: "I beg Your Excellency to ride calmly on and pay no attention to any of this. Wild people, uncouth rabble. They hate everything foreign and greet everyone like this. It is best to ignore it. That's what the Vizier does. They're just barbarians. I beg Your Excellency to continue."

The Consul was disconcerted and indignant, although he tried not to show it. When he saw that the Vizier's men really were not taking any notice, he rode on, but he could feel the blood pounding in his head. Thoughts raced through his mind, jostling and colliding with one another. His first reaction was to wonder whether, as the representative of the great Napoleon, he ought

to tolerate all of this or whether he ought immediately to turn back and make a scandal. He could not resolve the dilemma, because he was equally afraid of damaging the reputation of France and of acting too hastily and causing a conflict which would ruin his relations with the Vizier and the Turks from the very first day. Incapable of making a decision, he felt humiliated and angry with himself. And he was repelled by the Levantine d'Avenat, who kept repeating over and over again behind his back:

"I beg Your Excellency to ride on and pay no attention. These are simply uncouth Bosnian customs! Just keep going calmly!" As he vacillated, unable to find a solution, Daville felt that his face was burning and that, in spite of the bitter cold, he was sweating profusely under the arms. He found d'Avenat's insistent whispering loathsome. In it he began to glimpse what it must be like for a man from the West to transfer his life to the East, linking his destiny to it forever. But when they reached the last houses, unseen women spat from the windows right onto the horses and their riders. The Consul stopped again for an instant, but set off once more, submitting to d'Avenat's pleas and drawn on by the calm trotting of the escort. Then the houses came to an end and they entered the bazaar with its low shops. The Turkish shopkeepers and their customers were sitting in their raised shopfronts, smoking or haggling. It was like passing from an overheated room into a completely cold one. The savage looks suddenly disappeared, together with the gestures showing the infidels' heads being cut off, and the women's superstitious spitting. Instead, on both sides of the street, there were blank impassive faces. Daville saw them dimly as though through an unpleasant veil trembling in front of his eyes. No one ceased working or smoking or raised his eyes to honour the unusual figure and his splendid retinue with so much as a glance. Here and there a shopkeeper turned his head away, as though searching for goods on the shelves. Only Easterners can hate and despise others to such an extent and display their hatred and contempt in such a way.

D'Avenat fell silent and reined his horse back to a proper distance, but for Daville this incredible mute contempt of the bazaar was no less painful or insulting than the outspoken loathing of the earlier curses. At last they turned to the right and there in front of them were the long high walls and white building of the Residence, a large, well-proportioned structure with a row of glazed windows. This sight offered him some relief.

This agonizing journey, which was now behind him, would remain in Daville's memory for a long time, tenacious as a bad dream filled with meaning. Over the years, he was to make the same journey countless times, in similar circumstances. For he would have to ride through the residential quarters and the bazaar on the occasion of every audience, and these were frequent, particularly in troubled times. He had to sit upright on his horse, looking nei-

ther to left nor right, not too high nor down between the horse's ears, neither vacantly nor anxiously, not smiling or frowning, but serious, attentive and calm, with roughly that slightly unnatural expression with which military commanders are shown in portraits gazing above a battle into the distance, somewhere between the road and the line of the horizon, from where planned reinforcements are certain to come. For a long time the Turkish children would continue to spit from their gateways briskly and rapidly at the horses' hooves, as though uttering imprecations, the way they had seen their elders do. The Turkish shopkeepers would turn their backs, pretending to look for something on the shelves. Only occasionally would he be greeted by one of the Jews who happened to be there and simply could not avoid the encounter. He would have to ride like that innumerable times, calm and dignified, inwardly fearful of the hatred and malicious indifference poured on him from all sides, of the unforeseen mishap which might occur at any moment, sickened by this work and this way of life, but making a strenuous effort to conceal both his fear and his disgust.

And even later when, with the years and the changes they brought, the people had grown accustomed to the presence of the foreigners, and when Daville had met many of them and was on good terms with some, this first ceremonial procession would remain in his consciousness like a black, but burning, painful line, only gradually erased and softened by forgetfulness.

The solemn procession clattered across a wooden bridge and found itself facing a great gateway. Suddenly, with the sound of clanging bolts and servants' running feet, both gates swung abruptly open.

And so the stage was revealed on which Jean Daville was to act out various scenes, in always the same difficult and thankless role, for the best part of eight years.

This disproportionately wide gate was to open in front of him many more times. It always seemed, as it opened, like a giant's ugly jaws, emitting the stench of everything which was living, growing, crumbling, reeking or lying sick in the vast Residence. He knew that the town and surrounding villages which were obliged to feed the Vizier and his household flung into the Residence each day a couple of thousand pounds of provisions of various kinds, and that all of it was distributed, pilfered, and consumed. He knew that, apart from the Vizier and those closest to him, there were eleven dignitaries, thirty-two guards and just as many, or more, Turkish loafers and boot-lickers, Christian employees and occasional labourers. In addition there was an unspecified number of horses, cows, dogs, cats, birds, and monkeys. But above it all one could smell the heavy, obnoxious odour of butter fat and tallow which is nauseating to anyone unused to it. That insidious smell would stay with the Consul the whole day after every audience, and the mere thought of it would make him retch and want to vomit. It seemed to him that the whole

Residence was permeated with this stench, like a church with incense, that it clung not only to the people and their clothes, but to the walls and everything within them.

Now, as this unfamiliar gate opened in front of him for the first time the detachment of Mamelukes parted and dismounted and Daville rode into the courtyard with his personal escort. This first narrow courtyard was quite dark because the upper storey of the building jutted over its whole width. It was only after this that they entered the real, open courtyard, with a well and lawn and borders of flowers. At the end of the yard a high, solid fence enclosed the Vizier's gardens.

Still upset by what he had experienced on his way through the town, Daville was now further confused by the agitated courtesy and formal attentiveness with which he was met by the whole population of attendants and dignitaries of the Residence. They all bustled and jostled around him with a brisk urgency unknown in Western ceremonies.

The first to greet the Consul was the Chief Secretary for Finance. (The Vizier's local deputy, Suleiman Pasha Skopljak, was not in Travnik.) He was followed by the Keeper of the Weapons, the Master of the Wardrobe, the Treasurer and the Keeper of Seals, with a whole throng of men of unknown or indeterminate rank and occupation pushing and elbowing their way after them. Some, bowing their heads, muttered incomprehensible words of welcome, others spread their arms in greeting, and the whole crowd advanced towards the great hall where the Divan was to be held. The tall dark figure of d'Avenat moved to and fro among them, swiftly and roughly, shouting insolently at anyone blocking the way, organizing and commanding more ostentatiously and loudly than the occasion demanded. Daville, disconcerted but outwardly dignified and calm, felt like one of those saints in Catholic paintings borne heavenwards by a seething flock of angels. And the throng did indeed lift him up the few broad steps which led out of the courtyard to the Divan.

The Divan was a spacious, dimly-lit hall at ground level. There were several carpets on the floor. All round the walls stood low sofas, covered with soft cherry-coloured cloth. In the corner, by the window, there were cushions for the Vizier and his guest. The only picture on the walls was the Imperial emblem, the Emperor's monogram inscribed on green paper in letters of gold. Below this hung a saber, two pistols, and a red ceremonial mantle—gifts from Selim III to his favourite Husref Mehmed Pasha.

Above this hall, on the first floor, there was another, just as large, more sparsely furnished, but lighter. This was where the Vizier held his Divan during the summer. Two walls of this hall consisted entirely of windows, some looking over gardens and steep plots of land, the others at the Lasva and the bazaar across the bridge. These were those "glass casements" mentioned in

stories and songs, the like of which were quite unknown in the whole of Bosnia. Mehmed Pasha had acquired them at his own expense from Austria and brought a special craftsman, a German, to fit them. Sitting on his cushion, a visitor would look through those windows at a roofed verandah under the eaves of which, on a spruce beam, there was a swallows' nest with stalks of straw sticking out and chirping coming from it, and he could watch the cautious swallows flying swiftly in and out.

It was always pleasant to sit by those windows. There were always light and green foliage or blossom, a breeze, and the sound of water, the chirruping of birds, peace for repose and quiet for reflection and reaching agreements. Many difficult and terrible decisions were taken or approved there, but somehow, everything discussed there seemed easier, clearer and more human than in the Divan on the ground floor.

These were the only two rooms in the Residence that Daville was to know during his stay in Travnik. They provided the stage for many torments and satisfactions, successes and failures. Here, over the years, he would come to know not only the Turks and their unique strengths and boundless weaknessess, but also himself and the extent and limits of his powers, people in general, life, the world and relations between people in it.

As always in winter, this first audience was held in the ground-floor Divan. From the musty air, one could tell that the present occasion was the first time it had been opened and heated this winter.

As soon as the Consul had set foot on the threshold, the door on the opposite side of the Divan opened and the Vizier appeared in splendid apparel, followed by attendants, who walked with their heads slightly bowed and their arms crossed humbly on their breasts. This was a great concession in protocol, which Daville had achieved in negotiations carried on for the previous three days through d'Avenat. He thought it just the thing to brighten up his first report to the Minister. For the Turks had wanted the Vizier to receive the Consul sitting on a cushion as he received all his other visitors. The Consul, on the other hand, had wanted the Vizier to rise when he came in and to greet him standing. The Consul had appealed to the might of France and the military glory of his sovereign, the Turks to their traditions and the greatness of the Empire. Eventually, they reached an agreement whereby the Consul and the Vizier should both step into the hall simultaneously, meet in the center, and the Vizier should lead the Consul from there to the raised dais by the window where two cushions had been prepared, on which they were both to sit down at the same moment.

And that is what happened. The Vizier, who was lame in the right leg (which was why he was known among the people as "The Limping Pasha"), moved briskly and rapidly as lame people often do. He came up to the Consul and cordially invited him to sit down. The interpreter d'Avenat sat down be-

tween them but one step lower. Stooping, his hands folded in his lap and his eyes lowered, he endeavoured to make himself lower and smaller than he was and to have only as much wit and breath as were required for these two dignitaries to communicate their thoughts and messages to one another. All the rest of the crowd vanished silently. Only servants remained, stationed at short intervals, ready to pass what was to be served. Throughout the whole conversation, which lasted more than an hour, these boys like soundless shadows, handed one another and presented to the Consul and the Vizier all that the ceremonial required. First came the lighted chibouks, then coffee, then sherbet. After this one of the boys shuffled up to them on his knees, bringing strong perfume in a shallow dish which he passed under the Vizier's beard and the Consul's moustache as though it were incense. Then coffee again and new chibouks. All of this was served as they talked, with the greatest care, unobtrusively and swiftly.

For a man from the East, the Vizier was unusually lively, pleasant, and open. Although he had been told in advance about these qualities, and although he knew that he should not take it all too much at face value, Daville found this courteous and amiable manner agreeable after the unexpected humiliations he had experienced on his way through the town. The blood which had rushed to his face subsided. The Vizier's words and the smell of the coffee and tobacco pleased and soothed him although it could not erase his earlier painful impressions. In the course of the conversation, the Vizier made a point of stressing the savagery of this country, the crudity and backwardness of the people. The land was wild, the people impossible. What could be expected of women and children, creatures whom God had not endowed with reason, in a country where even the men were violent and uncouth? Nothing these people did or said had any significance, nor could it affect the affairs of serious, cultivated men. "The curs may bark, but the caravan moves on," concluded the Vizier, who had evidently been informed about everything that had happened during the Consul's ride through the town and was now trying to minimize the incident and alleviate its effects. And from these disagreeable trifles he passed immediately on to the unparalleled greatness of Napoleon's victories and to the importance of what their two Empires, the Turkish and the French, would be able to achieve, through cordial and well-conceived cooperation.

These words, spoken sincerely and calmly, pleased Daville, because they were an indirect apology for the recent insults, and he felt that they reduced the extent of the humiliation he had undergone. Already soothed and in better humor, he observed the Vizier carefully, recalling what he had learned about him from d'Avenat.

Husref Mehmed Pasha, known as "The Limping Pasha," was Georgian. Brought as a slave to Istanbul while still a child, he had been in the service of

the great Kuchuk Hussein Pasha. There he had been noticed by Selim III even before the Sultan came to the throne. Brave, astute, cunning, eloquent, sincerely loyal to his masters, this Georgian had become Vizier in Egypt at the age of thirty-one. In fact, that had all ended badly, for the great uprising of the Mamelukes had thrown Mehmed Pasha out of Egypt. But he had not fallen completely into disfavour. After a short stay in Salonika he was appointed Vizier to Bosnia. It was a relatively light punishment, and Mehmed Pasha made it lighter still by wisely behaving in public as though he did not see it as a punishment at all. From Egypt he had brought a unit of some thirty loyal Mamelukes with whom he liked to carry out military exercises on the plain of Travnik. Splendidly dressed and well-fed, the Mamelukes aroused people's curiosity and increased the Pasha's standing. The Bosnian Turks watched them with loathing but also with fear and secret admiration.

More even than the Mamelukes, it was the Vizier's stud that provoked wonder: so many horses of such quality had never been seen in Bosnia before. The Vizier was young and looked even younger than he was. He was of less than average height, but his whole bearing, and particularly his smile, made him seem at least a hand's breadth taller than he was. He disguised his lameness as far as possible by the cut of his clothes and his deftly controlled, agile movements. When he had to stand, he always knew how to adopt a posture which would make his disability imperceptible, and when he had to move he would do it rapidly, nimbly, and in stages. This gave him a special air of freshness and youth. There was nothing about him of the immobile Ottoman dignity of which Daville had heard and read so much. The colours and cut of his clothes were simple, but obviously chosen with care. There are people like this who give an extra brilliance and distinction to their clothing and jewellery simply by wearing them. His face, unusually red, like a sailor's, with a short black beard and slightly slanting black, bright eyes, was open and smiling. He was one of those people who conceal their disposition with a perpetual smile and hide their ideas, or absence of ideas, in lively eloquence. The way he talked about everything suggested that he knew a great deal more than he had said. All his civility and kindness, every favour, seemed to be only a prelude, the first stage of what might still be expected of him. No matter how well-informed and forewarned, no one could avoid the impression that here was a mild, reasonable man who would not only make well-meaning promises, but actually carry them out, wherever and whenever he could. But at the same time, there was no one shrewd enough to see through those promises and determine their limits or gauge the true measure of those good intentions.

Both the Vizier and the Consul turned the conversation to topics which they knew to be a secret weakness or favorite subject of the other's. The Vizier kept returning to the illustrious figure of Napoleon and his great victories, and the Consul, who had learned from d'Avenat of the Vizier's love of



the sea and seafaring, to questions connected with sailing and naval warfare. The Vizier really did passionately love the sea and life on it. Apart from the hidden pain of his failure in Egypt, what grieved him most was being so far from the sea and shut in among these cold, wild mountains. In the most secret depths of his soul, the Vizier cherished the desire that one day he might become the successor of his great master Kuchuk Hussein Pasha, and, in the capacity of Admiral, carry out his ideas for improving the Ottoman navy.

After an hour and a half's conversation, the Consul and the Vizier parted as close acquaintances, each equally convinced that he would be able to carry weight with the other and each well pleased with both his partner and himself.

There was a still greater flurry and clamour at the Consul's departure. Cloaks of great value were brought—marten for the Consul and woollen cloth and fox for his escort. A voice loudly intoned prayers and called for blessings on this imperial guest, and others responded in chorus. High officials brought Daville to the mounting block in the center of the inner courtyard. They all walked with their arms outspread, as though carrying him. Daville mounted. The Vizier's cloak was placed over his greatcoat. Outside, the Mamelukes were waiting, already on their horses. The procession set off in the same direction from which it had come.

Despite the heavy clothes he was wearing, Daville shivered at the thought that he would have once again to ride between the worn shutters and warped lattices, amid the insults and contempt of the mob. But it seemed as though his first steps in Travnik were always to bring surprises, even agreeable ones. It was true that the Turks in the shops were sullen and motionless, with deliberately downcast eyes, but this time there were no curses or threats from the houses. Uneasily tense, Daville had the feeling that many hostile and inquisitive eyes were observing him from behind wooden lattices, but without a sound or movement. For some reason he felt as though the Vizier's cloak were protecting him from the mob, and unwittingly he drew it a little more tightly around him, straightening himself in the saddle. So, with his head high, he rode up to Baruh's walled courtyard.

When he was at last left alone in his warm room, Daville sat down on the hard couch, unbuttoned his uniform and breathed a deep sigh of relief. He was over-wrought and weary. He felt empty, confused, as though he had been thrown from a considerable height onto this hard couch and had not yet come round, nor could he make out clearly how or where he was. At last his time was his own, but he did not know what to do with it. He contemplated rest and sleep, but his eyes fell on the hanging cloak he had just been given by the Vizier and it immediately occurred to him, like something unexpected and painful, that he would have to write a report about it all to the Ministry in Paris and the Ambassador in Istanbul. This meant that he would have to live

through it all once again, presenting everything so as not to damage his reputation, and yet not straying far from the truth. This task loomed before him like an impassable mountain which had nevertheless to be crossed. The Consul covered his eyes with his right hand. He drew in a few more deep breaths and, as he breathed out, said half aloud: "Oh, dear God, dear God!" And he stayed like that, leaning back on the sofa. That was all the sleep and rest he had.

*Celia Hawkesworth and Bogdan Rakić*

"A Letter from 1920"

March 1920. The railway station at Slavonski Brod. Past midnight. From somewhere a wind was blowing, and it seemed colder than it really was to the weary travelers, who wished only to sleep. High above, stars slipped between the clouds. In the distance, yellow and red signal lights traveled faster or slower along invisible tracks, with the piercing sound of conductors' whistles and the long drawn-out howling of the locomotive, which we travelers invest with the melancholy of our fatigue, and the tedium of our long, bad-tempered waiting.

In front of the station by the first track, we sat on our suitcases and waited for the train. We didn't know when it would come, when it would leave. All we knew was that it would be overcrowded, crammed with travelers and luggage.

The man sitting next to me was an old friend I'd lost track of for the last five or six years. Max Levenfeld, a doctor and a doctor's son. Born and raised in Sarajevo, where he had built up a large practice. Jewish in origin, long ago converted. His mother was born in Trieste, the daughter of an Italian baroness and an Austrian naval officer, himself the descendant of French emigres. In Sarajevo, two generations remembered her figure, her bearing, and her elegant style of dress. She was marked by the kind of beauty respected and appreciated by people otherwise quite impudent and vulgar.

Max and I went to high school together in Sarajevo, only he was three years ahead of me, which at that age was a lot. I vaguely remember that I noticed him as soon as I came to high school. He had just entered the fourth class, but still dressed as a child. He was a strong boy, "The little Kraut," in a navy blue sailor suit with anchors embroidered at the corners of the wide collar. He was still in shorts. And on his feet, perfectly shaped black shoes. Between his little white socks and shorts, powerful bare calves, ruddy and already sprinkled with light hairs.

Then, there wasn't and couldn't be any contact between us. Everything divided us—age, appearance, customs and habits, our parents' financial position and their social status.

But I remembered him much better at a later point, when I was in the fifth grade and he in the eighth. Then he was already a lanky young man with light eyes that betrayed unusual sensitivity and a very lively mind; well, but carelessly dressed, with thick blond hair that fell in heavy slicks, now to one, now to the other side of his face. We met and came closer during a discussion with some senior boys in the park on a bench.

Such schoolboy arguments acknowledged no limits and showed no respect for anything: all principles suffered, and entire philosophical worlds were mined to their very foundations by our bombast. Afterwards, of course, everything remained in place; but those passionate words were significant for us and the fate awaiting us, as a foreshadowing of the great achievements and painful perplexities of the combative times that were yet to come.

After one such lively discussion, when I started for home still trembling with excitement and convinced of my triumph (just as my opponent was of his), Max joined me. This was the first time that the two of us had been alone together. This flattered me and intensified my sense of triumph and high opinion of myself. He asked what I was reading and looked at me carefully, as if seeing me for the first time in his life. I was answering excitedly. All at once he stopped, looked me straight in his eyes and said in a strangely calm way: "You know, I wanted to tell you that you didn't quote Ernst Haeckel correctly." I felt myself blushing and the earth slowly moving from under my feet, and then back again into its place. Of course I had quoted him wrongly—my quotation was from a cheap pamphlet, uncertainly remembered and, most likely, badly translated. All my former triumph turned into a pang of conscience and feeling of shame. His light blue eyes watched me without sympathy, but also with no trace of malice or superiority. And then Max repeated my ill-fated quotation in the correct form. And when we got to his beautiful house on the bank of the Miljacka, he firmly shook my hand and invited me to come the following afternoon to look at his books.

That afternoon was an experience for me. I saw the first real library of my life, and it was clear to me that I was seeing my own destiny. Max had many German and some Italian and French books which belonged to his mother. He showed me all this with a calm that I envied him more than the books. It wasn't really envy, but rather a sense of limitless contentment and a strong desire that one day I too would move so freely in this world of books from which, it seemed to me, streamed light and warmth. He spoke just as if reading from books, freely, and moved without boasting in this world of glorious names and great ideas. And I trembled with excitement, with vanity, as I

shyly entered this world of great men, fearing the world I had left outside to which I had to return.

These afternoon visits to my old friend's house became more and more frequent. I improved quickly in German and began to read Italian. I even brought those beautifully bound foreign books home to my wretched apartment. I fell behind in my school work. Everything I read seemed to me to be the sacred truth and my sublime duty, which I couldn't escape if I didn't want to lose my self-respect and faith in myself. I knew only one thing: I had to read it all, and try to write the same or similar things. I couldn't envision anything else in my life.

I remember one day in particular. It was May. Max was getting ready for his final examinations, but without any fuss or noticeable effort. He led me to a small, separate bookcase with Helios Klassiker-Ausgabe engraved on it in gold. And I remember being told that the bookcase was bought together with the books. The bookcase seemed to me a holy object, its wood imbued with light. Max took out a volume of Goethe and started to read Prometheus to me.

Cover thy spacious heavens, Zeus,  
 With clouds of mist,  
 And, like the boy who lops  
 The thistles' heads,  
 Disport with oaks and mountain-peaks;  
 Yet thou must leave  
 My earth still standing;  
 My cottage too,  
 Which was not raised by thee;  
 Leave me my hearth,  
 Whose kindly glow  
 By thee is envied.

At the end, he rhythmically but powerfully pounded the arm of the chair he was sitting in with his fist, his hair falling down on both sides of his flushed face.

Here sit I, forming mortals  
 After my image;  
 A race resembling me,  
 To suffer, to weep,  
 To enjoy, to be glad,  
 And thee to scorn,  
 As I do!

That was the first time I had seen him like that. I listened to him with awe and slight fear. Then we went outside and continued our conversation about the poem in the warm dusk. Max saw me to my steep street, and then I saw him to the river bank, then back we went to the street, and back again to the bank.

Night was falling and the people had begun to thin out, but we continued to measure that path pondering the meaning of life and the origin of gods and men. I remember one moment particularly well. The first time we reached my nondescript street and stopped at some grey wooden fences, Max stretched out his left hand in a strange way and said to me in a sort of warm, confidential voice, "You know, I'm an atheist." A thick clump of elder was blooming above the tumbled down fence and spreading a powerful, heavy scent which came over to me as the scent of life itself. The evening was solemn, everything around us was quiet, and the dome of heaven above me, full of stars, seemed brand-new. I was so excited I couldn't say anything, I just felt that something important had happened between me and my older friend, that now we couldn't just separate and each go our own way home. And so we went on walking until late into the night.

Max's graduation separated us. He left for Vienna to study medicine. For a short while we wrote to one another, but the correspondence petered out. We sometimes saw one another on vacations, but without our former intimacy. And then came the war, which separated us completely.

And now, after several years, here we were, meeting again at this ugly and boring station. We had traveled from Sarajevo on the same train, but we didn't know it, and only saw one another here; and now we were waiting for the uncertain arrival of the Belgrade train.

In a few words we told each other how we had spent the war. He graduated in the first year, and then worked as a doctor on all the Austrian fronts, always serving in Bosnian regiments. His father died of typhus fever during the war, and his mother left Sarajevo and moved to her relatives in Trieste. Max had spent the last few months in Sarajevo, just as long as he needed to put his affairs in order. By agreement with his mother, he had sold his father's house on the Miljacka and most of his things. Now he was on his way to his mother in Trieste, and then he might go to Argentina, or maybe even Bolivia. He didn't say it explicitly, but it was clear that he was leaving Europe for ever.

Max had grown larger during his life on the front, had roughened; he was dressed like a businessman, as far as I could tell. In the darkness I could just make out his strong head with its thick blond hair and hear his voice, which had become deeper and more masculine over the years, and his Sarajevo dialect in which the consonants are softened and the vowels slurred and drawn out. There was a certain feeling of insecurity in his speech.

Even now he spoke as if he were reading from a book, using many strange, bookish, learned phrases. But that was the only thing that remained of the former Max. Otherwise there was no reminder of either poetry or books. (No one remembered Prometheus any more.) First, he spoke about the war in general, with a great bitterness revealed more in the tone than in the words, a bitterness that did not expect to be understood. There were not, so to speak, any opposing fronts for him in this great war; they had mixed, flowed into one another, and utterly merged. The general suffering had blinkered his vision and deprived him of an understanding of everything else. I remember how shocked I was when he said he congratulated the victors, and that he pitied them deeply, for the conquered see what they're up against and what needs to be done, while the conquerors can hardly suspect what is in store for them. He spoke in the caustic and hopeless tone of a man who has lost a great deal, and can now say what he likes, well aware both that no one can do him much harm for what he says, and that it cannot do him any good. After the great war, there were many of these embittered people among the intelligentsia, embittered in a peculiar way, about something indefinable in life. These people couldn't either manage to reconcile themselves and adapt, or find the strength for firm decisions in the opposite direction. He was, it seemed to me at that moment, one of them.

But the conversation quickly ran aground, because neither he nor I wanted to quarrel that night, after so many years, at this strange place for a reunion. So we talked about other things. Actually, he did the talking. Even now, he spoke in carefully chosen words and complicated sentences, like a man who spends more time with books than people, in a cold matter-of-fact manner, without beating about the bush, just as when we open a medical textbook, and find the symptoms of our illness inside.

I offered him a cigarette, but he said he didn't smoke, stating that hastily, almost with fear and distrust. And while I lit one cigarette after another, he spoke with somewhat forced nonchalance, as if driving away other, heavier thoughts.

"You see, the two of us have just come to the first main-line station. That means, we've taken hold of the latch of the door that opens onto the wide world. We're leaving Bosnia. And I will never go back, although you will." "Who knows?" I interrupted, pensively, spurred by that peculiar conceit that makes young people want to see their own fate in distant lands and along unusual paths.

"No, no, you'll come back for sure," my fellow traveler said with certainty, as if making a diagnosis, "while all my life long I'll be struggling with the memory of Bosnia, as if with some Bosnian disease. What its cause is—the fact that I was born and grew up in Bosnia, or that I'll never be coming back again, I don't even know myself. Not that it matters." In a strange place,

at a strange hour, even conversation becomes strange, a little like a dream. I looked sideways at the large, hunched silhouette of my former friend next to me and wondered; I thought how little he resembled that young man who pounded with his fist and recited, "Cover thy spacious heavens, Zeus!" I thought, what will become of us if life continues to change so quickly and profoundly for us; I thought that only the changes I noticed in myself were good and right. And while I was thinking all this, I suddenly noticed that this friend was talking to me again. Rousing myself from my thoughts, I listened to him carefully, so carefully that it seemed to me that the station noises around me had fallen silent and his voice alone murmured in the windy night.

"Yes, for a long time I really did think that I should spend my life treating children in Sarajevo just like my father, and that my bones, like his, would rest in the graveyard at Koševo. This conviction was already shaken by what I saw and experienced in the Bosnian regiments during the war, but when I left the army this summer and spent three whole months in Sarajevo, it became clear to me that I could not go on living there. And the mere thought of living in Vienna, Trieste, or some other Austrian city revolts me, revolts me to the point of nausea. And so I began to think of South America." "Fine, but may one ask what it is you're running away from in Bosnia?" I asked, with the recklessness at that time typical of people my age asking questions.

"Well, 'one may ask,' but one isn't likely to get a concise answer in transit at a railway station. But if I still had to say in one word what is driving me out of Bosnia, I would say: hatred." Max suddenly stood up, as if he had unexpectedly run into an invisible fence in his speech. And I emerged to the reality of a cold night at the railway station in Slavonski Brod. The wind was beating stronger and stronger, colder and colder, signal lights were winking in the distance, tiny locomotives were whistling. Above us, even that diminished sky with sparse stars had disappeared, and just fog and smoke made a blanket worthy of this plain where, it seemed to me, man sank up to his eyes in rich, black soil.

At that moment we heard the roar of an express train, immediately followed by its heavy whistle, muffled, as if coming out of a concrete tunnel. The entire station instantly came to life. Hundreds of previously invisible figures moved about in the darkness and began to run to meet the train. And the two of us jumped up, but the crowd we were caught up in separated us even further. I only managed to shout out my Belgrade address.

About three weeks later, I received a rather long letter in Belgrade. I couldn't guess who it was from by the large handwriting. Max had written it to me from Trieste, in German: "My dear old friend, When we ran into one another in Slavonski Brod our conversation was disjointed and difficult. And even had we had a far better occasion and more time, I don't believe we would have understood one another and gotten to the bottom of everything.

The unexpected meeting and abrupt departure made that quite impossible. I'm getting ready to leave Trieste where my mother is living. I'm going to Paris, where I have some relatives on my mother's side. If they'll allow me, as a foreigner, to practise medicine there, I'll stay in Paris; if not, I'm truly going to South America.

I don't believe that these few disjointed paragraphs I am writing in haste will be able to explain the matter fully, or justify in your eyes my 'running away' from Bosnia. But I send them anyway, because feel I owe you an answer, and remembering our school-days I don't want you to misunderstand me and see in me an ordinary Kraut and "carpetbagger" who lightly leaves the country he was born in, the moment she is beginning a free life and needs every ounce of her strength.

But let me come straight to the point. Bosnia is a wonderful country, fascinating, with nothing ordinary in the habitat or people. And just as there are mineral riches under the earth in Bosnia, so undoubtedly are Bosnians rich in hidden moral values, which are more rarely found in their compatriots in other Yugoslav lands. But, you see, there's one thing that the people of Bosnia, at least people of your kind, must realize and never lose sight of—Bosnia is a country of hatred and fear.

But leaving fear aside, which is only a correlative of hatred, the natural result of it, let us talk about hatred. Yes, about hatred. And instinctively you recoil and protest when you hear that word (I saw it that night at the station), just as every one of you refuses to hear, grasp, and understand it. But it is precisely this that needs to be recognized, confirmed, and analyzed. And the real harm lies in the fact that no one either wants or knows how to do it. For the fatal characteristic of this hatred is that the Bosnian man is unaware of the hatred that lives in him, shrinks from analyzing it, and hates everyone who tries to do so. And yet it's a fact that in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are more people ready in fits of this subconscious hatred to kill and be killed, for different reasons, and under different pretexts, than in other much bigger Slav and non-Slav lands.

I know that hatred, like anger, has its function in the development of society, because hatred gives strength, and anger provokes action. I know that there are ancient and deeply rooted injustices and abuses which only torrents of hatred and anger can uproot and wash away. And when these torrents dwindle and dry up, room for freedom remains, for the creation of a better life. The people living at the time see the hatred and anger far better, because they are the sufferers by them, but their descendants see only the fruits of this strength and action. That I know well. But what I have seen in Bosnia—that is something different. It is hatred, but not limited just to a moment in the course of social change, or an inevitable part of the historical process; rather, it is hatred acting as an independent force, as an end in itself. Hatred which sets



man against man and casts both alike into misery and misfortune, or drives both opponents to the grave; hatred like a cancer in an organism, consuming and eating up everything around it, only to die itself at the last; because this kind of hatred, like a flame, has neither one constant form, nor a life of its own: it is simply the agent of the instinct of destruction or self-destruction. It exists only in this form, and only until its task of total destruction has been completed.

Yes, Bosnia is a country of hatred. That is Bosnia. And by a strange contrast, which in fact isn't so strange, and could perhaps be easily explained by careful analysis, it can also be said that there are few countries with such firm belief, elevated strength of character, so much tenderness and loving passion, such depth of feeling, of loyalty and unshakeable devotion, or with such a thirst for justice. But in secret depths underneath all this hide burning hatreds, entire hurricanes of tethered and compressed hatreds maturing and awaiting their hour. The relationship between your loves and your hatred is the same as between your high mountains and the invisible geological strata underlying them, a thousand times larger and heavier. And thus you are condemned to live on deep layers of explosive which are lit from time to time by the very sparks of your loves and your fiery and violent emotion. Perhaps your greatest misfortune is precisely that you do not suspect just how much hatred there is in your loves and passions, traditions and pieties. And just as, under the influence of atmospheric moisture and warmth, the earth on which we live passes into our bodies and gives them colour and form, determining the character and direction of our way of life and our actions, so does the strong, underground and invisible hatred on which a Bosnian lives imperceptibly and indirectly enter into all his actions, even the best of them. Vice gives birth to hatred everywhere in the world, because it consumes and does not create, destroys, and does not build; but in countries like Bosnia, virtue itself often speaks and acts through hatred. With you, ascetics derive no love from their asceticism, but hatred for the voluptuary instead; abstainers hate those who drink, and drunkards feel a murderous hatred for the whole world. Those who do believe and love feel a mortal hatred for those who don't, or those who believe and love differently. And, unhappily, the chief part of their belief and love is often consumed in this hatred. (The most evil and sinister-looking faces can be met in the greatest numbers at places of worship—monasteries, and dervish tekkes.) Those who oppress and exploit the economically weaker do it with hatred into the bargain, which makes that exploitation a hundred times harder and uglier; while those who bear these injustices dream of justice and reprisal, but as some explosion of vengeance which, if it were realized according to their ideas, would perforce be so complete that it would blow to pieces the oppressed along with the hated oppressors. You Bosnians have, for the most part, gotten used to keeping all the strength of your hatred for that

which is closest to you. Your holy of holies is, as a rule, three hundred rivers and mountains away, but the objects of your repulsion and hatred are right beside you, in the same town, often on the other side of your courtyard wall. So your love remains inert, but your hatred is easily spurred into action. And you love your homeland, you passionately love it, but in three or four different ways which are mutually exclusive, often come to blows, and hate each other to death.

In some Maupassant story there is a Dionysiac description of spring which ends with the remark that on such days, there should be a warning posted on every corner: "Citoyens! This is spring—beware of love!" Perhaps in Bosnia men should be warned at every step in their every thought and their every feeling, even the most elevated, to beware of hatred—of innate, unconscious, endemic hatred. Because this poor, backward country, in which four different faiths live cheek by jowl, needs four times as much love, mutual understanding, and tolerance as other countries. But in Bosnia, on the contrary, lack of understanding, periodically spilling over into open hatred, is the general characteristic of its people. The rifts between the different faiths are so deep that hatred alone can sometimes succeed in crossing them. I know that you could argue, and with sufficient reason, that a certain amount of progress can be seen in this direction; that the ideas of the nineteenth century have done their work here too, and after liberation and unification all this will go much better and faster. I'm afraid that this is not quite so. (In these past few months I think I have had a good view of the real relationships between people of different faiths and nationalities in Sarajevo!) On every occasion you will be told, and wherever you go you will read, "Love your brother though his religion is other", "It's not the cross that marks the Slav", "Respect others' ways and take pride in your own", "Total national solidarity recognizes no religious or ethnic differences".

But from time immemorial in Bosnian urban life there has been plenty of counterfeit courtesy, the wise deception of oneself and others by resounding words and empty ceremonies. That conceals the hatred up to a point, but doesn't get rid of it or thwart its growth. I'm afraid that in these circles, under the cover of all these contemporary maxims, old instincts and Cain-like plans may only be slumbering, and will live on until the foundations of material and spiritual life in Bosnia are altogether changed. And when will that time come, and who will have the strength to carry it out? It will come one day, that I do believe; but what I've seen in Bosnia does not indicate that things are advancing along that path at present. On the contrary.

I have thought this over and over, especially in the last few months, when I was still struggling against my decision to leave Bosnia for ever. Of course a man obsessed with such thoughts cannot sleep well, and I would lie in front of

an open window in the room where I was born, while the sound of the Miljacka alternated with the rustling of the leaves in the early autumn wind.

Whoever lies awake at night in Sarajevo hears the voices of the Sarajevo night. The clock on the Catholic cathedral strikes the hour with weighty confidence: 2 a.m. More than a minute passes (to be exact, seventy-five seconds—I counted) and only then with a rather weaker, but piercing sound does the Orthodox church announce the hour, and chime its own 2 a.m. A moment after it the tower clock on the Bey's mosque strikes the hour in a hoarse, far-away voice, and that strikes 11, the ghostly Turkish hour, by the strange calculation of distant and alien parts of the world. The Jews have no clock to sound their hour, so God alone knows what time it is for them by the Sephardic reckoning or the Ashkenazi. Thus at night, while everyone is sleeping, division keeps vigil in the counting of the late, small hours, and separates these sleeping people who, awake, rejoice and mourn, feast and fast by four different and antagonistic calendars, and send all their prayers and wishes to one heaven in four different ecclesiastical languages. And this difference, sometimes visible and open, sometimes invisible and hidden, is always similar to hatred, and often completely identical with it.

This uniquely Bosnian hatred should be studied and eradicated like some pernicious, deeply-rooted disease. Foreign scholars should come to Bosnia to study hatred, I do believe, just as scientists study leprosy, if hatred were only recognized as a separate, classified subject of study, as leprosy is.

I considered whether I should devote myself to the study of this hatred and, by analyzing it and bringing it to the light of day, make my contribution to its destruction. Perhaps I was in duty bound to try, since, although a foreigner by birth, it was in Bosnia I first 'saw the light of day,' as they say. But after my first attempts and much reflection, I realized I had neither the strength nor the ability to do it. I would be required to take sides, to hate and be hated; and that, I neither wanted nor was able to do. Perhaps, if it had to be, I could have consented to fall a victim to hatred; but to live in hatred and with hatred, to be a part of it—that I cannot do. And in a country like present-day Bosnia, the man who does not know how to hate, or, what is still better and harder, consciously does not want to hate, is always something of a foreigner and freak, often a martyr. That holds true for all you who are born in Bosnia, and even more so for a newcomer. And so on one of those autumn nights, listening to the strange chimes of the various and many-voiced Sarajevo towers, I concluded that I could not stay in Bosnia, my second homeland, and did not have to. I'm not so naive as to look for any town in the world that has no hatred. No, I only need a place where I'll be able to live and work. Here, I would not be able to.

You may now repeat your remark about my running away from Bosnia with mockery, perhaps even with contempt. This letter of mine won't have

the power to explain and justify my action to you, but it appears that there are occasions in life when the ancient Latin maxim non est salus nisi in fuga holds true. I beg you to believe one thing only: I am not running away from my duty as a man, but only attempting to perform it more completely, without hindrance.

I wish you and our Bosnia the best of luck in its independent life in the new state.

Yours, M. L.”

Ten years passed. I rarely thought of my childhood friend and would have forgotten him completely, had not the basic idea of his letter reminded me of him from time to time. Some time around 1930 I found out quite by accident that Dr. Max Levenfeld had stopped in Paris, that he had an extensive practice in the suburb of Neuilly, and that in our colony of Yugoslavs he was known as “our doctor”, because he examined workers and students free of charge and, when necessary, bought medicines for them himself.

Seven or eight years passed. One day, again by chance, I learned the further fate of my friend. When the civil war broke out in Spain, he abandoned everything and joined the Republican army as a volunteer. He organized a first aid station and hospital and gained notoriety for his keenness and expertise. In early 1938 he was in a small town in Aragon whose name none of us could pronounce properly. An air raid was carried out on his hospital in broad daylight, and he perished along with almost all of the wounded.

Thus ended the life of the man who ran away from hatred.

*Lenore Grenoble*

### Miloš Crnjanski (1893–1977)

Miloš Crnjanski was born in Ilača, Vojvodina. An ardent Serbian nationalist, he nevertheless had to serve in the Austro-Hungarian army on the Eastern front in World War I. The horrors of war so utterly disgusted him that he became a militant pacifist in his poetry, which began to appear immediately following the war. In the post-war years he worked as a journalist and served as a diplomat. Because of his anti-leftist views, he refused to return to his country for many years after World War II, living in London and working at various degrading jobs. He finally returned to Yugoslavia in 1965. He died in Belgrade, revered as one of the greatest contemporary Serbian writers.

His first work was a book of poetry, *Lirika Itake* (The Lyrics of Ithaca, 1919). It was followed by a short poetic novel, *Dnevnik o Čarnojeviću* (Diary About Carnojevic, 1921). In both works he displayed an unusual talent, strength of conviction, antiwar protest, and modernistic tendencies, all of which made him one of the leading avant-garde poets. His best work, a two-volume novel *Seobe* (Migrations, 1929, 1962), depicts the fate of the Serbs in Vojvodina in the second half of the eighteenth century, who fought for their foreign rulers while constantly dreaming of the renaissance of their own nation or migration to Russia. *Roman o Londonu* (The Novel about London, 1971) is based on his experiences as an emigrant.

Crnjanski's powerful talent, vitality, and bold use of language have resulted in considerable influence among younger Serbian poets.

## A Tale

All I remember is  
that she was chaste and slender,  
that her tresses  
were warm as the soft  
black silk upon her white bosom,  
and that the break of day was fragrant  
with the perfume of acacia.

This memory came back by chance,  
came back to me with sadness,  
as I shut my eyes in silence.

When once more acacias breathe their scent,  
who knows where I shall be?  
But secretly I fear  
that her name no longer I'll recall  
no, not even her name.

*A. Lenarčič*

## Sumatra

Now we are carefree, gentle, light.  
We think, how silent, snowy, and white  
are the summits of the Urals.

If we are sad that a pale face has fled,  
is lost to us one evening, then we know  
that in its place a rivulet  
now flows somewhere, and all is red.

One love, one morning, in a foreign region,  
binds our soul closer by its hand,  
in the endless peace of the blue seas  
within which the coral shines bright red,  
just like cherries in my native land.

We wake at night to smile so pleasantly  
at the moon with its arc so slender.  
And we caress the oh so distant hills  
and icy mountains with our hands so tender.

*Ranka Kuić and Milne Holton*

*Migrations (Excerpts)*

The first day after her adultery seemed indeed insignificant to Madame Dafina Isaković. Towards evening she felt weak from the expectation that something unusual would happen.

The morning passed in crying, contemplation, and primping, and the afternoon in waiting for Kir-Arandjel, who had crossed the river into Belgrade, to deliver to the Turks the horses with which he had almost drowned in the Danube.

But that afternoon in the big yellow house filled with flour like a mill passed very monotonously, too, accompanied only by the murmuring of the water flowing by, so that Madame Dafina felt like shouting, if only to break the silence that was stifling with the odor and dust of stale wheat and rye.

She was not sorry for having betrayed her husband, but she felt ill seeing that nothing was changed by that act. She had spent the night with her brother-in-law, but that did not move a single seed of oats in the attic above their heads. Having already sensed that, despite all her authority, she had been lying around the house like an object which everybody avoided quietly, she wished now that the house surrounding her would turn upside down. The dead things, motionless and always the same, enervated and disturbed her. She wished that her brother-in-law were there so that he could promise, above all, to marry her and to take her away from there, to a new home in Budim.

She ordered the maids to bring her children to her, but even that did not help.

The younger girl, covered with scabs, lay wrapped like an infant. Sucking her thumb, she stared at the ceiling with her yellowish eyes, wriggling her legs. She fixed her black-dotted eyes on the ceiling without noticing that she had been carried to another part of the house. The older girl at first fell into her mother's lap with violent joy but left her just as quickly, playing hide-and-seek among the multicolored dresses hanging behind the stove. Madame Dafina soon realized that she had nothing to say to these children and that she had no reason to look at them. As she observed them, they seemed to her silly and alien. All this time the children were not even aware of her presence. They were attracted by the colorful hanging rags, by the window bars, and es-

pecially by the burning stove with its crimson fire, but they did not notice at all her misery and her eyes swollen with tears. Even from her lap the children extended their arms toward distant objects, as if to the opposite shore, and struggled as if from the arms of a giant. So, at last, she sent them away, together with the maids and dogs.

She called the legitimate wife of Dimča Diamanti, who looked like a long black broom sweeping around the house all day long, always wrapped in many folds. This woman knew how to read cards and she liked to talk, constantly plucking at the same wart. But that, too, was in vain. Madame Finka Diamanti was only able to relate how, on the shore, one of the horses which had been involved in the drowning attacked her own husband, who had run to save the drowning people, especially his partner Arandjel Isaković. All of Zemun was talking about this incident. Immediately afterwards, Madame Finka departed.

And so, when it got dark, Madame Dafina was again alone. She was horrified by the boring, wet day from which only recently she had expected so much.

All she had done seemed to her somehow meaningless; yet, it would have seemed so even if she had not done it. Everything her brother-in-law Arandjel had been telling her for weeks seemed right to her now. Although she still remembered clearly that entire night of love, she felt that she could easily forget it and that it would never even cross her mind again, especially if her husband should suddenly return. She also realized that the adultery would not bring her any joy, that she could repeat it tomorrow, with anybody, and that it would not seem particularly important to her. She began to reflect upon and to console herself with the riches in which she would revel if she married her brother-in-law. She visualized the new dresses she would order; and, as if she already had one on, she began to feel the touch of the silk garment on her body. At that thought, however, she not only felt no specific pleasure but even anticipated some sort of sadness. It seemed the same to her whether she belonged to one brother or to the other; and it occurred to her that afternoon that, as far as she was concerned, she would consent to belonging to both. What is more, to others, too—to anybody.

Through the window she saw the entire huge twilight and the reflection of the cool, grey sky on the flood waters. The river was a murky yellow, full of mud, and the willow groves, whose buds had already begun to swell, were frozen in recent days that had suddenly turned cold. Above the islands, however, at the lower end of the sky, opened a large blue patch, on which the minarets and walls of Belgrade emerged clearly out of the moist, bright evening. The croaking of the frogs around the house began to roar and throb.

A large, bright piece of sky also lighted one wall in the room where Madame Dafina was tossing around from boredom and despair, almost in



tears, having lost one of her gold-embroidered slippers behind the stove and the other by the door. Lying beneath a large, ancient icon of Christ, she felt a desire to put out the burning light but, unexpectedly, she became afraid of the descending darkness. Not daring to reach for her slippers, she hardly stirred, lying on her back on the pillows, in the intolerable haze from her incessant smoking. Since her head was heavy, she only now noticed that it was almost dark in the room. The darkness had already enveloped the objects and walls. Only toward the stove, the grey light of the dying evening glow from the river was falling on one wall and disappearing behind the curtain. A large, black trunk, filled with her dresses, rose darkly from the floor, like the high mound of a grave.

Through the smoke of the Turkish tobacco, Madame Dafina was staring at the light in the window as if mesmerized by the bright moonlight in the dark night. Tired from thinking, she suddenly heard behind her the running of mice. Only then did she become fully aware of the darkness in the room. She wanted to scream, but her voice choked in her throat.

Opening her eyes widely, she realized only now that she had not escaped soon enough from the darkness which had surrounded her and of which she was so dreadfully afraid. Except for the white stove, on which a bed sheet was drying like an apparition, and for the bright opening of the window, everything else in the big dark room had sunk into a dense murkiness, together with the murmuring of the water. Neither the tables nor the bed nor the door was visible any longer, and she noticed in horror that she could not even recognize her slippers on the rug. Dogs were howling outside.

Suffocating in the darkness and mortified by fear, she was not able to shout or move. She was shivering all over, and she felt an icy coldness beginning to creep up her legs. Sensing that her toes were stiffening, she still could not move her feet; on the contrary, wishing to get up and flee, she felt that she was sinking deeper and deeper into the pillows.

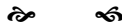
It seemed to her that the sheet on the stove was rising and that cold air was blowing through the curtain above the bed. Tense, trembling all over and with her eyes wide open, she saw how the mice were pouring forth and creeping up to her from the large, black trunk which held her dresses. Bending over her knees, with a shriek in her throat, she saw around the trunk frogs, snakes, and snails in the mud, coiled and pressing, treading upon each other, and swarming.

With her eyes almost popping out from under her eyelids, she saw how the white sheet from the stove was moving closer and closer. At the same time she sensed that somebody was standing behind the curtain in the darkness. Disheveling her hair with trembling hands and shivering from the cold as if she were cast in ice, she saw a hand emerging from the dark.

Its fingers, white as chalk and contracting, were creeping closer and closer, each one separately. The hand descended from the illuminated wall like a white cat, crawling over the objects and the stove. At that moment, Madame Dafina noticed another hand which had approached her from behind and was reaching for and rumpling her dresses on the wall, throwing them around on the floor. Finally, releasing a subdued scream, she also saw in front of the curtain the huge belly of her husband, his mouth, eyes and nose, his entire image on the white sheet, bloody, with the throat slit and with his black military hat hovering above his head.

When the wall behind the apparition began to sway, she also discerned hills and golden ears of corn which spilled through the wall together with waves of wheat, rye, and oats from the ceiling. Then entire constellations of stars flashed before her eyes, blue, purple, and yellow; and unusually luke-warm waters, over which the skies were flowing, poured over her. Shrieking terribly and starting in the air she found herself face to face with her bloody and horrifying husband Vuk Isaković, and she saw him decompose before her eyes. It is thus that fleeing in a dream from wolves, and suddenly rushing in front of a rock, one sees a terrible bear.

And so Madame Dafina fell down, clasping her hands in the darkness the very first day after the adultery, hurting the unborn child she was carrying.



Isaković was—or at least he thought he was—at the end of his life here, before Strasbourg. His heavy boots had lost all their color, and his trousers, bulging behind like a sack, all their form. He had been darning them himself. His face had become copper-colored from walking, wind, and sun and he was taut and sturdier from the strain. Then again, with his belly he would look like a heavy, filled barrel. Although he had become completely decrepit with age, after two days of sleep he began to squint after peasant women, despite all the sadness in his heart. Believing that he would die, he mellowed, but he still beat horses with his fists.

He did not shave at all and, therefore, his face became more serene, with an almost gentle expression. But when his regiment, too, was assigned a Catholic priest, his yellow eyes with small black dots acquired a feverish glow which they had not displayed during the journey. In these days, speaking differently from all other officers, soothingly, like a priest, he was selecting people who, he thought, should be sent home. "Read this with attention," he said to Captain Antonović, giving him the list of those he had selected, "and correct me if you find a mistake. Write: they passed through Lorraine like soldiers and fought a war; they came home and there they should continue to

serve like soldiers...." In fact, he was sorry that, sending his people to Varadin, he could not send them to Russia with his flowery signature.

For, tortured by illness, which he did not want to worry about, and disappointed in his expectation of a promotion, maddened by the difficulties concerning the acquisition of flour and meat for his soldiers, the honorable Isaković, lying in his den, finally realized during the truce before Strasbourg that he had become a ludicrous and superfluous figure, like a senile, fat priest who keeps on preaching but who in reality is no longer worth anything. As sometimes happens with the onset of old age, a fathomless emptiness appeared clearly before his eyes.

Setting out for this war and seeing death for the fourth time in his life, he hoped that something interminable would finally come to an end and be fulfilled. He thought that he and his men, in some special army, would emerge from a fierce battle strong, glorious, and rewarded with something unknown but which he imagined as particularly pleasant and significant, both for himself and for them. On his departure, he had left behind a lot of worries, which were especially cumbersome this spring: the quarrel with his brother about his wife's money, a sick child with scabs over her entire body, a repulsive wife whom he could no longer subdue, and finally the entire village which had begun to build dirt homes in the mud near Varadin. The villagers had been complaining every day, expecting him to give them food, to find them beams and posts and to draft them into the army and at the same time migrating and fleeing from him into older villages and richer settlements nearby. Thus, plagued in the last days before the departure by the digging of a well in search of drinking water and by the building of a church in the middle of the village, Isaković left gladly, convinced that all this was miserable and worthless, whereas that which awaited him in the war was powerful and bright and might end in something wonderful, both for him and for all these people of his.

Before leaving, he was disgusted not only by deprivations and misery which he found in his own home, in his hut, cattle-yards, and all around his village along the river up to Varadin, but also because of the unpleasantness which he had experienced with Marquis Guadagni, the commandant of Osek, while working on the new distribution of Slavonian villages. At the same time, he was involved in the solicitations and written petitions of Patriarch Shakabenta, so that it seemed to him that they all, like him, felt the futility of their living, settling, roaming, wailing, and multiplying there on the shore of the Danube. Leaving the foggy evaporation of marshes and bogs and the immeasurable suffering, which repeated itself daily during the migrations, drowning of cattle, and ploughing in the mud and salt-springs, he imagined himself riding away on horseback on a warm spring morning to some high hill, where he would receive something that would help and raise everyone's

spirits. With forebodings that he would not come back, he still thought that upon his return, when he and his soldiers descended the other side of the hill, they would all ride home contented, finding everything changed and joyful. He used to leave his wife and children confidently in his brother's home; and as far as the settlement and those who remained at home were concerned, it seemed to him that somebody would take care of them too, so that he would find them in the tall wheat already growing on the plain, free from epidemics and disease. He thought that he would forget thefts and murders, which he had to argue about every day at home, and he hoped that God's or the Emperor's hand would be extended over all his soldiers and their wagons, along the entire journey to war. Therefore, he took special care that the names and conditions of individual villages and regiments be nicely written out on the roll which the commissary had to send by special courier to the War Council in Vienna.

Having grown up close to his father, who sold cattle even to Savoyski and who had pushed all his children, brothers, relatives and acquaintances into the Austrian army, which was repelling the Turks, the young Isaković had led an almost pleasant life in the army. Spoiled and often rewarded, he harbored in himself a hazy but deep notion of happiness and pleasure, in the hope that all wars would end in a general peace and that afterwards he, his relatives, friends, and all his soldiers would be clothed in especially festive and showy attire and thus make a round of the battlefields and the Empire, before the eyes of the entire world which would exclaim, "Look, Serbs!"

Under the influence of his father's promises, which filled his head with the return to a burned, slaughtered, and deserted Serbia, he spent his life in the army not only at peace but also during all three wars, carefree and contented, constantly expecting something pleasant to happen to all of them. Sinking deeper and deeper into military life, colonization, censuses, concentrations of people and livestock in fortresses and strategically situated villages, Isaković realized only after his father's death that nothing was becoming any better. Only then did he notice around him the muddy fields and marshes, the misery of his people, the monotonous, bitter life in villages and trenches, in homes on the water, in huts and cattle-yards, in holes dug in the ground.

And so in recent years he survived all the unpleasantness of the migrations and the service and all the disappointments of people older than he: those in military ranks as well as in the patriarch. In this war, however, from Pečuj on, he was trudging along with greater and greater difficulty, lost in the masses, slighted deliberately, it seemed to him.

He crossed the Rhine observing his actions as if they were done by someone else, stepping among corpses through the burning streets, as if in a dream. And only here, before Strasbourg, during that intolerable truce, did he finally

feel that horrible, giddy emptiness before him, in which there was no longer anything.

Lying in the terrible heat and humidity on the ground, in the low hut covered with grass which, dried up, smelled intoxicating, he remained almost completely alone for days, with a jug of water, shifting on the cover and the saddle from the sunny to the shady side, removing ants with his palm from under his headrest. With his ailing stomach, which bothered him less since the beginning of the battles, he lay in this hut as in a grave, all day avoiding going into the camp built on the pasture-ground among the wagons—a real gypsy camp, in which the people were roaring, accompanied by *gusle* by the fire, more out of hunger than from drinking. Stretching his legs and spreading out his arms, Isaković imagined in his slumber that he was reaching all the way to the city entrenchments and to Baerenklau's tents, so that he could push the forts with his soles and strangle several Baerenklau in the camp with his hands. He fell asleep several times, furious and desperate, and was awakened before evening by the singing of the soldiers and the beating of drums.

In the darkening twilight, through the rattling and murmur of the camp, the clatter of hooves, the cattle bells, the sound of blacksmiths' anvils, Isaković, bloated from sleep and rest, immersed himself with all his strength in the subdued, endless chirping of crickets over the whole wide field, in the fathomless nothingness and emptiness which he saw suddenly near him, before his old age. Afraid of being disturbed by his officers' problems, as well as by their feasts, he did not ask for them, and did not even go to Baerenklau's tent where gambling and carousing were in full swing. In his loneliness, his eyes filled only with the silhouettes of several miserable, motionless wagons, from which harnesses were hanging, and with long plains of scorched fields and the glowing sky, Isaković abruptly shook off everything he had hoped for until now. After his lieutenant-colonelship, he also renounced Baron Baerenklau, whom he had admired, and a whole group of spruced-up, wigged commanders. Not only did the entire army, which they were dragging behind them, clearing its path by slaughtering the enemy, seem not to worry him in the least now, but also his past appeared to him as an infinite madness. He hoped for nothing anymore, not even for his return; and all those people who had settled down there in the mud he now saw as changed, sad, and deceived.

But on abandoning and despising the entire army, he abandoned everything else forever: his wife and children, for whom he had been breaking his back for so long and who were not there to see, to touch or help him; all that mud to which he was supposed to return with his mad, empty, and worthless life; and all those affairs he still wanted to take care of.

That evening not only the hut in which he lay, but his entire life sank into the darkness and fathomless emptiness. It disappeared; he took it off as he

used to take off his silver-embroidered clothes before women, tittering drunkenly. An old woman appeared instead of his first love, emptiness in place of cities where he had lived, traded, dug trenches, shot and beaten people.

Of his entire life there still remained bright in his memory only those shining, pure stars and silvery forest paths above which the April fog descended and on which he rode his horse in the first days of his marriage, living in that monotonous boredom of a small Slavonian garrison, hunting foxes. And in the future he saw only boundless Russia engulfed in snow, where he had thought of migrating, to live an easier life for once and to rest and settle down once and for all.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich*

Lament over Belgrade (Excerpt)

The life of humans, and a greyhound,  
 a withered leaf, a sea gull, a doe, and the moon on the open sea  
 appear to me as apparitions, finally as a dream, and as the death  
 of one after the other of actors in the theater.  
 Only, all that—and I—were never more  
 than some foam, a few moments, a whisper in China  
 that whispers like the heart, ever colder and more quiet,  
 so that there remain neither Ming nor yang nor yin,  
 nor Tao, nor cherries, nor mandarin,  
 nor any one, nor any one thing.

You, however, still shine through a murky dream of mine,  
 eternal through our countless tears, in Your darkness and dust.  
 Your blood fell on plains like a dew,  
 as before, to cool the last breath of many.  
 Once more I embrace Your steep rock,  
 You, Your Sava, Your slow Danube.  
 The sun rises in my dream. Illumine! Flash! Thunder  
 Your name, with a thunder from clear skies.  
 And when Your old clock tolls for me, too,  
 Your name will be my last whisper.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich*

**Desanka Maksimović (1898–1993)**

Born in Rabrovica near Valjevo, Desanka Maksimović studied in Belgrade and Paris and taught school for many years. Most of her life she spent in Belgrade. Maksimović began to publish poetry after World War I. In the period between the two wars she wrote poetry and literature for children: *Pesme* (Poems, 1924), *Vrt detinjstva* (The Childhood Garden, 1927), *Zeleni vitez* (The Green Knight, 1930), and *Gozba na livadi* (The Feast on the Meadow, 1932). These poems are distinguished by strong lyricism, genuine emotions, an almost pantheistic closeness to nature, simplicity and immediacy, and refreshing images and metaphors. These characteristics remained the same throughout her creativity. After World War II she wrote several poems in which she expressed her concern for her suffering people along with her hatred for the oppressors. In the last years of her life she wrote perhaps her best poetry, evoking the glory of Serbia's distant past and searching in it for answers to present problems. Her best postwar books of poetry are: *Pesnik i zavičaj* (The Poet and His Native Land, 1946), *Miris zemlje* (The Scent of the Earth, 1955), and *Tražim pomilovanje* (I Seek Mercy, 1964).

## No, Come Not Near

No, come not near! My wish is, I confess,  
to love but at a distance and to wait.  
In waiting only is there happiness,  
the happiness our dreams anticipate.

No, come not near! There's always more delight  
in our desires for what we do not own.  
In search there may be beauty infinite  
as in the things but to our fancy known.

No, come not near! True love in this creation  
resembles stars that glitter from afar  
and in the skies draw all our admiration.  
No, come not near-remain a distant star'!

*A. Lenarčič and Janko Lavrin*

## Don't Fear

Don't fear it is like a leaf falling under a limb,  
as when in the night the last sound dies away,  
as when from the mountaintop one takes in the view,  
as when the wind trails off tracing a gentle thought.

Don't fear, it comes when the sea suddenly calms down  
and is covered endlessly with dull luster.  
Don't fear, it will be as easy as raining,  
as when the moon pales gently before the sun.

Don't fear, it will be as when one fades into a fog,  
and paths, springs, the whole world darkens.  
Here is my hand, the last frail mooring  
until the raft drifts into darkness.

Don't fear, it will be gentle as when the white gossamer  
starts winnowing from poplars and flowering the ground.  
It will be like a passage between pains,  
we will sight in the lake the saddened world around us.



Don't fear, it will be fast as when a noose loops over,  
only the blue space around us will start to whirl.  
Here is my hand, it will be the straw on which  
the ant in the tale crossed the river.

Once, as a child, you walked on a log  
across the abyss in a dark, wet jungle,  
without looking into the black chasm before you.  
Do not look now either, I will lead you slowly.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich and Charles David Wright*

For All Mary Magdalenes

I seek mercy  
for the women stoned  
and their accomplice, the darkness of the night,  
for the scent of clover and the branches  
on which they fell intoxicated  
like quails and woodcocks,  
for their scorned lives,  
for their love torments  
unrelieved by compassion.

I seek mercy  
for the moonlight and for the rubies  
of their skin,  
for the moonlight's tusk,  
for the showers of their undone hair,  
for the handful of silvery branches,  
for their loves naked  
and damned—  
for all Mary Magdalenes.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich*



**Branko Ćopić (1915–84)**

Branko Ćopić was born in the Bosnian village of Hašani during World War I. He received his education at a teacher's school in Banjaluka and the University of Belgrade. He participated on the side of the partisans in World War II. After the war, he lived as a professional writer in Belgrade, and committed suicide in 1984.

Ćopić was a prolific writer of short stories, novels, poems, plays, and children's books. He achieved early recognition, shortly before World War II, with his stories about the hard life of the Bosnians. His prewar collections of stories are: *Pod Grmečom* (At the Foot of the Grmeč Mountain, 1938) and *Borci i bjegunci* (Fighters and Deserters, 1939)—perhaps his best book of stories. His postwar novel *Prolom* (The Breakthrough, 1952) is an epic tale about the partisan war, whereas his later novels, *Gluvi barut* (Noiseless Gunpowder, 1957) and *Osma ofanziva* (The Eighth Offensive, 1964), depict the difficulties the victorious peasant partisans encountered in the cities after the war. The last war was still one of his main topics and he was able to spice it with genuine humor, as in *Doživljaji Nikolettine Bursaća* (The Adventures of Nikoletina Bursać, 1955).

He was often satirical of the contemporary situation in his country. He was perhaps the most popular Serbian writer of his day, especially among children. The populist and somewhat superficial nature of his writings is compensated by his warm concern for people and by his healthy humor.

## The Cruel Heart



The machinegunner, Nikoletina, was parting from his mother in the tiny, cluttered yard in front of the old house, with its sagging roof. His short leave was over, and he was hurrying to reach his unit, which had been fighting these days somewhere near Kljuc, before dark.

It was a dry, cold morning in late autumn. There was no sun; and, in addition, a cold wind was blowing steadily. Nikoletina's frail, little mother seemed even smaller as she drew her head into her oversized man's overcoat. Huddled beside her big, awkward Nikoletina, she looked like a blue-lipped child.

"My Nidžo, my apple, take care of yourself, when you go away," said the mother worriedly, shivering constantly—partly from the cold, and partly from the self-supporting sorrow of old people. She spoke, not looking at her son, but at his pants, patched at the kneecaps. If she had looked at his face, she knew well, she would have started crying and forgotten all her resolutions.

"Go to the devil, mother, what else would I do, but take care of myself?" responded Nikoletina morosely, and he carefully buttoned his bulging little army bag, out of which protruded a layer of greased paper.

"Take care of yourself, my happiness, be clever," the weeping old woman advised softly, taking a thread off his outgrown, wrinkled army overcoat, while Nikoletina sullenly replied: "What is the matter with you, mother, do you think that I am crazy, instead of clever? What is with you this morning?" Being used to his rugged nature, the old woman was not hurt by her son's rough answers, but advised him further, constantly afraid she would forget to tell him something important. She had been like this since the uprising started.

"Nidžo, my pigeon, I did not ask you what kind of quarters you have there where you are going to be." "Well, mother, there are crazy people in the world, but you surpass them all! What quarters! Do you think that somebody makes a mattress for me? I lie on the ground, cover myself with the sky, and that is my lodging." The dry, cold wind was blowing tirelessly over the bare hills and deserted fields which were covered with the first hoarfrost. The wind whistled sorrowfully in the orchard, chasing down the last few apple leaves and winding through the groves by the river, warning that unavoidable parting was upon them. The old woman sank even more deeply into the faded overcoat, and started to cry with tiny, stinging tears.

"My son, you are already leaving, and I haven't had a chance to look at you long enough!" Nikoletina only scowled, avoiding the eyes of the crying

old woman, and, with knitted brow, stared at a lonely tree on the nearby hill, and answered her roughly, almost angrily: "Ach-to look long enough at me! Why the devil do you want to look at me? Do I have horns? You have really become childish." "Ach, my son, a lot of mothers become childish nowadays," the old woman said bitterly and reproachfully, wiping her eyes with the little end of her black scarf; and Nikoletina no longer knew what to answer her, and he wiped his nose and said in a businesslike fashion: "Mother, let's kiss each other and I will leave. I will be late." Beginning to cry again, the old woman was barely able to kiss her son on his chin and shoulder before he pulled away from her embrace, saying good-bye dryly, and hurried down the road.

"Well, good luck, son! May God watch over you and keep you alive!" said the old woman with her last strength before her voice was choked by tears. Nikoletina did not hear her words anymore, but he knew well that his mother watched him with tearful eyes, and no matter what, he could not walk with a measured step, and he kept stumbling on the large dry clods on the road as he hurried to hide himself behind the hedge on the first curve.

Left in the deserted yard, the tiny, weak old woman strained herself to see once again her departing son through her tears, but Nikoletina's wide shoulders were disappearing with merciless speed around the bend.

The rugged and craggy mother Bosnia, rough and sharp in everything, does not let you, not even in the last minutes of a departure, look long enough at your most loved one: it wrenches him from you quickly and hides him from your eyes, just then when he is dearest to you.

➤ II ◀

Wet and sweating, all red in the face and with a curse on his lips, Nikoletina was running hastily with his helper to a low stony knoll from which the enemy was retreating, caught by fire from the side.

"Faster, Šurkan, faster! Are you having an attack of liver sickness! For heaven's sake!" They reached the knoll quickly and lay down in a quarry full of low thorny bushes. Fortunately, he had time to place his machine gun suitably. He started shooting in short spurts at the retreating legionnaires who were running in groups over the rocky field, and already taking up positions at the edge of the first underbrush.

The enemy had been forced to retreat hastily from its former position as the partisans had driven a wedge into its overextended lines. They had been forced to retrench quickly and prepare for a new attack. They were confused and bewildered by the persistence of the partisans. It had not occurred to them that their opponents were fighting from the last suitable positions at the entrance to the wide valley, the birthplace of most of the partisans in this battal-

ion. If the partisans had retreated from this place, the enemy would have had all open way to the lower villages. Each partisan fighter knew this, and, therefore, yesterday's hasty retreat had abruptly stopped as each partisan group had dug in, feeling there was no room for further retreat. To the enemy these were incomprehensible, sudden changes in the situation and the unexpected, persistent counterattacks of the newly tempered partisan detachments had overwhelmed them. Deafened by their own guns, boiling with blind hate, they were fighting and storming, seeing in front of them not an ordinary enemy, but an odious and greedy plunderer, a thief, who like a greedy pig had attempted to break into their homes.

"Well, we wouldn't let you get by even if you had a star on your forehead." Having fired on the last scattered groups of legionnaires, Nikoletina changed the hot barrel of his machine gun, wiped off the angry sweat, that was burning his eyes, and turned to his assistant Šurkan: "Fill up all the ammunition belts; they will come again. They really have gone blind, like hungry pigs before they get hit over their heads. They won't retreat." Suddenly both of them started frightfully, as if somebody had shot behind their backs. Behind them, quite close, somebody called hesitatingly: "Nidžo-o-o-o ... Nidžo!" After a moment of speechlessness Nikola opened his mouth and then exclaimed: "Look! Where did you come from, mother? How you scared me!" Hesitating, undecided, as if caught in a prohibited place, the tiny little woman, aged prematurely, started slowly up the sloping ground, covering the several steps which separated her from the machine gun.

"Get down, get down! Sit here, you are revealing our position!" Nikoletina swore at her in a subdued voice and the old woman, confused and unsure, like a child, got down quickly and unnaturally, sitting on a stone near his legs, putting a little bag on her lap.

"Well, where did you come from?" Nikoletina yelled at her snappishly, coming to his senses.

"Well, I just came!" said the old woman modestly, still breathing heavily from the excitement and the distance she had covered. She gaped at her son with so much quiet and devoted joy that Nikoletina, touched, only turned his head and mumbled: "You came! I can see myself that you came; I'm not blind." "How did you learn that we were here?" asked Šurkan, surprised.

"It was easy, my son, I recognized your machine gun and I just went after it. I felt all the time: here must be my Nidžo." "Ach, your Nidžo!" snubbed Nikoletina at her. "What the devil did you come here for?" "Ach, my son, you are really a child," the old woman said reproachfully, shoving her hand into the little bag. "Well, mother came and brought a snack or two. Maybe you are hungry." "Hmm, hungry! What else? Of course, we are hungry. Do you think that the enemy is treating us to roast chicken?!" Nikoletina mumbled, and then still peevish, he sized up the little bag on mother's lap and said in a more

conciliatory voice: "Take out what you have and run home! They are coming again, and when a bullet hits you, hmm..." The old woman took out smoked bacon and a piece of unleavened cake, placing it on a stone near them, and the watchful Nikoletina, having noticed something suspicious among the enemy, gave a sign to his assistant and waved to the old woman.

"Go on, mother, go back quickly! Hurry, just get across the field to the road." Busy with the enemy, Nikoletina was no longer morose, nor rough, and the old woman felt that it was something serious and that she should not bother them any more, and without taking leave she hurried down the hill.

The shooting started again. The enemy began a new attack. They were advancing in groups under the protection of their machine guns, not sparing their ammunition.

Nikoletina returned the fire and then turned for a moment, waving to the old woman, who stopped for a moment.

"Faster, faster! I will protect you with the fire!" The black silhouette started walking again and almost crawled across the field.

Already hot from the fighting, Nikoletina fired again, and during the short rest he spoke tersely to his assistant: "Take a look, Šurkan. Is the old woman getting away?" "There she is—she is already half way across the field!" said the winded Šurkan, taking out the first round of cartridges.

The enemy was very persistent this time. Systematically and slowly, according to all the rules of warfare, they pushed forward.

"Look, ours are retreating from the right flank!" Šurkan said somewhat excitedly, pointing to the small groups of partisans who were running down from a low mountain range along the sparse little birchtree wood. "We will have to retreat, too. They will hit us from the side." "We are not retreating," Nikoletina replied shortly, shooting again at the nearest knoll, from which spat the sharp fiery tongues of the enemy's guns, hardly noticeable in the snow. "Šurkan, see where the old woman is!" "There she is, almost at the end of the field. Just a bit and she will reach the road." "A little bit longer, Šurkan," Nikoletina blurted out almost apologetically, covered with sweat, and with red eyes, not listening to the courier, who angrily yelled, showing his round head from behind the pile of rocks on the left side.

"The machine gun! The machine gun! Nikoletina, retreat to the old position by the beechtrees! The commander ordered it!" "Šurkan, the old woman? Take a look!" "There she is, reaching the road!" said Šurkan relieved, and with this, Nikoletina let out the last long and joyful burst, grabbed the machine gun and started walking back.

"Let's go, Šurkan, now we can go. Take the bacon with you! Ach, mother, you made me sweat today!" Above the steep edge of the road, which from this point led in curves down to the village, Nikola's mother stood. Hardly noticing herself shivering, not hearing the bullets, which were singing

high above her, she was holding the wet timber tree branch, watching two black silhouettes with tearful eyes—one bigger, one smaller, who were hurrying down the remote snowy mountain range. She shouted in her weak voice, although they couldn't have heard it down there: "Hurry up, my Nikola, my apple. Here I am; I am safe! Don't worry about me; don't worry, my pigeon."

*Branko Mikasinovich*



**Mihailo Lalić (1914–92)**

A native of Montenegro, Mihailo Lalić was born in Trepča, near Andrijevica. As a law student at the University of Belgrade, he was often imprisoned for his communist activities. He fought as a partisan in World War II and spent time in a prisoner-of-war camp. After the war he occupied many positions as an editor and journalist. He died in Herceg Novi in 1992.

His first book of short stories, *Izvidnica* (The Reconnaissance Patrol), appeared in 1948, but it was not until a series of novels—*Svadba* (The Wedding, 1950), *Zlo proljeće* (The Evil Spring, 1953), *Raskid* (The Break, 1955), *Hajka* (The Chase, 1960), and his best work *Lelejska gora* (Leleja Mountain, 1957, 1962)—that he received universal recognition as one of the best living Serbian writers. He was a one-theme writer—the last war and the fratricidal struggle between the partisans and their opponents in Montenegro. But Lalić was not concerned with the realistic depiction of war as much as he was with man's behavior toward his fellow man. In *Lelejska gora* he follows the odyssey of a partisan leader left behind enemy lines and hunted like a wild animal, until he is freed of all restraints and concerns that civilization had imposed upon him, and is faced with the problem of naked existence. Some of his other works are short stories—*Prvi snijeg* (The First Snow, 1951), *Gosti* (Guests, 1967), *Poslednje brdo* (The Last Hill, 1967)—and the novel *Pramen tame* (A Patch of Darkness, 1970).

*Leleja Mountain* (Excerpts)

... I slept like an uninhabited mute valley amid the mountains. Suddenly, the sooty stone of human voices began to tumble into the valley. A dream probably—and I awoke. As I did, the voices solidified and, linked up into a chain, echoed over the meadow.

“See, he isn’t here,” said one. “You’ve dragged me about through this hell all for nothing.”

“Not here,” added the other. “He was lying there where the grass is flattened down.”

“The devil’s flattened it down! It’s flat everywhere.”

“I saw him, I tell you. He looked dead, his head was hanging lower than his body. A live man never lies like that.”

“Well, did the devil take him away?”

He must have, I thought, the devil takes care of himself as long as he can. I lined up three pistols on the ground to defend myself: The day was endless and they were crafty. It wouldn’t be easy. If they would only go along the trail together, but they wouldn’t. Perhaps they would leave one on guard while the others hurried after me. Fear, that old fear, began to twist me and raise me from the ground: it lifted me up and dropped me, it wore me out with waiting, and again dropped me. It let me realize that I am merely a vulnerable hunk of flesh; then it clouded my brain and shook up my joints beyond my control. I dug my elbows and then my knees and toes into the earth and clenched my teeth to keep them from chattering.

Their voices were growing louder: they were standing in the same place, murmuring something in wonder. Judging from their voices, they were afraid. Especially one of them. He kept repeating “dancing-ground” in a strange tone of voice, and “fairy lights,” and then warned his companion against touching the flattened grass, for it would knot up his brain. He lowered his voice to an ominous whisper and revealed that they, the Harpies, always died an unusual death, usually nothing remained of them. They were rare, he emphasized, and that was because they can’t stand each other. When two met in the same place, they challenged each other to their Harpy duel without witnesses, and fought with clouds or whatever else they could pick up as a weapon. Sometimes both of them got hurt and never returned.

“Let’s call him,” said the other.

“No! They also called to him and he answered from different places to lure them on.”

“Those are only fairy tales. He’s been done in by the Plećovićs in revenge.”

“The Plećovićs were all down below when it happened.”

“Then someone else did—for his money.”

I realized that they were looking for *him*. They had forgotten me as though I had never existed. I was sorry for a moment: the old brute had taken over my fame and pushed me into the background. Before this he had wanted to take that woman from me, now he lay in the pit with his whole weight on the pocketbook with the money in it. I should have taken the money from him to buy a soul or two with it. Now it was too late. Perhaps it was better this way. When they found him they would probably think that the Devil, that wild and popular devil, who was ignorant of the use of paper money, had personally done him in. A different voice called from the slope; there was a black blot in the meadow in the valley, they would have to see what it was.

They went to see, and the voices, subsiding gradually, vanished altogether. The air cleared of their stench and I inhaled till tears filled my eyes. I gazed at the branches, they were really slender and constantly outstretched in embrace. Their eyes, golden and green, regarded me with calm sorrow: you’ve wandered a lot, you’re tired out, settle down for once! The gentle arches vaulting one over the other, a sky over a sky into infinity, swayed up and down. Sleep overcame me and I slowly forgot. Forgetting with one part of my being, I remembered with the other: Gluvlja, summer, when the grain was being brought in, and my mother sticking birch branches over my cradle to protect me from the sun...

Suddenly I heard men, the poisonous beasts, shouting, and I hid. They weren’t coming my way, they weren’t thinking of me; they had climbed the trees, like snakes, each in his own wood, to cut branches. As they rested they called to each other from hill to hill. I listened and calmed down; they reminded me of my childhood, when Jovan Miletić and Gavro Grivić used to call to each other.

“Oh Markelez, you frog spawn, look and see why Masnik is so quiet!”

“You’d be quiet too if you had been lifting and rolling logs all night long.”

“Logs all night long? What do you mean for God’s sake?”

“Heavy ones too. The females in the neighborhood have drained him so dry his bones are breaking out through his skin.”

“Oh Masnik, the devil take you, do you hear what Markelez says about you?”

“No, I don’t! I’m not in the habit of listening to barking dogs like Markelez and you and company.”

The hoarse dull voice dragged me with it before I realized that something about to happen where it came from was to be remembered so that something else could be forgotten. I made my way past Markelez through the virgin wood, and reached Masnik’s area. He must have been working since before dawn—a whole patch of the wood had been laid bare by early autumn. Only

naked skeletons were left of the trees, with sharply protruding stumps of what had been branches. I saw him high up in an oak tree, in the network of forks and antlers, and I hissed at him like a snake, one as big as he was, his equal. He looked down, saw me and realized everything at once.

“You’ve worked a lot,” I said. “It’s time you took a long, long rest from all this.”

“I’ll rest,” he said derisively, “after you liberate me.”

“That’s why I’ve come from the cave. It’s time I liberated someone at least.”

“Well, you’ve talked a lot about liberation, but somehow everything’s turned out wrong for you.”

“It can’t do otherwise when the world’s all upside down.”

He hid behind the tree trunk. He held on to a stump of a branch with his left hand; with his right he swung his pruning hook at my head. I stepped back, I was cool and I hated him no more than I hate the rain, the heat, the woods or some other natural phenomenon. He was natural where he was, and in the right, and he knew it, and I was an alien who wanted to disturb the natural course of things. I couldn’t kill him, I hadn’t the will or the strength to do so. It was always like that when men were concerned—the opposite of what I wanted to do. I’d let him live, for I was accustomed to his dodges and I’d miss them; but first I’d scare the wits out of him.

“Why did they take Vanja Lopa to jail?” I asked.

“How should I know? Someone ordered it and someone else acted on the first someone’s orders.”

“Yes. You wouldn’t know. All you did was take the letter to the wrong address. Now, could you manage to get down out of that tree?”

“No,” he said between clenched teeth. “I’m working, can’t you see?” “Then I’ll bring you down quicker than you think.”

I took aim, not at him but at the branch on which he was standing, between the tree trunk and his feet. Hit by the bullet, the branch broke under Masnik’s weight and he scrabbled with his hands at the void. A protruding bough broke his fall; then, as he dropped to a lower one he screamed. He could have stopped there but his long legs flayed out as though he purposely wanted to lose his balance. He dropped again, but now more slowly, like a huge spider emitting the filament by which it suspends itself. At first I was frightened by his shadow, then I noticed the rope he had, and that it was unwinding from his stomach like a snake, simultaneously unwinding and distending.

He reached the lowest branch, grabbed it convulsively and hung over it. He was moaning and the coil of his intestines continued to unravel from his torn trousers. He stank, It made me sick to look at him. A bullet through his head would have ended his sufferings. I took aim, then I lowered my rifle:

why should I end his sufferings? It was better as it was. The bullet I had fired had not touched him. It was not his fate to die by a bullet—he did not deserve the honor. He'd have done the same to me if he had had the chance, just as he had to Niko; so now let him suffer.

His strength forsook him, he slipped from the branch. He fell on his knees, cried, rolled over on his back to see the tree trunk bridled with his intestines. He contemplated it with hatred, as though it had been a horse that had thrown him. He thrashed with his hands in pain. Shaken by these movements, the long blue snake burst, spattering me with slime and filth. I wiped my face with a handful of dry leaves. I heard his name being called again. I replied for him with shouts that could not be recognized and meant nothing. He turned and looked at me—his face was livid and shiny with sweat. He moved his lips, whether he was swallowing or trying to throw up something, I could not tell.

“Kill me,” he muttered at length.

“I'm no fool to owe blood. You'll croak as it is.”

“Kill me, kill me; I'd do as much for you!”

“You would, with someone else's hand—I know you well.”

“Pfuy!” he tried to spit on me, but he shut his eyes.

He was calm. I knew he was conscious and that it was by sheer willpower that he was keeping quiet, stifling the pain. There was not a sound, only the breeze disturbed the leaves of the lopped-off branches. In the trees there was nothing more for it to move except the blue stretch of intestines, at which Masnik would gnash his teeth and snarl through his nose. He continued to be quiet, he seemed to be sleeping spread out all over the place, in the air, the tree and on the ground, striving to cover as much space as possible, to tie it to himself and take it with him on his undesired journey. Even that was not enough: he tore up handfuls of earth with leaves and twigs and crushed them feverishly in his hands.

“You'll pay for this,” he moaned with shut eyes.

“You fell yourself; why should I pay?”

“Someone will avenge me.”

“Why, when a bullet didn't even nick you?”

“I'll tell how it was.”

“I don't care if you do. I'm paying a lot as it is—what I owe and what I don't.”

He probably hoped to provoke me with threats into finishing him off. When this hope was gone, he ground his teeth and covered his eyes with one hand. The sun was in his eyes, he tried to swish it away like a fly with his other hand. He mumbled something incoherent in a half tone—I couldn't make out whether he was praying or tallying up his crimes. Froth and blood had caked around his lips, out of which peered sparse gray hairs. His breath

stank—to come closer to him was nauseating and if I stayed where I was I could hear nothing he said. And nothing more was audible. From the distant patches again came shouts of alarm, and Grivić called to Markelez,

“Run, man, and see! That wasn’t his voice!”

“Run yourself, captain, if you’re so anxious to see.”

“Go on, you coward, maybe the man has hurt himself.”

“It’s none of my business. I’ve enough of my own troubles as it is.”

“There was a shot, Markelez! He’s had an accident.”

“Well, I’m not going to match a pruning hook against a gun. You go, captain, if you want to be a hero.”

They carried on like that for an hour. In the end they got together and began to approach noisily. Masnik raised the upper part of his body and fell back again. He raised himself once more and looked around. He was looking for something, maybe for a hole, like a snake. He could no longer lie still. He was moaning, breathing heavily, crawling towards the heap of branches he had prepared. He reached it, crawled underneath, only his legs remained exposed. The branches over him heaved and trembled and at length sank into stillness. I uncovered him. His eyes had glazed; he had paid his debt.

*Petar Mijušković*

**Dobrica Ćosić (1921– )**

Dobrica Ćosić was born in Velika Drenova, in central Serbia. After finishing a technical school, he participated in World War II as a political commissar with the partisans. After the war he occupied various positions, was elected to the parliament, and became the president of a leading publishing house. Because of his differing political views, he was relieved of all posts and now lives as a professional writer and a highly respected dissident.

Ćosić's first novel, *Daleko je sunce* (Far Away Is the Sun, 1951), was received with universal acclaim as the best fictional treatment of the events in World War II. His other novels, *Koreni* (Roots, 1954), *Deobe* (Divisions, 1961), *Bajka* (A Fable, 1966), and the tetralogy *Vreme smrti* (A Time of Death, 1972–77), all treat a related subject matter: the emergence of the Serbian peasant as the most vital force in the last hundred years and his role, often tragic, in the two world wars. His latest work, the trilogy *Vreme zla* (A Time of Evil, 1985–90), depicts the fate of the revolutionaries before and during the war and their disillusionment with the official party line. Ćosić's focus is local, yet his works have universal meanings. By striving for synthesis while dwelling on details, he has become the foremost novelist in Serbian literature today.

*A Time of Death* (Excerpts)

In the crown of the old beech tree, Bogdan Dragović was clinging to its trunk like a lizard, and watching the counterattack of the Serbian battalion through his field glasses; but for the frightful shooting, the scene of the battle would have been amusing to watch through the round lens: a mixture and interchange of comical and panic-stricken movements, like a moving picture on a screen. He felt like that just now because, thanks to him, Paligorić's gunners had silenced two Austrian cannon and blown up a machine-gun nest.

At that time Major Stanković was standing under the beech tree, and after every shell fired by the Dangleis he shouted: "Where are we now? Very good, my boy. We must have lunch together today. I have some roast sheep's head." Then the major ran off to help repel the three-pronged Austrian attack. Bogdan watched through his field glasses to see how his courage functioned in battle, and saw him under shrapnel and annihilating shellfire, only sometimes stooping slightly; he even stepped back from the firing line and filled his fancy pipe, though he didn't light it. Then he disappeared among the soldiers behind the juniper trees.

The thought flitted through Bogdan's mind: courage in battle has its origin in either intense hatred or extreme pride. Major Gavriilo Stanković showed only pride, pride which must be connected in some way with the sacred justice he talked about. In St. Petersburg he must have had at least a whiff of revolutionary faith; this emerged in his talk about justice and his love for the students. If this good man had been his commanding officer on Bačínac instead of Luka Bog, he would never have vomited out there in the darkness.

As he brought the bare, snow-covered heights into his field glasses, with the dark woods on either side, he focused his lens on a pair of horses without riders, standing motionless as though frozen still in the snow. A sudden idea arrested his thoughts: a great deed has significance and beauty only if performed among people. What sort of courage is it that no one sees or knows about? And was this really such a great deed—his being in the beech tree, as yet unperceived in the lens of some Austrian field glasses, as he watched two firing lines attacking each other in the snow, or subsiding onto the white slope with awkward, unfamiliar movements? No, he could not really redeem himself in this way; this was not really a great deed worthy of esteem and admiration.

His teeth chattered with cold as he breathed in the scent of the bark. A skein of blue smoke hovered over the snow-covered slope dotted with corpses. Two armies, speaking two different languages, were yelling and moving toward each other. Where was Ivan? He looked for him through his field glasses, but the smoke and shrapnel made it impossible to recognize any



of the soldiers. He could not even see Major Stanković. Violent firing erupted from the Austrian artillery; it seemed that those two cannon silenced by Paligorić's Danglis had been stunned only temporarily.

"Where are those big guns firing from?" shouted Captain Paligorić over the field telephone.

"I don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know? Find them!"

Bogdan looked for them in the forest. He looked for a long time at the small grove in which the two recently silenced cannon had been firing. He could see nothing but smoke. Then he saw them—first one, then the other. Shells roared over his head and fell behind his back.

"Take the first position! Go back to where we hit them the first time!" Stanković said into the field telephone.

"That's just where those two are hitting at us," said Bogdan.

Three shells churned up the grove. Bogdan felt angry; the Austrian shells were flying just above the branches—they would split him open like a sparrow—but only one in five of their own found its mark.

"Hit the same place again!" he shouted, filled with a bittersweet sensation.

The branches cracked over his head, sprinkling him with twigs and bark; he clung yet more closely to the tree trunk. They had found him. Machine-gun fire was peppering the crown of the beech tree. Now the real thing was about to start!

He heard Paligorić's voice through the receiver: "Now we're going to pound those Austrian trenches! See that we don't miss!"

He trained his field glasses on the slope where the battle was thundering, raising clouds of dust in which it was impossible to distinguish the two opposing sides, or the dead from the living, since all alike were hidden under smoke and shrapnel. A little lower down, in the direction of the forest, the medics were dragging away the wounded.

"The machine gun's spotted me! The bullets are raking the branches all around me!" he shouted into the receiver.

"Never mind that! You're not the only one who's catching their fire," answered Paligorić.

Yes, he was right, it was worse for them. He scraped off the old bark with his forehead, and noticed a dead or frozen beetle. Its shining, rigid feeler spilled over the pupil of its solitary eye. It was cowardly, despicable, to envy an insect. He took up his field glasses to see the position: Major Stanković was walking toward him with his orderly, shouting something and waving his arms. He couldn't hear him because of the shooting, but was filled with joy, a joy which he had never experienced before. Around him, bark splintered and branches snapped. He didn't care if a shell got him, he wasn't going to move.

“Don’t worry!” he shouted as loudly as he possibly could to Major Stanković, convinced that in his presence he would dare do anything of which a human being was capable.

Paligorić asked where the bullets were falling. He felt something sting his thigh, and clung even more tightly to the tree, making himself smaller and thinner. Was he wounded? He was not aware that blood was flowing down his leg. His cap fell off. The beetle drove its feeler right into his eyeball. There was no escape; he dared not even blink. Something stung the calf of his leg. He was finished. If he jumped, he would be cut to pieces in flight.

“Look out, Dragović! Look out! Above you!” He heard Major Stanković’s voice, and moved sideways to see him: when a shell hit you, you flew up into the air and split in two, and one part went into the black smoke and the other plunged into the white snow and subsided there, making a red stain on its white surface. The feeler of the beetle poked right into his eyeball.

“Gavrilo!” he yelled, dropping his field glasses and falling into the snow; he could not breathe, and felt a dull pain in his ribs. Was he wounded, or had he broken some ribs? But Gavrilo had been killed! He jumped up and ran toward the shell hole, and stood in front of it, transfixed: blood was spurting from naked, loose ribs. He groaned, burst into tears, and covered his face with his hands.

“Dragović! Dragović!” Someone was calling him, groaning at the same time. He lifted up his head, and a few paces away he saw Major Stanković lying in the snow with a torn, bloodstained jacket, his mouth wide open. He realized that the shell had blown the orderly to bits. He shouted: “Stretcher-bearers!” A hot blast flung him into the shell hole. As he fell he saw his old beech tree slowly collapse, its trunk shattered, and break into pieces as it rolled down the white slope.



The commander of the Danube Division, first levy: “They’ve retaken Hill 801. The troops on Rajac are hardly strong enough to provide a lateral flank and guarantee our withdrawal along the Prostruga heights. I can’t meet a blow from Rajac; I must inform you that this is quite impossible!”

Mišić: “Then what are you going to do? Can you hear me? Suvobor is collapsing!”

“Let the Morava Division take the hammering from Rajac.”

“The Morava division has been pushed back onto Lisina and Retke Bukve. They cannot possibly get to Prostruga. You and Vasić are personally responsible for the defense of Suvobor and Rajac. Just the two of you—I’ve no one else to send! That’s all I have to say.”

Vasić: “Podovi has been attacked, too. They’re pushing through between Babina Glava and Ravna Gora. My division is in terrible shape!”

Mišić: “And what are you doing, Vasić?”

“I’ve ordered the Eighth and Eighteenth Regiments to close the breach on Ravna Gora. And I’ve attacked them on the Dičina.”

“And what happened? Hello, Vasić! What happened?”

“What did you say, Kajafa?”

“I haven’t been able to hold Šiljkova slope. I just couldn’t, sir. My right flank was ground to powder.”

“Kajafa, I do not wish to hear from the lips of my commanding officer the words ground to powder, crushed, frightful, desperate, catastrophic! Hello! A people and an army are not wiped out in this way—neither man nor God permits it. Can you hear me, Kajafa?”

“But what if the armies are unequal, and man is powerless to defend himself?”

“In a fight for survival the forces are always equal. A man always has the power to defend himself. Can you hear me, Kajafa? For that, a man always has the power.”

“Everything’s shaking around me. I no longer know what I’m doing.”

“You must prevent further penetration. They’re enclosing us in a vise-like grip. We have only one line of retreat. As I told you before, you two are responsible. I have no one else! Can you hear me, Kajafa?”

“I’ll do all I can. I dare not do any more, sir.”

“You must do what you think impossible, Colonel.” “Yes, Vasić, I can hear you.” “We’re still on Molitve.”

“What do you mean, you’re still on Molitve? You’ll stay there until give orders to the contrary. Regroup your forces there.”

“What with ridges, then these chasms and slopes, my divisions are completely split up. No two battalions can keep together as a single unit.”

“It seems like that to you because you’re looking at a map. But we don’t defend our lives by looking at maps, Vasić. A map does not show either our fatherland or our freedom. Even when you took your staff examination you had to know your country the same way you know your house and your wife.”

“Thank you for the geography lesson, sir. But it’s not that my division has got lost on Suvobor—between them, the mountain and the enemy have cut them to ribbons. I’ve got an entire corps against me.”

“Now listen to me! If our position doesn’t improve immediately, and the enemy remains on the Suvobor watershed, then we’re surrounded and they’ve got us by the throat! There’s a gaping hole between us and the Užice Brigade. The Austrians are going to pass through it in marching columns, do you realize that? So you must defend Suvobor today, Vasić.”

“But how, I ask you? And who with? Can you hear me? Who am I going to defend it with?”

“With your own head, Colonel!”

“I can’t defend Suvobor with my head, sir!”

“Well, you have to, Vasić! I’ll say the rest of what’s on my mind when I hang up!”

Kajafa: “You realize that I do not go back on my statements, sir, nor do I fear the results of my decisions.”

Mišić: “I’m not obliged to listen to everything you say, Colonel.”

“But I am obliged to report everything, sir. And if I defend Rajac today, I’ll have to abandon it tomorrow. That’s all.”

“We are fighting today among ourselves. Listen to me. Village constables and road menders are doing their duty for their fatherland. We all get paid for doing our duty. Can you hear me?”

“I carry out my oath as a soldier from honor—not for pay, sir.”

“A soldier does not give his oath only in the barracks and in peacetime, Colonel. We soldiers have given our oath for a single day, a single hour. For a single moment which awaits us. Only a woman requires perpetual fidelity. Our fatherland requires us to give this promise only once, but once and for all. Such a time has now arrived. Can you hear me, Kajafa?”

“As army commander, have you really no other orders for the defense of Suvobor? You appeal to me through my oath, but how am I to appeal to my soldiers?”

“I have no reserves to give you for Rajac. I am making use of my ultimate right as a commander in appealing to you through your oath. You can use this right, too. And let me know as soon as you have done something to our advantage.”

Hadžić, chief of staff: “Two telegrams have arrived from the High Command. We have suffered heavy losses in attacks made this morning through noon by the Obrenovac Brigade and the Second Army. The attacks were unsuccessful. Moreover the Third Army has not been able to resist the blows received today. The left wing has retreated suddenly in disarray. They are asking us for immediate help.”

Mišić: “Tell them that I can send them the orderlies, my own included. What about the attacks of the Ujice Brigade? Are they going to help us, to prevent our left flank from being surrounded?”

“They haven’t reported at all, sir. I don’t think we dare count on their attack.”

“Could the Montenegrins try to do something?”

“The High Command has forwarded a telegram to us from General Janković in Cetinje. He says that yesterday the enemy attacked throughout the entire day. In four days the Austrians have suffered about six hundred casual-

ties, dead and wounded. The Montenegrins do not have adequate forces for an offensive.”

“I have no further orders until nightfall. I have already threatened the division commanders and called on them to fulfill their oath. They will do the same to the regimental commanders, and they in their turn to the battalion commanders. But the battalion commanders will not dare to threaten the platoon commanders. And that is the limit of my power as army commander. All that remains is to use court-martials.” “Even the regimental commanders dare not use threats. Today in some regiments it has come to blows and fisticuffs between the officers and the soldiers. There are reports from Milanovac and Cfacak of a mob of deserters coming down the mountain. And a lot of men have given themselves up to the Austrians—a whole battalion and six officers.”

“There are no deserters, and no one has surrendered in the First Army, Hadžić. Anyway, those who desert and surrender do so because they are unhappy and desperate men. Don’t reproach me, I’m not shouting at you. Please tell the division staffs immediately to ask the prisoners taken today whether they are tired and hungry, and whether they are short of ammunition. Also whether they have reserves behind the firing line.”

Ljuba Milić: “The position of the Morava Division can no longer be maintained, sir. The defenses are collapsing.”

Mišić: “And do you think that the position of the First Army, which as you know is under my command, is any better? Do you think that the position of the entire Serbian armed forces is any better than that of your division, Colonel?”

“I am responsible for Morava Division, second levy, and not for the First Army or the entire armed forces, sir. I am speaking and acting within the limits of my own competence and duty—and my own capacity, too, believe me.”

“You are responsible for your division while it is in the barracks or on parade. But when the survival of our people is at stake, then, Ljuba Milić, you are responsible for everything that has happened since the fall of Kosovo, in the year 1389, until this moment. You are responsible for everything until the fall of the final curtain. Can you hear me? Yes, that’s right. And when it gets dark and the Austrians can no longer see you in their gun sights, then withdraw your forces to the line Ploče-Sastavci-Česte Bukve.”

“What about the cannon? How am I to get them to Česte Bukve? I don’t see any path marked on the map: the terrain is impassable there.”

“Don’t talk to me about maps! Our country is like that, you have to go on your hands and knees. You can get through everywhere, and drag along everything you want. No place is impassable—do you hear me? If a man hasn’t passed, then the farm animals have; and where they haven’t been, the wild

beasts have. Now we must follow their tracks. We must defend everything we possess, every plant, every creature of the forest, every footstep!”

Miloš Vasić: “All my efforts have failed. My division is falling to pieces. The remains of one regiment already disintegrating have charged against Parloge and Ravni Gaj.”

Mišić: “Well, what of it? Do you expect me to sympathize? What about your next efforts?”

“I expected more understanding from my commanding officer, sir. Meanwhile my efforts are continuing, but they are the efforts of a cripple. The dying men are scratching at the ground, that is, the snow.”

“It’s not the snow they should scratch, but the man responsible for their plight. So try at least to do that. Scratch him!”

“I have ordered a withdrawal, which is now proceeding. I had no other alternative.”

“And why the hell must you save your own ass at all costs? You can’t forget that you were once a minister. So now you have to piss on the army command, you bastard!”

Mišić: “Now, Hadžić, is there any more bad news you haven’t told me? Why are you crying?”

Hadžić: “The worst possible thing has happened, sir! Just ten minutes ago Živko Pavlović reported from the High Command that shells have arrived which cannot be used in our cannon!”

“But why can’t they be used? Good God, they know the caliber of our cannon!”

“Yes, that’s true. But these shells have come from France, and they are two and a half millimeters longer than the caliber of our cannon. So we can’t use them. It must be sabotage, which we couldn’t possibly foresee. It’s disgraceful! The Allies have written us off. They’ve simply sacrificed Serbia. Come into my room, sir, and see how the officers are sobbing! Strong men are weeping, and the operators, too.”

“Hadžić, come with me into your office. God help us, heroes!” Mišić said to the officers. “Stand at ease. Now look me straight in the eye. There’s nothing I can do for you, and no one else can either!”



Tola Dačić, who had not wished to return to Prerovo, was now walking around the headquarters and dressing stations of the First Army; he waited for Dragutin in the shed of the staff headquarters and spoke to him in a whisper:

“Why is the commander in such a hurry?”

“What have his worries got to do with you?”

“A great deal, let me tell you. The lives of my sons depend on his worries. What’s he asking you through those whiskers of his?”

“He asked me if I would surrender to the Fritzies tonight.”

“I suppose you didn’t tell him?”

“I told him I’d give his Austrian opposite number a bad time!”

“Why did you say that?”

“I don’t know. But that’s how you have to talk to him.”

“He was leaning over the fire a long time. He’ll scorch his whiskers. It’s not good to look at a fire such a long time.”

“He’s getting warm. What’s better than warming yourself in a shed, with the snow drifting in?”

“People who stare at a fire and say nothing either have big accounts to settle with the Almighty, or they’re planning mischief for somebody.”

“And why are you hanging around the headquarters, you old fusspot?”

“I want to see how you work on the staff, and what the commander’s doing in bad times like these. I have three sons in the First Army, they’re all much the same age, and I’ve got a right to go into the headquarters and see what’s going on there!”

“You’d have no right to do that if you had thirty-three sons in the First Army! Živojin Mišić isn’t your hired man.”

“I know better than you what he is and what he isn’t. But I don’t know whether he’s a lucky man. What do you think? You’re close to him—you can see whether he’s the kind of man that things turn out well for. Do you think he’s going to have luck on his side?”

“How should I know? What’s that got to do with you anyway?”

“But it does concern me, young man. If he doesn’t have luck on his side, then we’ve had it. Only a man who has more luck than strength and wisdom can master a disaster of the kind we’re facing now.” ...

But the First Army could not have done more than it had actually done, thought Mišić as he poked the fire. It had lacked the strength to maintain a single success and then exploit it the next day. Everything that had been gained one day, dearly bought with blood, had been lost the next day with even greater bloodshed. Success in one position had lost significance because of failure in another. What had been held at all costs for two days was lightly abandoned on the third day because of the general breakdown. The fall of important positions had caused the collapse of secondary ones. The army had been reduced to an unorganized mass of corpses, deserters, and traitors; it had been crucified and bled white by a fighting force of far greater strength.

Time too had disintegrated and crumbled, washed away by rains and blown apart by blizzards. Night undermined day. Then day came crushing in with the ebb of dawn. Time had become fluid like water, wandering like a stream, and finally everything had rushed into one headlong torrent directed

against him. From the moment he had taken over the command of the army, nothing had been simple or lasting neither in space nor in time, in movement nor in thought. Time and the course of events had played havoc with ideas, annihilated decisions, forcibly interrupted orders transmitted over the field telephones, and instructions in the logbook of the army staff. All his attacks had ended in defeats. He had attacked a stronger enemy; he had tried to defend more than could be defended. Was it his fault that the losses had been so heavy, that the army was now so exhausted? Where had he gone wrong, and when? He huddled into his overcoat and poked the fire, then stared into it.

“Good evening, General,” said Tola Dačić quietly. He was carrying a bag on his back with some strips of painted blue wood tied to it.

Mišić looked at him in puzzlement, then saw that it was the old man whom he had met on the highway when he took Dragutin as his orderly—the old man who had cried out, “You see, folks, he looks just like any Serbian soldier!”

“Can I get warm by your fire?” he whispered.

“Yes, come sit down. What are you going to do with those blue strips of wood?”

“They’re to make crosses for my sons. Unless, God forbid, they cannot escape the fate of the last one.”

“And where are your sons?”

“All three of them are in your army. The fourth was in Stepa’s army, and he stayed at Cer. No sign that he even trod this earth. I wanted to ask you—I hope you won’t mind—what was on your mind all evening while you were looking at the fire?”

Mišić started with an awkward movement and lifted up his cap. He had been surprised and caught in a state of fear. He leaned forward to catch the old man’s whispers:

“Please don’t reproach me. It’s my right as a citizen. I have nothing else to give you.”

“I believe you. But first take that blue wood off your back, and throw it in the fire. Go on, throw it in! Don’t think the worst will happen!”

“And why should it bother you if I do? Faith has an upper limit and a lower one.”

“And what do you think the lower limit is?”

“It’s in your heart. You can never express it in words. I’ll take my bag off if it hurts your eyes.”

Mišić listened: from the darkness he could hear Dragutin playing his flute. He began to tremble. “Sit down so we can talk.”

“Tell me, General, how long can things go on like this?”

“You think we can’t go on much longer?”



Tola Dačić did not reply immediately. He looked at the fire. "A man by himself can stand a lot, but the people all together can stand everything. That's how I see our misfortunes."

"Do you put your trust in God?"

"Even God can't do much for really great suffering and misfortune. It seems as though even He doesn't know quite what He's doing, and can't fix the beginning and the end of things."

"Are you saying this seriously, or just for something to say?"

"With me it's all the same. But it seems you've decided not to give in to the Fritzie?"

"I've made up my mind that we'll drive them out of Serbia, God willing. And that as soon as possible, within a few days, my man." "And where are your children, General?"

"Two of my sons are in the army. My elder daughter is a nurse, and I have a little girl with her mother in Kragujevac."

"Are your sons officers, or ordinary soldiers?" "They're ordinary soldiers. In the front line. Like your sons."

"Thank you. Now I believe what you say about your sons, too, and what you plan to do with the Fritzie."

Tola Dačić loosened the blue wood from his bag and threw it into the fire. He was silent for a while, until the flames caught it, then turned to Mišić and asked:

"If, God forbid, I should ever need something, may I come to you?"

"By all means." "Now I guess you want to be alone with your worries for a while?"

"Yes, I must."

"Well, God grant that your sons may outlive you. Thank you for letting me get warm by this nice fire."

"Thank you for talking to me. And good luck!"

His eyes followed the old man as he departed. Dragutin was playing the flute. The flames leaped upward, roaring and yielding themselves to the darkness. A burst of flame, then nothing. First the wood, then the glowing embers, then ashes, then nothing. He made a pattern among the ashes with a stick. A trail among the ashes. Then nothing. To win, or to survive. All the second lieutenants know about that, or think they do: he had taught them how battles are won, and how to wage war victoriously. He knew how all the great battles in history had been won, how battles should be waged for victory. Oscar Potiorek knew this, too. Both his junior officers and mine know it. But how do you fight battles for survival? How do you win that one saving victory, a victory for one's very life? That is a battle which is not a victory, about which nothing is written in the history books, or in any other kind of learned works.

A battle in which victory has no value or glory. A flame, then darkness.  
Ashes, then nothing.

He would tell Putnik immediately what he had decided, without a moment's delay. Let him replace him with someone else. Let him summon him before a court-martial. He got up and hurried to the telephone.

*Muriel Heppell*

**Meša Selimović (1910–82)**

A native of Bosnia, Meša Selimović was born in Tuzla. He studied literature at the University of Belgrade and taught at a high school in his hometown. In World War II he fought with the partisans. Afterwards he occupied several positions, taught literature at the University of Sarajevo, was a theater director and the editor in a publishing house. He died in Belgrade.

Selimović appeared as a writer relatively late (1950). He published a novel *Tišine* (Silences, 1961), and short-story collections, *Tuđa zemlja* (Alien Land, 1962) and *Magla i mjesečina* (Fog and Moonlight, 1965). His major work, *Derviš i smrt* (Death and the Dervish, 1966), has been translated into many languages. Among his other significant works are the novels *Tvršava* (The Fortress, 1970) and *Ostrvo* (The Island, 1974). His discerning psychological analysis, his preoccupation with the basic aspects of human existence such as war, lust for power, greed, and injustice, his fine characterization and an articulate style contribute to his reputation as one of the best of contemporary Serbian writers.

*Death and the Dervish (Excerpt)*

That image of a lonely, yet courageous man on the difficult path of life corresponded well to the sense of fate that I had then. If I had been in a different mood, I might have been upset by my hopelessness and condemnation to a dreary march, but at that moment it seemed like a sensible reconciliation, even like defiance. I did not know what the good Husein-effendi had really meant, but it seemed to me that he was laughing a little both at himself and others.

Hafiz-Muhammed came out of the tekke and stopped by the fence above the river. His face was pale, upset. He did not even look at me. Was he sick?

“How are you feeling today?”

“Me? I don’t know. Bad.”

I could sense that he did not like me, but I did not hold it against him. He was also walking the tightrope between two banks, the best he knew how. Sometimes he even tried to be kind.

I asked him, smiling, still in my good mood, ready to understand everything, ready to be thankful: “Tell me the truth: did you know what the kadi’s wife wanted, and is that why you sent me to her?”

“Which kadi’s wife?”

“There’s only one kadi in town. And only one kadi’s wife, Hassan’s sister.”

He got angry, almost disgusted. I was not used to seeing him like that.

“Don’t mention their names together, please!”

“Then you knew. But you didn’t want to get involved, right?”

“Forget that scum, for God’s sake! I wanted to help you, that’s why I didn’t go. But don’t mention them now.”

“Why?”

“Haven’t you found out?”

“About what?”

“Then I have to tell you.”

From his troubled voice, from the painstaking effort that it took for him to look into my face, from his restless hands, which he continually thrust into his deep pockets and pulled out again, from everything about him that I had never seen before, that made him look like someone else, and from the fear that seized me, I knew that he had something very painful to say to me.

I asked him, rushing to immerse myself in the black waters: “About my brother?”

“Yes.”

“Is he alive?”

“Dead. They killed him three days ago.”

He was not able to say anything else; nor did I ask.

I looked at him: he was crying, his mouth was contorted, he was terribly ugly. I know that I noticed this, and I know that I was surprised that he was crying. I did not cry. I did not even feel any pain. What he had said flared like a blinding light, and there was a calm. The water gurgled peacefully. I heard a bird in the trees. Well, it's all over, I thought. I felt relief: it's all over.

"So," I said, "I guess that's it. Above this water sparkling with the golden sun."

"Calm down," said Hafiz-Muhammed horrified, thinking that I had gone mad. "Calm down. We'll pray to God for his soul."

"Yes. That's all we can do."

I did not even feel pain. It was as if some part of me had been torn away, and it was no longer there: that was all. It was quite strange for it to be gone, quite unbelievable, quite impossible, but it had hurt more while it was there.

Mustafa also came, Hafiz-Muhammed had surely told him about my distress. He brought me something in a copper bowl, greatly moved, even clumsier than usual.

"You need to eat," he told me, trying not to shout. "You haven't had anything since yesterday."

He put the bowl in front of me, like medicine, like a sign of his concern; I ate, I did not know what. Both of them looked at me, one beside me, the other in front of me, like feeble guards against sorrow.

And then, between two mouthfuls, that absent part of me began to hurt.

I stopped eating, dumbfounded, and got up slowly, very slowly.

"Where are you going?" asked Hafiz-Muhammed.

"I don't know. I don't know where I'll go."

"Don't go anywhere. Not now. Stay here with me."

"I can't stay."

"Go into your room. Cry, if you can."

"I can't cry."

I gradually realized what had happened, and pain began to engulf me, like a river that rises quietly, and while it was still at my ankles, I thought with apprehension about my fear of the despair that was to come.

And then I felt a sudden burst of rage, as if my brother were standing guilty before me. It serves you right, my tearful anger hissed inside me, what were you trying to do, what did you want? You've brought misery on us, you foolish man! Why?

And that passed as well. It lasted only for a moment, but it set me back in motion.

From the hills, from the Gypsy mahal, came the deafening beats of a drum, at short intervals, and a zurna wailed, incessantly, without interruption; it had gone on all day, the entire previous night, and forever, the horrible madness

of Saint George's Day rushed down on the kasaba like defiance, or a threat. I listened to it and trembled, a big kettledrum was beating somewhere, sounding an alarm, summoning those who were no more, all our dead brothers above and below the earth. Someone had survived and was calling.

He was calling in vain.

There were still no thoughts or tears inside me, no direction. I should not have gone anywhere, but I was going somewhere; there must have been some trace of my dead brother Harun.

My river flowed beneath the small stone bridge, and on the other side there was dead land. I had never crossed that bridge, except with my eyes. That was where the bazaar, the kasaba, and all life ended, where the short road to the fortress began.

My brother had passed this way and never returned.

Since then I had often gone in my thoughts from the stone bridge to the heavy oak gates that split the gray walls. In those imaginary visits I had walked as in a dream; the road was always empty, cleared for my arrival (which was tortuous even in my thoughts), so that I would be able to pass more easily. The gates were the goal of everything: the road led from everywhere only to them; they were the meaning of fate, the triumphal arch of death. I saw them in my thoughts, in my dreams, in my fears. I sensed their dark calls and insatiable hunger. I always turned around and fled; they watched my back, luring me, waiting. Like darkness, like an abyss, like an answer. Behind them was a secret, or nothing. There all questions began and ended, began for the living, and ended for the dead.

For the first time I was actually walking through the street of my endless nightmares; for a long time I had been uncertain as to how I would meet it. And it was indeed deserted, as I had imagined and hoped then, but now it no longer mattered. I would even have preferred for it not to be so empty: it resembled a graveyard. It watched me, gloomily, darkly, viciously, as if it were saying: you have still come! This passage into nothing unnerved me, and killed even that small amount of pitiful courage called indifference. I did not want to look, in order to lessen my unease and shivers of everything inside me, but I saw everything, the hostility of the deserted street, the terrible doors into the unknown, and the eyes of the hidden guard in the small opening in the gate. I had not seen those eyes in my thoughts then, when I should have gone; I had seen only the gates and the street that led to them, the tightrope to the other bank.

"What do you want?" asked the guard.

"Has anyone ever come here alone?"

"You have. Do you have someone in the fortress?"

"My brother. They imprisoned him."

"What do you want?"

"Can I see him?"

“You can see him if they imprison you, too.”

“Can I bring him some food?”

“Sure. I’ll give it to him.”

I tried to turn back time, like a lunatic, I tried to revive my dead brother. He had not yet been killed; I had just learned that he was in prison and come at once to inquire about him; it is human, brotherly. There is no reason for fear or shame, there is still hope, they will release him soon, and he will get the food that I sent him. He will know that he is not alone or abandoned; his own blood is at the gate. Neither turrets, nor guards, nor apprehensions have kept his brother from coming, he has come, I have come; he is fifteen years younger than I; I have always looked after him; I brought him to the kasaba. Hey, people! How could I abandon him in the hour of his greatest need? His miserable heart will cheer up when he learns that I’ve inquired about him. He has no one of his own except me, how can I, too, deceive him? Why? In the name of what? All of you may look at me askance, get angry, and shake your heads; I don’t care, here I am, I won’t deny these bonds. I have none that are closer; crucify me for this love if you will, I can’t help it. I’ve come, brother, you’re not alone.

It was too late. After everything that had happened, and everything that had not, I could only say the prayer of the dead for him, in the hope that it would reach him and be of some use to him.

That prayer was bitter, different from the one which I used to say over the corpses in coffins. It concerned only him and me.

Brother, forgive me, a sinner, for this belated love, I thought that it existed when there was a need for it, but it’s waking only now, when it can’t help anyone, not even me. And I no longer know whether it’s love or a futile attempt to turn back time. Except for those family graves in our village you had only me. Now you and I no longer have anyone; you lost me before I lost you, or maybe you didn’t. Maybe you thought that I stood in front of these ironbound gates just as you’d stand here for me; maybe up to the last moment you hoped that I’d help you, but if you had only not trusted in me so much, you’d have been spared the fear of final solitude, when everyone has abandoned us. And if you knew everything, then God help me!

“What are you whispering?” asked the man behind the gates.

“I’m saying the prayer for the dead.”

“You’d better say the prayer for the living; they have it harder.”

“You’ve seen a lot, you must know what you’re talking about.”

“What do I care whether you think I know what I’m talking about?”

“How many people have come through this gate?”

“More than have gone back out. And they’re all accounted for.”

“Where?”

“Up there, in the graveyard.”

“It’s bad to joke like that, my friend.”

“They’re joking. And you’re joking. And now get out of here.”

“Does one really have to be rude in your position?”

“Does one really have to be stupid in yours? Come inside, step over the threshold—it’s only a few inches—and you’ll start talking differently right away.”

Only a few inches, that much, and right away everything would be different.

Everyone should go to see those few inches, so that they can hate them. Or no, they should be hidden from people; people should never go there before they are taken there, so that they will not conceal all of their thoughts or make everything they say repulsive.

I returned with my eyes lowered, searching for his footprints on the uneven cobbles where no grass grew, searching for the place where he had stood for the last time outside the fortress walls. There was no longer any trace of him in the world. Everything that remained was inside me.

I felt the greedy stone eyes in the slit of the gates piercing the back of my head: they would burn through me.

I had been at the edge of death, at the gates of fate, and had learned nothing. Only those who enter learn something, but they cannot tell it.

Maybe it will occur to people to make this the sole entrance to death and to herd all of us in, one after the other, in droves—why should we leave it to chance and our fated hours?

But this crazy thought was only a defense against the unspeakable horror that had seized me, an attempt to lose my own troubles in a common misery. I had gone to look for the last traces of my murdered brother, but I was at his funeral, without him, without anyone, all by myself. I had not meant to do it, I did not know why I needed to go to that place, to remember him who had died. Maybe because it was the saddest place in the world, and the commemoration of the dead was most needed there. Maybe because it was the most horrible place on earth, and there it was necessary to overcome one’s fear in order to remember those who had been killed. Or because it was the most repulsive place on earth, and there the memory of one’s former self could be a horrifying epiphany. I had sought none of this, but it happened; I had not needed it, but I could do nothing else.

At the entrance to the bazaar there were ten or so people, waiting, as if I were returning from another world. They watched me, motionless; their eyes were calm, but remained fixed on me. They were a burden to me; many of them pressed against my forehead, swarming around it. I would stumble and fall. I did not know why they had come; I did not know why they were blocking the way or what they were expecting; I did not know what to do.



I stepped out of the street leading to the fortress, as if stepping out of the night (I could hear the muffled beats of the kettledrum again; up there I had not), among the people who were waiting, protected by the sun and separated by the bridge from that path into nothing. And I saw Is-haq, the fugitive, wearing a shoe on one foot only—the other was bare. His face was hard, like those of the others. They were one; they did not differ in any way. I saw them like a multitude of Is-haqs, with many eyes and a single question. It seemed that it was because of Is-haq that I could tell why they were standing on that edge and what they wanted to find out. I knew it very vaguely; I sensed it, because of him, and I did not dare to raise my gaze from the cobblestones. Maybe the people would move apart; maybe we would somehow pass by each other. I would pretend that I was absorbed in thought and did not see that they were expecting something. No matter if they knew that it was not true, no matter if they thought that I was avoiding their eyes. Only I would have wanted for him not to be among them. They would not have been there if he had not brought them.

But when the wall of their legs prevented me from passing, I raised my eyes toward Is-haq's face; I needed to see what he wanted, I could not avoid it. He was not there. I knew where he had stood; he had been the third from the left. But from that spot a thin youth now looked at me, not at all surprised that I had stopped in front of him.

Their eyes were wide open, determined, waiting. Where was he? He was not to the right of the youth, or to his left, all the way to the end of the line. I did not count but I knew that there were nine of them now. My eyes passed along their faces; I inspected their closed lips and tensely knit brows. I forgot that they wanted something; I was searching for Is-haq. I did not know why I needed to see him, or what I would say to him, but I was sorry that he was not there. Yet I had seen him. From afar to be sure—I had gone twenty paces with my eyes lowered, and the sunlight glittered on the men, gilded them in that other world; they glowed like torches and deflected my gaze, but it did not matter. I would have pawned my soul to recognize him. To the others I did not need to say anything, even if I had known what to say.

I went on, and they parted to let me pass. For a few moments it was quiet; I was walking alone, but then I heard feet scraping on the cobblestones. They had started after me. I quickened my step, to keep ahead of them, but they hurried after me. They were not deterred by the distance between us. It seemed that their numbers were growing.

The spring twilight fell, and the streets were bluish, restlessly quiet.

I did not hear the muezzin, I did not know whether it was time for the prayer. But the mosque was open; only one candle was burning, in a tall candlestick.

I went in and took my place at the front. Without turning around, I heard how people entered and sat down behind me, without words, without even a

murmur. They had never been so quiet. And it seemed to me that during the prayer they were silent and solemn. I was moved by that earnest rustling behind my back.

While the prayers still continued, I began to feel that they were strange, different from any before, that they were more passionate and dangerous, that they were a preparation for something to come. I knew that they could not end as they usually did. Amen is a beginning, not an end: its sound was muffled, thick, full of waiting. But for what? What was going to happen?

In the silence, in the motionlessness, in their determination not to leave, although the prayers were over, I realized something that I did not want to know. They wanted to see me after I learned of this tragedy; they wanted me to show what I was at that moment.

I myself did not know what I was, and I did not know what kind of answer to give them. Everything depended on me.

I could have got up and left, fleeing from both them and myself. And that would have been an answer.

I could have asked them to go out, so that I would be left alone in the silence of the empty mosque. And that would have been an answer.

But then everything would have remained inside me. Nothing would have reached anyone. In front of the fortress gate I had still been afraid of the pain and remorse that was to come, I might still have been consumed by fire, stifled by grief, or forever dumbfounded by unspoken rage and sorrow. I had to say something. For those who were waiting. I was a man, at least then. And for him, the undefended. Let it be a grievous brotherly prayer, the second already that day, but the first that people would hear.

Was I afraid? No, I was not. I was not afraid of anything, except whether I would do what I had to do well. I even felt a calm readiness for everything, a readiness that came with the inevitability of action, and a deep acceptance of it, more powerful than revenge, more powerful than justice. I could no longer oppose myself.

I got up and lit all the candles, carrying the flame from one to another, I wanted each of them to see me, I wanted to see each of them. For us to remember each other.

I turned around, slowly. No one would leave, not a single one of them. They watched me, sitting on their knees, excited by my silent movements and the flames that burned along the whole front side, releasing the thick smell of wax.

“Sons of Adem!”

I had never called them that.

I did not know what I was going to say, nor had I a moment before. Everything happened on its own. My grief and excitement found a voice and words.

“Sons of Adem! I will not give a sermon, I could not, even if I wanted to. But I believe that you would hold it against me if I did not speak about myself now, at this moment, the darkest in my life. What I have to say has never been more important to me, but I am not trying to gain anything. Nothing, except to see compassion in your eyes. I did not call you my brothers, although you are that now more than ever, but rather the sons of Adem, invoking that which we all have in common. We are men, and think in the same way, especially when we are in distress. You have waited, and wanted for us to be together, to look one another in the eye, sorrowful about the death of an innocent man, and troubled by a crime. And that crime concerns you as well, since you know: whenever someone kills an innocent man, it is as if he has killed all men. They have killed all of us countless times, my murdered brothers, but we are horrified when they strike our most beloved.

“Maybe I should hate them, but I cannot. I do not have two hearts, one for hatred and one for love. The heart that I have knows only grief now. My prayer and my repentance, my life and my death—all of it belongs to God, creator of the world. But my sorrow belongs to me.

“Allah has commanded: remember your duties toward your kinsmen.

“I did not remember them, O son of my mother. I did not have the strength to protect you and me from this misfortune.

“Musa says: O my Lord! Give me a helper from among my kin, give me my brother Harun, strengthen me with him. Make him my helper in my work.”

“My brother Harun is no more, and I can only say: O my Lord, strengthen me with my dead brother.

“With my brother who is dead but not buried according to the laws of God, who was not seen or Kissed by his family before he embarked on the great journey, from which there is no return.

“I am like Qabeel, to whom God sent a crow that dug up the soil, to teach him how to bury the body of his dead brother. And he said: ‘Woe to me, can I not do as much as a crow, can I not bury the body of my dead brother.

“I, the unfortunate Qabeel, more unfortunate than a black crow.”

“I did not save him while he was alive; I did not see him after he died. Now I have no one except myself and you, my Lord, and my sorrow. Give me strength, so that I will not despair from brotherly and humanly grief, or poison myself with hatred. I repeat the words of Nuh: ‘Separate me from them, and judge us.’

“We live on this earth only for a day, or less. Give me the strength to forgive, since he who forgives is greatest. And I know that I cannot forget.

“And I ask of you, my brothers, do not hold these words against me, do not hold them against me if they have hurt or saddened you. Or if they have revealed my weakness. In front of you I am not ashamed of this weakness; I would be ashamed if I did not have it.

“And now go home, and leave me alone with my misfortune. It is easier to endure, now that I have shared it with you.

I was left alone, alone in the entire world, in the strong candlelight, in the blackest darkness, and felt no better inside, as the people had carried only my words away, and all of my sorrow remained for me, untouched, blacker still because my hopes that it would be lessened had been betrayed. I struck the floor with my brow, and knowing, alas, that it was in vain, recited in my desperation the words of the Baqara Sura:

Our Lord, we seek your forgiveness.  
Our great Lord, do not punish us if we forget, or commit sin.  
Our great Lord, do not place upon us a burden that is too heavy for us.  
Our great Lord, do not charge us with that which we cannot endure and accomplish.  
Forgive us, have mercy and give us strength.

Maybe he forgave me, maybe he had mercy; he did not give me strength. Weaker than I had ever felt, I began to weep like a helpless child. Nothing that I had ever known or thought had any meaning then; the night beyond those walls was black and threatening. The world was terrible, and I was small and weak. It would have been best to stay like that on my knees, to pour myself out in tears, never to rise again. I knew we must never be weak and sorrowful if we are true believers, but I knew that in vain. I was weak, and did not think about whether I was a true believer or a man lost in the deaf loneliness of the world.

And then there was an empty silence. Something was still rumbling somewhere within me, more and more distant; screams could still be heard, but fainter and fainter. The storm had worn itself out and abated, all on its own. Because of my tears, perhaps.

I was tired. I was an invalid who had just arisen.

I put out the candles, taking their lives one by one, without the solemn feeling that I had had when I lit them. Grief had destroyed me, and I was alone.

I feared that I would remain in the darkness for a long time. Alone.

But when I snuffed out the soul of the last candle, my shadow did not disappear. It swayed, heavy, on the wall in the half-darkness.

I turned around.

In the doorway stood the forgotten Hassan, with a live candle in his hand. He had been waiting for me, silently.

*Bogdan Rakić and Stephen Dickey*

### Vasko Popa (1922–91)

A native of Vojvodina, Vasko Popa was born in Grebenci near Bela Crkva. He studied in Vienna, Belgrade, and Bucharest, and graduated from the University of Belgrade. He has been active for many years as an editor in the publishing house “Nolit.” His poems have been translated into almost every European language.

In 1968 he received the National Austrian Prize for European Literature. He is considered one of the leading poets in world poetry and certainly one of the best poets in contemporary Serbian poetry. He died in Belgrade.

Popa published several collections of poetry: *Kora* (Crust, 1952), *Nepočin-polje* (Field of Sleeplessness, 1956), *Pesme* (Poems, 1965), *Sporodno nebo* (Secondary Sky, 1968), *Uspravna zemlja* (Earth Erect, 1972), *Vučja so* (Wolf Salt, 1975), *Živo meso* (Raw Flesh, 1975), *Kuća nasred drumca* (The House on the Highroad, 1975), and *Rez* (Cut, 1980). His poetry shows many unique features: a predilection for concrete objects, a curt crisp verse and, above all, a creation of new myths. Despite seeming traditionalism and deceptive simplicity, everything about Popa is unconventional, almost revolutionary. Even his patriotic poetry is unlike any other. Concern for the universal and even metaphysical and an attempt to pierce the crust of things make his poetry laden with meaning and symbols and exciting to read and listen to. He liked to write poetry in cycles, several of which were completed while others remained undone.

Popa was also interested in folk literature, gathering and publishing unearthed folk songs and tales, especially those with mythological connotations.

## Proud Error

Once upon a time there was an error  
So ridiculous so minute  
No one could have paid attention to it

It couldn't stand  
To see or hear itself

It made up all sorts of nonsense  
Just to prove  
That it really didn't exist

It imagined a space  
To fit all its proofs in  
And time to guard its proofs  
And the world to witness them

All that it imagined  
Was not so ridiculous  
Or so minute  
But was of course in error

Was anything else possible

*Charles Simic*

## The Little Box

The little box gets her first teeth  
And her little length.  
Little width little emptiness  
And all the rest she has

The little box continues growing  
The cupboard that she was inside  
Is now inside her

And she grows bigger bigger bigger  
Now the room is inside her  
And the house and the city and the earth  
And the world she was in before

The little box remembers her childhood  
And by a great great longing  
She becomes a little box again

Now in the little box  
You have the whole world in miniature  
You can easily put it in a pocket  
Easily steal it easily lose it

Take care of the little box

*Charles Simic*

St. Sava the Shepherd

He guards a herd of stones  
On a green meadow

Inside the ancestral  
He helps each stone  
To give birth

Wherever he roams!  
The herd trails him  
The hills echo with stone-steps

He halts in a clearing  
Yellow and secluded  
Stone after stone he milks

Then he gives his wolves to drink  
This thick stone-milk that reflects  
The seven colors of the rainbow

Strong teeth and secret wings  
Grow when you drink stone-milk

*Charles Simic*

## Eyes of a Wolf

Before they christened me.  
They gave me in the interim  
The name of a brother suckled by a shewolf

As long as she lives my grandmother  
Will call me Little Wolf  
In her linen-like Walachian tongue

On the sly she would feed me  
Raw meat so I would grow up  
To lead the pack some day

I believed  
My eyes would start to glow  
In the dark

My eyes don't glow  
Perhaps because the real night  
Hasn't yet begun to fall.

*Charles Simic*



**Miodrag Pavlović (1928– )**

Miodrag Pavlović was born in Novi Sad in 1928. He finished Medical School at the University of Belgrade and practiced medicine for several years. Later he turned to writing as his main vocation. Now he works as an editor in the publishing house "Prosveta." He has written poetry, plays, short stories, and essays of literary criticism. His first collection of poems, *87 pesama* (87 Poems) appeared in 1952. His other books of poetry are: *Stub secćanja* (The Pillar of Memory, 1953), *Oktave* (Octaves, 1957) *Mleko iskoni* (Primeval Milk, 1962), and *Velika skitija* (Great Wandering, 1969). For his prevalently contemplative poetry Pavlović found sources in Anglo-Saxon literature and in classical myths. Intellectual and neoclassical, he endeavors to overcome the romanticist, Bohemian tradition of over-emotionalism. In his latest poems, he is turning more and more toward the old Serbian myths and legends, creating also his own, in an effort to find answers to the problems of the present.

Pavlović has also written short stories, *Most bez obale* (The Bridge without Shores, 1956), and the plays collected in *Igre bezimenih* (The Dance of the Nameless, 1963), *Koraci u drugoj sobi* (Steps in the other Room, 1958), and *Put u neizvesnost* (The Road to the Unknown, 1958). His collection of essays *Rokovi poezije* (The Terms of Poetry, 1958) show him as an erudite and demanding literary critic.

## The Epitaph of an Ancient Slavic Poet

Because of our old poems  
in this new faith  
they called me a heretic and archenemy.  
To consolidate their church  
they weeded out the old refrains  
and they hated me!

Buried at night  
I passed into misery.  
They dream of me as a magician  
but I did not rise from the grave.

Nor do I rise now, when they awaken me  
is this the Last Judgement, or what?  
they're shouting at my unresponsive ears:  
rise up, infidel, collect your body!  
Where can I find it, I ask,  
as if it were easy to remember  
in this tumult that destroys the crevices of my mind.  
Angels, put away your trumpets,  
Soldiers of heaven,  
don't trample my grave with your spurs!  
I am staying where I am,  
in the earth of my native tongue,  
I don't want to be tried in your courts  
and thrown below the open skies  
on the cold sieve of Eternity.

Let others face the god,  
I like my own big hole  
where ancient words heal like runes  
and the gusle under the earth is fertile with memories.

*Biljana Šljivić-Šimšić*

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Prince's Daughter Weaving

What our husbands could not save  
can I hope to save?  
What a pitiful general  
exiled under the infidel's tent,  
mute and alone!  
Beneath the monastery walnut trees  
the meadows were filled with flowers  
where I walked with my mother  
before my winter husband led me away.

I live with the underworld shepherds:  
the towers here rise up high  
and the armies are mighty  
and the precious stones green  
and the white-teethed children  
hotly kiss their mothers' breasts.

All kingdoms are the same  
and suns,  
and night without sun.  
But no one gave me gold thread  
to embroider my words.

So my womb has come to accord with the underworld,  
but before the fruits of spring are long ages of waiting.  
By night with a candle I wander across my own roots,  
to whom, there in the distance, at the cave's exit  
will the morning of my blood dawn  
and when, and in what tongue?

*Bernard Johnson*

## Balkan Itinerary

Pass slowly through small churches  
without asking the way,  
render greetings to the wooden hands of saints  
steeped in blood and milk,  
observe the white snakes quivering  
under the mosques' arched vaults,  
adjust your time  
by the wall-clocks of eternity,  
stoop low beneath the midnight bells' chiming  
crystal and heavy  
like stars falling on your helmet,  
sit down with the craftsmen  
in the forest of tall roses:  
let them refashion your face with their gentle chisels.

Then to the mountains!  
To the giants' goblets filled with ice  
and the freezing garrets of mist;  
look back  
at the forests' frantic coursing  
and beasts more fierce than the wind;  
no people in that desolate vista  
nor tall buildings,  
no one has come here yet,  
nothing is yet created  
neither concourse of voices nor river!

All you have seen in the Balkans  
was only illusion—boats  
on the murky sea of primeval beginning.

*Bernard Johnson*

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Traveler's Departure

It's just getting light.  
The bells are not yet awake.  
Nor water in springs.

In the church I am hated  
and in the council  
and amongst my kinsfolk,  
now I am leaving.

I walk round the mountain's neck.  
Some ancient sun  
climbs through the pinetrees,  
light comes to my lips.

A robe of smoke from the heights  
falls slowly down through the air,  
another angel brought down.

With an earthenware pot in my sack  
I stride away from my country,  
the silence bears me on like a broad river.

But I shall come back to their square  
to tell them the truth of the smoke  
and the sun's new name.

*Bernard Johnson*



**Stevan Raičković (1928– )**

Stevan Raičković was born in Neresnica, Serbia, finished high school in Subotica, and studied literature at the University of Belgrade. He has been working in various institutions and publishing houses as an editor. He is now an editor in the leading Belgrade publishing house "Prosveta." Raičković has published several collections of poetry as well as books for children. Representing the neo-romantic current in contemporary Serbian poetry, he employs several basic motifs: nature as perfection, passion for loneliness, and yearning for soothing silence. His anxiety over man's losing ties with nature leads him sometimes to pessimism and retreat from the urban life. Simplicity, sincerity, and genuineness are his other traits. His main books of poetry are: *Pesma tišine* (The Song of Silence, 1952), *Kasno leto* (Late Summer, 1958), *Kamena uspavanka* (The Stony Lullaby, 1963), *Stihovi* (Verses, 1964), and *Prolazi rekom lađa* (A Boat Sails Down the River, 1967).

## Awareness of Autumn

We have grown weary of looking at the cloud,  
the grain,  
the rain  
and everything we know already out and out.

We wonder not at the swallows  
as low they fly,  
nor at the sunflower, turning  
to the sun on high

We know the time when yellow grow the leaves  
and know they needs must fall.  
(’Tis only love that may at times  
come unexpected, after all.)

There is not anyone but knows  
and fully knows,  
how this little life of ours  
goes and flows.

Why, then, where the green grass spreads  
should we not rest our weary heads?  
And why  
you and I  
should not dispel our grief  
by the beauty of a single leaf? Song of the Grass!

*A. Lenarčič*

## Song of the Grass

The grasses have a single thought heavy as a stone.  
They tell me: Who needs your song?  
Lie down. Fold your hands, anywhere, under your head  
And keep quiet. Keep quiet until you forget speech.  
Silently watch the hill quite distant and blue,  
Sunk in silence. Lift your eyes slowly from the hill  
To the cloud, so restless and white, moving in the sky.



Look from the cloud into yourself. And stopped in yourself  
Lie down. Quiet with your eyes turned within, the hill.

Confused by the dark inside you, look and understand simply:  
(Simply as the wind sways us accidentally.)  
There are no clouds above the hill a little black because of the dusk.  
I lie in the tall grass and think indefinitely.

An ant on my knee is like a man on a hill.  
Restless, the ant stands. I'm silent. And this is my song.  
Sunk in thought, I lie in the grass. The grasses rustle, heavy as a  
stone.

*Charles Simic*

#### Stone Lullaby

Sleep wherever you happen to be,  
All you kind, bitter, inspired ones,  
You hands in the grass, lips in the shade,  
You who are bleeding, you who are in love.

Heal into the blue dream of the stone,  
You living, you tomorrow assassinated,  
You dark waters under the white foam  
And bridges stretched over emptiness.

Cease, herb, do not wither,  
Sleep, marigolds as the stone sleeps,  
Sleep, all you sad, all you weary ones,

Last bird, turn toward me.  
Softly say this name,  
And turn to stone in the air.

*Charles Simic*



**Ivan V. Lalić (1931–96)**

Ivan Lalić was born in Belgrade, where he studied law. He spent a few years in Zagreb, then worked in Belgrade as an editor until his death.

Lalić began to publish poetry in 1952. His first book of poems, *Bivši dečak* (The Boy That Was) appeared in 1955. Since then he published several collections of poetry. He was a poet of subdued pathos and great technical skill, inclining toward classical motifs and intellectualism. His verse is complex and refined and his poems are vehicles of his thoughts rather than emotions.

Among his other books of poetry are *Argonauti i druge pesme* (The Argonauts and Other Poems, 1961), *Vreme, vatre, vrtovi* (Time, Fires, Gardens, 1961), *Čin* (The Act, 1963), and *Izabrani stihovi* (Selected Verses, 1969).

## Voices of the Dead

Far away in the night a fire is blazing, behind it another,  
 Butterflies of flame settling on the edge of night.  
 A third fire. Soon a clean line of flame,  
 A ring on a dream. Nobody may pass.

The leaves of the chestnut trees before the house fall in fear  
 And people say: Autumn. Selissa, that is the camp  
 Of a great dead army, pitched on the distant hills.  
 Alone, I strain my ear for bugles, tense and breathless.

But instead of the blare of copper I hear the first snowfall  
 In the deserted woods. But the fires still burn.  
 Somewhere towns are razed when a frown appears  
 On the forehead of earth, lost in thought. But the fires still burn.  
 A ring around a dream. Did anyone hear a bugle?  
 The bugle is behind the silence, and the silence is stronger.

*Francis R. Jones*

## The Stonemasons

The measure is in the stone, and the tongue of earth is crushed  
 In the voices of the chisels, calling to each other  
 In the echo of dust, like children  
 Between the raindrops;  
                                   sometimes we recognized

A scream or a word, trapped it,  
 Set it upright in air. We found the measure of walls,  
 The weeping of crenellations, the smile and the vine,  
 The movement of a beast rising from the stone  
 Like a star from the sea: innocent, washed clean

We measured the stone with a yard of iron,  
 With our imperfect love;  
                                   we translated  
 An unknown tongue into known forms,  
 And celebrated that unspoken agreement  
 With the stronger measure of substance;

Then the earth shook-  
 Somewhere there had been a mistake,  
   unclear even in the flash  
 Of dust settling, of the tongue melting  
 Into its genesis, like water;  
 When the blood was dry  
 we tried again.

*Francis R. Jones*

Of the Works of Love

The works of love are scattered through the world  
 Like the scars of war; grass grows fast  
 Over the battlefield, and the wet ember of earth  
 Bursts into flame to restore the terrible virginity,  
 As before the embrace, before the remembering, before the voices  
 At dawn, with lips just parting:  
 The works of love are in dispute

And when the wall crumbles, and when the garden grows wild,  
 When the word is erased, when the ring is broken,  
 Love loses out;  
                   but listen to the screams of the birds  
 Over the cove where the sea learns from lovers  
 A different tenderness: time is impartial  
 And the world is love's task,  
                                   the long rehearsal  
 Of immature gods.

*Francis R. Jones*



By Đ. Simić

### Miodrag Bulatović (1930–91)

Miodrag Bulatović was born in the small Montenegrin village of Omladina. World War II, which he experienced as a boy, left an indelible impression on him. After the war he found it difficult to adjust. After spending several years drifting from place to place, he began to write. He quickly became successful with his unorthodox short stories and novels, and his name crossed over the borders of his country. Next to Andrić, he is the most translated Serbian author. He spent his last years as a professional writer in Ljubljana.

His first work, a book of short stories, *Đavoli dolaze* (The Devils Are Coming, 1956), showed immediately his predilection for the unusual and even bizarre, his interest in, and concern for, the insulted and injured, for demented, drifting individuals at the bottom of society. In his novels, *Crveni petao leti prema nebu* (The Red Cock Flies to Heaven, 1959), *Heroj na magarcu* (The Hero on a Donkey, 1964), and *Rat je bio bolji* (War Was Better, 1968), he treats in an expressionistic manner the alienation of his characters, the evils of war, which he likens to pornography, and the inability of man to even recognize, let alone achieve happiness. This stark pessimistic tone is strengthened by the author's unbridled license and uncanny sense for the dramatic.

In addition to these works, Bulatović also wrote a short-story collection *Vuk i zvono* (The Wolf and the Bell, 1958) and a play *Godot je došao* (Godot Has Come, 1965), a take-off on the Godot theme.

*The Red Cock Flies to Heaven* (Excerpts)

Jovan saw Srećko and Ismet carry the stretcher into the graveyard. They vanished among the sparse briars and put down their burden. They were visible to Jovan from the waist up. Their heads were together, and they were staring at each other. They clinked their bottles and the brandy sparkled in the sun. Without taking his eyes off them, Jovan rubbed the bristles of his rusty beard.

Peter looked up at the sky and saw nothing. That thing above, the blue that men called the sky where the soul settled after the body's death, was nothing but a vacuum, an unsubstantial emptiness devoid of anything visible or real on which the human eye could fasten. Jovan saw Srećko and Ismet embrace.

Peter, who felt himself lying on the dusty ground, was tormented by hunger. This was a devil situated somewhere in his bowels, at the center of his being, a devil that kept turning over. He felt it equal in size to the whole of his stomach, a devil with feelers that sucked the strength, endurance, and will from every ounce of his exhausted body. He grabbed up fistfuls of dust and sand and pounded and kneaded them. Never had he felt such a burning in his stomach or such ashes in his throat or such a strange and tasteless dust on his lips and under his tongue.

Jovan stared through half-closed eyes into the sparse thornbushes behind which something was happening.

The buzz and singing of the wedding guests mingled with the clatter of dishes. From the table came an uproar of thumping, singing, and shouting. They were eating, Peter thought, beyond all measure. And the devil in his stomach grew more and more restive and drew a veil across his half-blinded eyes. "Hold on," he said to himself, "Hold on. There'll be a bone or two even for you. They won't eat it all."

"Look at those two singing," said Jovan, shaking his arm. "They're drinking too, look!"

"How can they drink on an empty stomach?" Peter asked without shifting his position.

"How do you know they're drinking on an empty stomach?" Jovan asked childishly, putting on a frown of importance.

Peter opened his eyes. The sky was lighter, as if all the fires on earth were up there pouring down their heat and burning ash into his eyes. He felt too that the clamor from the long table, the sated shouting and groaning, the banging of dishes and scraping of spoons, the whole of this overheated tumult, was coming from above, from the transparent and burning sky and not from the square, white house by the roadside.

To Peter's imagination it appeared thus: they were all of them up there in the sky. They were grinning at one another over a table laden with foodstuffs.



A thick, dark broth poured from invisible dishes. The servants fought over the scraps. The sweating bride appeared unable to eat any more, yet still they went on stuffing her like a turkey hen. They forced her jaws apart and crammed her with hot potatoes, large chunks of meat, and slices of hard barley bread. They poured ever hotter broth and sweet sour milk into her so she would digest the meat and pastries better and, light as a feather, be the first to leap into the dance. Her belly was swollen to an unnatural size but no one seemed surprised. They were actually delighted by it. They danced around it and vanished from sight. They clanked their glasses, swilled their drinks, tapped her belly to see whether it was firm and rang; it rang like an empty barrel. Her belly grew and grew and the sun began to shine with a new light. Her belly grew larger every moment, and the wedding guests grew smaller, punier, and less noticeable. Everything at this wedding in the sky was sad save the bride whose body was soon to fill the entire celestial space. There were no more wedding songs, no more music or shouting. The domestics dashed around her, squabbling over the crusts, bones, and stinking dregs of broth. Everybody was looking upward but none could make out her wise head perched on its rounded beam of a neck.

Finally they all set off marching across the blue firmament, dragging the table in all directions. It came apart, but the tureen of broth and the bones remained aloft. They all departed, each taking his own road, leaving the bride alone in the sky. She was so large that she filled the whole of Peter's vision. Her blue-veined legs hung motionless. Her arms rested on the mountain tops. She was perched on a cloud like a bee on an apple blossom. Gnawed sheepsheads, untouched roast chicken with yellow backs and charred legs, a bloated goatskin—this was all that remained visible behind her.

Catching sight of the distant wedding table, Jovan grew sad. He raised himself a little so he could take them all in at one glance. Some were dancing and some were not. They were throwing bones and crusts of bread around them. He could not tell which of them was the most sated and replete. He looked longingly at the bride.

"God, I'm hungry!" he said, sniffing the air.

His words brought Peter back to earth: the wedding guests descended from the sky and resumed their clamor. Ivanka's belly went flat and the sky reassumed its vastness. Of the former picture in the sky there remained only a white smudge—the wedding guests running around the bride like circus clowns, admiring her and wiping their greasy faces on the hem of her many-colored dress.

"I've never been so hungry," said Jovan.

"Nor I," replied Peter, and only when he heard his own voice was he quite certain that he was back on earth.

"Do you think they know how hungry we are?" Jovan asked.

“Don’t be a fool,” said Peter. “When have you ever heard of the well-fed believing the hungry? They not only don’t know we’re hungry, but they think we’re too full to get up.”

“Peasant swine!” said Jovan.

Peter closed his eyes and dozed off again.

“What about going and begging a bit of bread and some bones from them?” Jovan whispered.

“Not on your life!” Peter snapped.

“It wouldn’t be a bad idea,” said Jovan in a singsong voice.

“It would be cowardly,” interjected Peter.

“But I’d soon be back,” Jovan blustered, “and then you’d bless me for it.”

“Shut up and stay where you are,” Peter replied.

“But what’s there to stay for?” Jovan persisted.

“Them, of course,” Peter said sleepily. “Maybe they’ll remember to throw us the odd bone. Who knows?”

“But why?” Jovan objected. “Why should they? There’s no reason why they should, is there?”

“All right, but is there any particular reason why they shouldn’t?” Peter asked, half opening his eyes and seeing the desperate Jovan above him.

“No, that’s true,” Jovan said. “There certainly isn’t. Only the devil alone knows.”

“Well then, if there isn’t, wait and see,” Peter burst out in a deep voice. “Perhaps they’ll realize we’re too proud to beg.”

“God, but will they though!” Jovan groaned, looking in the direction of the feast. “Oh God, if they don’t, interrupt their feast for a few moments and tell them we’re hungry, but that we refuse to beg!”

“They’ll probably think of us,” droned Peter sleepily. “They’re peasants and you can never be surprised by anything peasants do.” “Oh God, will they remember though,” Jovan repeated tearfully, biting his forefinger like a child. “Oh God, whisper to them so they don’t forget. Say to them: My dear, well-fed people, pause in your guzzling a moment and see how hungry these brothers of yours are. Throw them what you don’t want to eat yourselves and they’ll be as satisfied and gentle as they always are. Tell them that, oh God. We aren’t asking much, only that they pass by and throw us some bread and bones as they would to the dogs.”

The replete and many-hued wedding party was reflected in Jovan’s large, tear-filled eyes.



The crowd grew agitated and began to thin. The old man saw the Moslem cemetery overgrown with burrs and brambles. Among the headstones tottered

the dark shapes of the gravediggers, unable to free themselves of their gleaming charge, which still lay on its planks. Even more clearly could he see the motionless vagrants under the pear tree; he wondered how they could lie so long in the burning sun without getting sunstroke. In the far distance, he could make out the stinking town of Bijelo Polje and was terrified at the echo of its bells which drifted from it in warm waves.

When he saw Mrkoje grab Muharem by the shirt front, he turned cold. "What do they want of him now?" he thought, and noted that two of the crowd carried guns on their shoulders. "Surely they're not going to kill him? Oh, God, give me my strength back so I can go and drive them away like dogs."

"Call the cockerel!" Mrkoje demanded inflexibly.

"It won't do any good," said Muharem, scarcely able to stand. "You've already seen."

"Call him, I tell you," Mrkoje growled.

"What are they for?" Muharem asked, catching sight of the guns.

Mrkoje bared his teeth, and Muharem thought he was about to spit in his face. He quickly lowered his head and murmured:

"But ... he's quite happy up there where he is...."

"If you don't get him down, we'll shoot," Mrkoje said.

"Tell me first why he's so important to you," said Muharem raising his head from his breast.

"The guests want to throw him alive into the boiling water," Mrkoje snarled drunkenly, letting go of him, "so it'll be better for you if you call him."

"I'm sorry for him," Muharem whispered.

"Do you want us to give you a hot bath and pluck you, instead of him?"

The old man could not hear what was being said, but he saw Muharem recoil from the crowd and gaze upward.

"Heh, Reddy, lad!" he called. "Reddy! You mustn't come down for anything. Stay up there forever. They want to put you in boiling water and pluck you. They want to have a bit of fun. So you stay where you are even if it means I can never hold you in my arms again." Mrkoje again grabbed Muharem by the breast and hurled him violently aside.

The old man saw that if some of the men had not caught him he would have fallen.

Muharem's eyes wandered over the crowd, which no longer wanted to play with him, and a damp smile of gratitude spread across the old man's lips.

But he soon saw one of the three men with guns spit at him and he felt like crying.

The man nearest Muharem took aim. The gun kicked in his shoulder. The shot had no effect on the mass of the crowd—they were watching the cherry

tree. Muharem saw the cock give a jump at the shot and fly away. It appeared to be still crowing. He could not tell whether it had flown off before the shot or only after the bullet had hit it. He was numbed with fear.

"Perhaps you're only wounded," he whispered loudly enough for those near him to hear. "Hold on. Don't fly to earth. The wounds are nothing. I know plenty of herbs that'll heal them. you just try to stay alive." The old man saw Mrkoje take sight along his gun barrel. Then he smelled burnt powder.

"Dogs!" he said to himself. "Lousy, rotten dogs!"

"Mrkoje didn't miss either," thought Muharem, beginning to wish a bullet would take him. Still crowing, the cockerel gave a start in mid-air at the second shot and, for a moment, seemed to halt in its flight so that Muharem thought it was going to stay suspended there forever. But with a further crow, it tore itself away from the invisible ground on which it appeared to rest and flew higher and higher.

"He's going to fly right away," Muharem thought and was seized by a fit of trembling. "I'm afraid I shall lose him."

The crowd seethed. Many just went on dancing, but there were some who stopped to watch the cockerel and the stooping Muharem. The song died on their lips, their drunken shouts remained bottled up in their throats, and an expression of fear and wonder replaced their grimaces of fury and anger.

They twisted their red necks and gaped, trying to keep their feet while they did so. Across their broad faces, past eyes exhausted with brandy and dancing, the cock flew like a red comet. And who can say what strange position their tousled heads would have attained or how far their necks would have bent and twisted or how far the cock would have hurtled in its whistling trajectory, had not a third shot rung out? Muharem could not see who had fired: Mrkoje, the two men behind him, or one of the other six who had appeared carrying guns. But he saw that the third shot had also found its mark. "As long as they don't get his heart," he thought, still not grasping what was happening.

At the shot, the cock once more halted a few seconds, long enough to see who it was that laughed and who had fired at it. It seemed to hang there some time, its head retracted, its wings outspread and feet extended. And when the third searing pellet pierced its plumage, it gave a start and soared straight up into the sky.

It might have fallen but for the volley of bullets that reached it. The men took aim, staggered and fired, yelled and catcalled, and the empty, smoking cartridges fell about their feet. They continued firing for a long time. Beside them the hot water steamed and the masculine women standing over the pails showed teeth that were gleaming white.

Struck by the pellets, the cock flew swifter and more madly than ever. It was so high above the earth and the crowd that no one, not even the terrified Muharem, could tell its wings from its legs, its head from its neck, or its tail from the rest of its plumage. All Muharem saw was a handful of fire, a red ball vanishing into the blue sky with an ever increasing velocity.

The air vibrated with song. The earth shook beneath the dancing. Muharem was horrified at the thought that the cock might go on flying upward until it reached the heavens themselves. "They'll never let him come down again," he whispered. "They'll want him there too and I'll be left on my own forever."

When the sun had hidden the cock, Muharem saw the faces of the crowd bathed in a red light. The sky itself had turned red and the hills that pierced it with their summits, the bare fields, the road and the river that hid among the alders and willows. Blood poured from the red dot and the tears gushed down Muharem's cheeks. Purple feathers flew everywhere, so many that he could make out none of the people standing near him. People tried to avoid them, but they rained down, covering them.

Somewhere amid the noisy crowd stood Muharem, helpless to stir from the spot. Through his tears he watched the red dot growing smaller and smaller and the men who continued to take aim and fire without pause. He had only one wish: to find the place where the cock would fall, to catch it in open arms and see whether or not the lead had shattered its heart.

But the cock flew faster and faster, not even flinching before the sun, without any thought of returning to earth. It scoured the heavens with the speed of a comet, vanishing from the sight of the startled people. The firebird! Old Ilija, seated in his chair, gazed over the heads of Ivanka, Kajica, and the women who were emptying their pails of water. He saw Muharem weeping and hardly able to support himself.

"Calm yourself," he thought. "Calm yourself, boy. Don't take on so about your cockerel. I know you loved it. But try to forget it. There's nothing on this earth that a man can't get over and forget. So don't mourn your cockerel too much. I'll make a sign to these swine around me to get you another. Pull yourself together, for their game hasn't been entirely successful. The cock's escaped them, soared off to heaven and the devil himself couldn't get it down again. Look around you. See, they've been deceived. It's turned into the sun itself and is shining down on us, all bloody and ragged. So be calm, laddy, dry your tears and come and sit here beside my knee."

The men continued to shoot, at what they themselves probably had no idea. The kolo went on turning as before. The masculine women and the giants and dwarfs who had been hurling stones and sticks into the cherry tree had gone. Nobody made any further mention of the cockerel—as if it had

never crowded. The crowd seemed merrier than ever. Only Muharem stared at the red dot in the sky and whimpered like a puppy.

*E. D. Goy*

**Matija Bečković (1939– )**

Of Montenegrin origin, Matija Bečković was born in Senta, Vojvodina. He studied literature at the University of Belgrade, where he lives. He has been the president of the Serbian Writers' Association.

His first book of poetry appeared in 1962; since then he has published several more books, usually of long narrative poems, in which he combines a keen awareness of his compatriots' tragic experiences in the recent past with a masterful control of the language and the high rhetoric of the Montenegrin dialect. His best books of poetry are *Tako je govorio Matija* (Thus spake Matija, 1965), *Lele i kuku* (Woe upon Woe, 1978), *Kaža* (A Tale, 1989), and *Ćeraćemo se još* (We'll Keep at It, 1997).

## No One Will Write Poetry

No one will write poetry anymore.  
The immortal themes will abandon the poems  
Unhappy with the way they were understood and versified.  
Everything that was once subject of poetry  
Will rebel against it and its cowardice,  
Objects themselves will express what the poets had no courage to say.  
Sea, the ancient theme of poets, will leave poetry forever  
And return to its grave where it grew up.  
The sunset, turned ridiculous,  
The starry sky, driven into a cliché,  
Will forsake poetry.  
The roses will insist on their color  
And will not agree to the fickleness of poets.

The word freedom will escape and return to its meaning.  
Poets will have no language in which to sing.  
No one will stand between the poet and his poetry,  
And so poems will attack poets  
Demanding that they fulfill their promises.  
The poets will retreat from all that they've said,  
But everything that they imagined and prophesied will catch up with them.  
Poetry will demand their lives  
So that its metaphors may remain true and irrefutable.  
In generations to come  
No one for any price will want to be a poet.  
Future poets will have better ways of spending their time.  
The free man will not consent to write poems in order to be a poet  
And yet there's no other way to be a poet.  
A tree, yesterday's symbol in poetry,  
Will wail from the square of its dark past  
And no one will be able to equal its lament  
Since it knows itself better than anyone else.  
True poets will be against poetry  
And all over the world they'll have the same thought:  
For the sake of its esteem in the eyes of true poets,  
No one will write poetry anymore.

*Charles Simic*



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If I Knew I'd Bear Myself Proudly

If I knew I'd bear myself proudly  
Before judges and serving my sentence,  
What a trial I'd blaze and endure everything,  
Warding it all off with my bare limbs.

If I knew I'd kick the table alone  
Under my feet and fix the noose myself,  
My soul would earn itself eternity  
And my hangman go on weeping after me.

But I'm afraid, I'd start to beg.  
To sob, to kneel, to betray everything,  
Just to save my bare ass,  
I'd spit on all and agree to everything.

*Charles Simic*



**Danilo Kiš (1935–89)**

Danilo Kiš was born in Subotica of a Jewish father and a Montenegrin mother. Because of that background, his family was subjected to terror during World War II, in which his father and many other relatives perished. After the war, he studied at Belgrade University and lectured in France. He spent the rest of his life in Belgrade and France, where he died prematurely in 1989.

Kiš's first work, a short novel *Mansarda* (The Attic, 1962), concerns the growing pains of young people. Most of his subsequent works, however, deal with the suffering people, mostly Jewish, were subjected to during wartime for racial and political reasons: *Psalam 44* (Psalm 44, 1962), *Bašta, pepeo* (Garden, Ashes, 1965), *Peščanik* (Hourglass, 1972), and *Grobnica za Borisa Davidoviča* (A Tomb for Boris Davidovič, 1978). He also wrote short fiction and nonfictional works, as well as literary polemics, in which he defended artistic freedom of expression. Kiš is, next to Andrić, the most recognizable Serbian writer abroad.

*Garden, Ashes* (Excerpts)

In our new surroundings my father's behavior underwent certain changes. I say certain because these changes were due more to the milieu, to the landscape, than to some radical transformation in his character. In any case, I had not previously been in a position to observe my father, and my curiosity in this respect had been completely frustrated by his repeated absences, by what I would call his conscious sabotage of my oedipal curiosity. Who would dare assert that my father had not intentionally avoided any kind of personal disclosure, had not intentionally concealed his personality behind a mask, appearing alternately as a writer, chess player, apostle. To tell the truth, he played an unworthy role in front of me, he lacked the courage to show his true face. He was constantly switching masks, concealing himself behind the facade of one or another of his roles, all of them pathetic. Lost and hidden in the labyrinth of the city, among the multitude of felt hats and derbies, he was—thanks to his mimicry—entirely sheltered from my view.

When we moved to the village, my father could no longer hide. One day in spring, at the time of one of his sprees, I caught sight of him in his true form: he was walking along the embankment of the swollen river, returning unexpectedly after a six-day trip. We thought that he might have lost his way in the Count's forest or run away, guided by his star. As he walked along the embankment in his black frock coat, swinging his cane high in the air, swaying on his feet like a ship's mast, his celluloid collar yellowed, staring into space through his steel-rimmed glasses, my father became a part of the landscape, as if he had climbed into a picture frame, and he lost his air of mystery totally. To remain unnoticed—he must have seen me from afar—he hid his stiff-brimmed hat under his arm and attempted to slip by me. Truly a devastating sight. Without his hat, that crown of thorns, with his ash-gray hair parted in the middle, unsure on his feet, clumsy and flat-footed, he was entirely deprived of his greatness, he was nondescript. I didn't dare call him. The river had been swollen by the spring torrents, so I was afraid I might rouse him from his sleepwalking, genuine or feigned, and cause a fatal fall. Instead, I pulled aside and let him pass. He literally brushed me with the tails of his fluttering frock coat; I caught a whiff of tobacco, alcohol, and urine, but his face was immobile. In this bare natural context, framed by fresh, uncut boards, his face came into full view, his magnificent nose streaked with red and blue veins like a blotting pad. Deprived of the baroque backdrop of city gates and the lighted vestibules of respectable small-town hotels, he now appeared in his natural state, all his power of mimicry lost. He, the chess champion, writer, world traveler, apostle, was unable to muster the effort to play the role of a peasant or woodcutter.

Of course, it wasn't only pride, as he liked to believe, but also physical indisposition and infirmity; otherwise, who knows, he might have started wearing a peasant outfit and kept on hiding. Stripped by an official act of his standing as a retired senior railway inspector, with all its financial repercussions, he had come upon the perfect excuse for his orgies—he began to drink heavily, to spread anarchistic ideas in the villages, to sing the “Internationale.” He soon became known throughout the county as a dangerous revolutionary anarchist, poet, and neurasthenic, yet he was also respected in certain circles for his wardrobe, his frock coat, his cane, his hat, or for his delirious soliloquies, for his awesome, penetrating voice. His standing was especially high among women cafe owners; whose very appearance inspired him and drew out of him the golden thread of his lyrical expansiveness and his sense of gallantry. Thanks to these muses, who stood blinking at him from behind the counter without understanding either his words or his songs, he was able to preserve his identity as well as his skin, because these plump, bucolic muses took up his cause with the police, opened secret doors for him, defended him from the village rowdies whose reputation as drinkers and singers he had seriously threatened. Standing on a table, like a statue of a great orator and demagogue, he would take a sip from somebody's glass, spit it out, and then—squinting as if trying to remember something—reel off the wine's vintage, its alcoholic content, the species of vine, its exposure to the sun, its district. The effect was always fantastic. Suspecting my father of collusion with his Calliopes and Euterpes, peasants brought their own bottles along in the hope of tripping him up and discrediting him. But he would spit out the wine faster than usual, with an expression of divine indignation, like a magician when someone peeks up his sleeve as he is stabbing his own heart with a sword.

“Gentlemen,” he would say, “not even the lowliest clerk would be taken in by your petty tricks. You plant counterfeit Tokay from Lendava on me, gentlemen, as you would forged money on some child. The presence of this lady”—my father bows to Madame Clara, who occupied the command post in the cafe, holding on to the handle of the beer pump as if it were the helm of a ship that lifts the foam of the waves—the presence of this lady, as I said, forces me to refrain from spitting this wine into the face of your suspicions, from disrupting this marketplace atmosphere and the distrustful mundaneness by which you debase everything that is sublime. I shall begin at the beginning so as to arouse your miserable suspicion to an even higher degree and make your ignorance still more conspicuous at the moment, at the grand and shameful moment when I tell you what the soul of this wine consists of, what gives it this false glow, this cheap ersatz taste, when I unfurl under your very noses the artificial rose of its blush, the cheapness of its color, the tawdry make-up on its lips, which I have just touched, gentlemen, and I am stunned by the de-

gree of refinement with which they attempt to ape the true intoxicating spirit and virginal ardor of a Tokay.

This was the first act of the comedy that my father would act out in the evenings in village taverns, or rather a small sequence in his rich repertoire, into which he poured all the passion of his delirious inspiration, his whole genius, his ebullience, his enormous erudition. He would start singing only if provoked, and he would sing only to humiliate the village rowdies. He would burst into song suddenly, and with such force that the glasses on the counter would rattle and the village singers fall silent for fear of looking ridiculous in the eyes of the ladies. My father maintained an extensive repertoire of sentimental romances, old ballads and barcarolles, popular songs, and czardases, and numbers from operas and operettas, which he sometimes followed with dramatic recitatives, but in his interpretation the sentimentality of the words and melodies would take on a major-key purity, while the sugary sediment would be crystallizing in the silver goblet of his voice, becoming brittle and resonant. He added new subtleties to the tearful fin-de-siècle tremolo, purging it of its Biedermeieresque false delicacy and puritanical modesty, he sang without glissandi, with full lungs, manfully yet not without warmth. The effect was due primarily to the timber of his voice, in which there were no petty lyrical affectations. Instead the notes rolled out in grand sweeps, slightly cracked like the sound of a French horn.

The third act of my father's long-run touring shows which would end sorrowfully, like a tragic farce. My father would awake in a village ditch covered with bruises of unknown origin, caked with mud, his trousers wet and vomit-stained, without a penny or cigarette in his pocket, an internal thirst in his intestines, and a suicidal impulse in his soul. Like Pierrot grown old, he rescues from the mud his miserable paraphernalia, his cane, his hat, his glasses, then desperately looks for a cigarette butt in his pockets, the last butt of his life, to help tally up the sad balance of all his days and nights, calculating the accounts from the bottom up. Unable to recall how or when he acquired the bruises, he sets about deciphering the figures marked in his own hand on an empty packet of Symphonia cigarettes. The dense column of figures, showing the results of all fundamental calculations, stands now in front of him like an Egyptian relic inscribed with hieroglyphics in his own hand—figures whose meaning has slipped his mind.

At last, my father is outside the frame of the drama and farce of which he is writer, director, and protagonist all at once; he is now outside all his roles, an ordinary mortal, the famous singer without his voice, without the pathos of his gestures, the genius forgotten in his sleep by his muses and goddesses, a clown without a mask, while his frock coat and his by now famous paraphernalia lie draped over a chair: the stiff celluloid collar, discolored like an old domino, the headwaiter's tie with a bohemian knot. The room is saturated

with the sour stench of alcoholic vapors, feces, and tobacco. A large enamel ashtray marked “Symphonia” sits on the chair by the bed. A tarnished silver cigarette case. Matches. A bulky pocket watch with an old-fashioned dial and Roman numerals ticks off some mythic time, conveying its vibration to the plywood. Behind the frock coat draped over the chair, behind that black curtain concealing the infamous relics of a famous artist, a straight blue line of smoke rises and then swirls like a corkscrew. Although he looks as if he might have died a long time ago, his Symphonia is still smoldering on the ashtray, the column of ash gradually wasting away.

And where, I ask you, is his famous hat? His hat, which sits on the table like a black vase, contains a kilogram of rotten beef, which he had bought six days earlier in Baksa and carried with him from cafe to cafe under his arm. Like carrion, the meat is covered with a swarm of flies and a bumblebee that makes a buzzing sound like the tolling of a bell far away, very far away.

As he lay there half-dead, his chin pointing upward, his jaws loose, his lips parted, guttural consonants, sticky and aspirated, wheezing out of his lowered Adam’s apple, my father inspired pity. Deprived of the tokens of his dignity, the cane that served as his scepter and the derby that served as his crown, without his glasses and his fierce mask of severity and meditation, his face revealed the anatomy of his skin, the veins and blackheads on his prominent masculine nose, the relief map of his wrinkles, which I had thought all this time to be nothing more than a mask on the face of a sufferer and apostle. It was, however, a hard, rough crust, pockmarked and greasy as if smeared with make-up, dotted with thin purple veins. The rings under his eyes were puffed up, like blisters bubbling with lymph. His arm—his embalmed arm—hovered alongside the bed like the guardian of his body, a sleeping sentry, and was making an obscene gesture, the last bit of maliciousness that my father was able to concoct: making an obscene gesture right under the noses of the whole world and the dreams in which he no longer believed.

The following day, he had come to. Although still drowsy, and tormented by a hellish, fiery thirst that he extinguished with water, he tried to restore his dignity by fixing his tie in front of the mirror, deftly, the way people insert false teeth. He would leave without a word, resuming his ingenious soliloquy, and return late at night without telling us where he had been. Peasants and shepherds told us later that they had seen him deep inside the Count’s forest, some ten kilometers away from our village, or even farther away, in some other district. He would come home only to shave, change his collar, and catch a nap, speaking to no one and refusing to eat for fear we might poison him. He subsisted on wild mushrooms, sorrel, wild apples, and birds’ eggs that he took from their nests with the hook of his cane. And in the summertime, we would come across him unexpectedly in the fields, his black derby emerging from the fiery wheat, his glasses flashing in the sun. He moved

through the fields like a sleepwalker, lost in thought, waving his cane high in the air, following his star, which he would lose amid the sunflowers, only to find it again at the edge of the field, on his greasy black frock coat.



Quite unexpectedly and unpredictably, this account is becoming increasingly the story of my father, the story of the gifted Eduard Scham. His absence, his somnambulism, his messianism, all these concepts removed from any earthly—or, if you will, narrative—context, this subject is frail as dreams and notable above all for his primordial negative traits: his story becomes a densely woven, heavy fabric, a material of entirely unknown specific weight. In its wake the self-centered stories about my mother, my sister, and myself, the accounts of seasons and landscapes, fade into the background. All the stories stamped with earthly signs and framed within a specific historical context take on secondary significance, like historical facts bound up in a destiny that no longer concerns us: we shall record them without haste, when we can.

What bothers us and keeps us from giving ourselves over to the blissful recording of facts is the muddy tale of my father, woven together from one unreality after another. The term should not be misunderstood: my father's memory is more real than any other memory of my childhood, but he is artfully hiding behind one of his numerous masks, changing roles with unprecedented agility, concealing his true face, resorting to the most perfidious simulation. No matter. Let's attempt to unmask him, to demystify him, since—in any case—my father's story is slowly and inexorably approaching its climax.



To demonstrate to everyone that he had truly recovered, after that horrible day when he was almost crucified, my father began to attend to chores that you would never have expected him to do. He wrote letters to friends and relatives long since forgotten, he asked forgiveness from the sisters with whom he had quarreled bitterly a few years before, he put his herbariums and his notes in order. He even asked Aunt Rebecca, in a very submissive way, for permission to water the geraniums on her porch.

One day, just when we had grown accustomed to hunger and joyously reached the conclusion that we had “surmounted the crisis” (I naturally quote my father) and that we would now be capable of withstanding a prolonged interval without food, “using up the golden reserves of calories that the organism has been accumulating not just over the past few years but throughout life, aware of the possibility of—or, rather, ready for—such disagreeable surprises,” my father came up with a truly lyrical outburst. Taking along his



cane, the expression on his face declaring both a grand intention and determination, he headed for our relatives' garden and proceeded to cut nettles. He hacked away at the lilac bushes, and when he came upon a stalk of nettles, he would break it off above the roots, attacking the bush with his cane in his clumsy way.

"I never saw anyone pick so many nettles," I said in mock admiration, to provoke him.

My father looked up for an instant, and I thought he would respond with some maxim that would be instructive and useful in future life. But he didn't even glance at me, he simply loosened his tie and went on hacking away at the lilac bushes.

"You're doing that job very unprofessionally," I said, to provoke him. "You've cut as many lilac branches as nettles."

"Young fellow!" my father shouted, looking up again and then rising to his full height.

"You're doing that job unprofessionally," I repeated.

He was obviously confused by my behavior, which was entirely outside the bounds of protocol.

"You never had any understanding for your father," he said, furious. "You are beginning, in a manner wholly incomprehensible to me, to judge your father on the basis of certain external, altogether insignificant and atypical facts, on the basis of certain actions that are guided by the demands of a higher power, conditioned by reasons incomprehensible to you. Yet all of this is merely the influence of a low, provincial, rural milieu, which is very unhealthy for the shaping of your character. I understand, in the sense that I understand everything: you too, I regret to say, are teaming up with these provincials against your own father, you, my son, my Brutus, are teaming up with the sons of the esteemed Madame Rebecca, my ostensible cousin, you are under the influence of Mr. Otto and of the illustrious old lady—I think you know who I mean—and of all those who have resolved to discredit me in the eyes of my own children and in the eyes of the whole world."

Before I had a chance to respond or defend myself, he turned around abruptly and began hacking away blindly at the lilac bushes. Then once more, altogether unexpectedly, he stood up straight and turned to me like someone who needed only to round out the conclusion to his irrefutable arguments, and I realized that this gesture went beyond the bounds of the forlorn role he was playing, that he was making a genuine and desperate effort to make me a witness to his martyrdom.

"Andi," he said, "do you know how long your father has been smoking? Do you?"

"I do," I said, happy that at last he was talking with me.

"You were smoking when we lived on Bemova Street."

“There, you see, young fellow, I was smoking eighty cigarettes a day. By doing so I was sustaining my miserable body, worn out by insomnia and hard work.”

“You were smoking Symphonia cigarettes. Eighty a day. Maybe more.”

“Eighty to one hundred and twenty a day, young fellow! Need I to say more? You are mature enough to draw some independent, far-reaching conclusion, to look upon your unfortunate father and judge him within the context of this one single fact, leaving aside a lot of other facts, that would illuminate my actions like a halo. Do you know, my young fellow, what it means for someone who has been smoking a hundred and twenty cigarettes a day to be left at a given moment—entirely unprepared, speaking in philosophical terms—without a single smoke?”

“That I understand,” I said in a naive tone. “But I don’t understand what you are going to do with all those nettles.”

“Fine,” said my father, forgetting the nettles for a moment. “Although under the circumstances I am not particularly anxious to provide detailed explanations of my actions—these matters are much too tricky—I’ll tell you what I am going to do with those nettles. But you must promise me a full measure of understanding. When someone who has been smoking eighty cigarettes a day...”

“A hundred and twenty a day, Father!”

“...a hundred and twenty cigarettes a day, then, when such a person is left without a single smoke, without that glowing illusion, you must admit, young fellow, he is not able to inject into his responses and his actions the full measure of his intellectual powers and his lines of evidence. That much, my young fellow, ought to be clear to you.”

“Good enough. After all, I’m a nervous person I understand.”

I felt genuinely sorry for him. It had been all downhill for him lately. He had abruptly given up drinking because credit was no longer available to him in the cafes. He could no longer charm even the lowest of the female cafe owners in the district. Nor could he go on smoking linden leaves mixed with spurge, with which he deceived himself in the beginning, stating and proving to his own ardent satisfaction that the mixture contained a significant proportion of toxic acids similar to nicotine. His celluloid collar was loose around his slender gooselike neck, and bright yellow along the edges.

“I won’t ask you any more questions, Father,” I said. “But will you let me stay around long enough to see what you’re going to do with the nettles. From what I understand about smoking.”

“I’m going to make nettle soup,” he said, straightening up so that I could hear his old, tormented bones crackling.

“As far as I know,” I said, genuinely astonished, “nettles are fed to pigs.”

I realized that I had gone too far. I could see that it took tremendous, superhuman effort for him not to howl. He swallowed, his Adam's apple like a bird's chest, bobbing up and down nervously. When he spoke, his voice was calm, yet full of tension:

"I must confess, with surprise and regret, yes, with surprise and regret, that you have completely absorbed certain lower middle-class and peasant habits. You inject so-called rational, simplistic logic into everything, and that, my young fellow, signifies the most abominable ignorance in matters of a higher order. As proof, let me give you an irrefutable fact that is as clear as the sun: nettles, my young fellow, were one of the delicacies at the court of Count Eszterhízy! Do you still say, then, that nettles are fed only to pigs?"

"All the same," I said, "I bet that I'd break out in a nettle rash or something like that."

"Your crudeness and disrespect for the facts are profoundly insulting and frightening to me," he went on. "I see in this a proof, one more proof, of the scope of the influence exercised on you by this peasant milieu, this sick environment devoid of any noble aims and concepts, this earthbound logic that sees nothing beyond the routine, this life and these customs lacking daring or bold moves. Yet nettles were eaten, I repeat, and you will eventually be able to verify this point, at the court of one of the most prestigious families of Europe. Nettles were ideal nourishment for spiritual artistic endeavors. Music was composed and played as nettle soup was eaten—potage d'ortie, as it was called, and it ennobled the spirits and refined the ear."

Then he began pulling nettle leaves with his bare hand, making pained grimaces, and stuffing them into his black hat. Next he slipped his magical hat under his arm and marched home, like a Peripatetic devising a sharp response destined to become a foundation of philosophy and an adornment of oratory.

I knew that at least one of our relatives, with whom my father was feuding, would be sitting on the porch, so I put my hands in my pockets and followed him, whistling casually.

Sure enough, if you had watched my father as he strode past our relatives' porch, waving his cane high in the air, completely absorbed by the weight of his thoughts, you would never have guessed that the hat under his arm contained nettles from which he intended to cook a potage of the kind that had been eaten at the court of one of the most prestigious families in Europe.

We were all aware that the nettle episode was but an introduction to a grand performance, an omen of catastrophe. My father had been harvesting nettles like a dog chewing grass before a storm. We kept waiting, as if in an ambush. Meanwhile, my father continued pouring ashes on his head and writing those long letters, letters to his sisters and friends, sometimes sagacious and didactic, sometimes as gloomy as a testament. But one day he put on his derby again and headed for Budapest, kissing all of us good-bye, even those

relatives with whom he had been feuding and who concealed none of their bewilderment and mistrust of this gesture.

“We have to step up our alertness,” Uncle Otto said as soon as my father had turned his back, “he’ll bring a time bomb from Budapest.”

At which point an automobile pulled up in front of the house and my father settled himself comfortably inside and then asked me gently if I would see him off at the station. My mother signaled me to go along and followed me with a gaze full of meaning and warning.

I sat in the automobile next to my father and Mr. Janos, the hired driver. No one said a word the whole way. I wanted to leave the initiative to my father, to provoke him by my silence, to force him to declare himself, to tell the truth. He spoke up, however, only at the cafe at the railway station, where he was drinking a cup of chicory that he had ordered after a long, painful pause. I could see that he was having a hard time controlling his yearning for alcohol, which I took to be a sacrifice and a good sign.

“I am taking advantage of this moment of lucidity and mutual trust,” my father began, “to say a few words to you. Appearances notwithstanding, I believe that you are the only one with any understanding of me, the only one capable of regarding my weaknesses (you see that I do acknowledge my weaknesses as well) from a profound standpoint and with understanding. I know, I know, you cannot forgive me my egotism, my aloofness from the world. Perhaps you are right, but it’s too late now for repentance and explanations. Do you understand? It’s too late now, young fellow. Let me say another word or two, though. My role as a victim, which I have been playing with greater or lesser success all my life—we all act out our lives, our own destinies, after all—that role, as I said, is gradually coming to an end. You must remember this once and for all, young fellow, you can’t play the role of a victim all your life without becoming one in the end. There is nothing I can do about it now. I’ll have to do my best to complete that role with dignity right up to the very end. The forgiveness you will give me will be my redemption.”

I must confess that I didn’t really understand him. But I could tell that he was speaking in a slightly lower octave than usual, in an octave of sincerity that had long since withered inside him and that sounded unusual and moving.

We sat in a provincial railway station cafe, the only customers) *tete-à-tete*, over a filthy checkered tablecloth. It was a late summer afternoon, and flies swooped back and forth, intoxicated by their own flight and the heat. The room smelled of goulash and floor wax. A celesta stood in the corner, covered with cloth like a casket. Flypaper swayed back and forth, gently and lazily, measuring out the minutes. The bottles on the shelves were taking their siesta, crammed with the sun’s rays and their own weight, like flower buds or artillery shells.

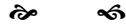
“There are people,” my father continued, “who are born to be unhappy and to make others unhappy, who are the victims of celestial intrigues incomprehensible to us, guinea pigs for the celestial machinery, rebels allotted the part of a rebel yet born—by the cruel logic of the celestial comedy—with their wings clipped. They are titans without the power of titans, dwarf-titans whose only greatness was given them in the form of a rigid dose of sensitivity that dissolves their trifling strength like alcohol. They follow their star, their sick sensibility, borne along by titanic plans and intentions, but then break like waves against the rocky banks of triviality. The height of the cruelty allotted them in lucidity, that awareness of their own limitations, that sick capacity for dissociation. I look at myself in the role forced on me by the heavens and by fate, conscious of my role at all times yet at the same time unable to resist it with the force of logic or will. Fortunately, as I said, this role is coming to an end.”

This unique moment of sincerity and lucidity was broken by the arrival of the train. My father left a lordly tip on the table and took his secret with him to the grave.

When he returned from Budapest after a couple of days, my father brought me a tool chest as he had promised that day at the railway station. There was a touching sincerity in this gesture. He swaggered around the house as if he were accustomed to giving gifts and performing acts of charity, yet we well knew what a sacrifice this was for him, how much of a proof, if you will, of the goodness of his heart, because it must have been an enormous effort for him to remember my wish—which I had mentioned more for the sake of decorum than in the hope that he would satisfy it. The tool chest, a miniature carpentry shop, was a part of my distant dream, the ornament of my inclinations, the wherewithal to match my inborn talent for carpentry, a talent that climaxed during my severest preadolescent religious crises: ever since I had seen the child Jesus with a chisel and hammer in an engraving in a chapter of my catechism titled “Concerning the Fourth Commandment of God,” my passion had become more inflamed. The caption under the illustration, in blazing italics, read, “He was obedient to his parents.” I associated this directly with carpentry, assuming that building wooden tripods was the height of devotion to one’s parents and to God, symbolic, like a prayer or Lenten fasting.

Uncle Otto, still mistrustful of my father, took advantage of one of my father’s afternoon strolls to take apart my tool chest, obviously with the intention of finding a detonator. Holding his breath, he cautiously unscrewed the handle of a drill, keeping it some distance from his eyes, trying to penetrate the secret world of all this paraphernalia, to peer inside, to uncover the diabolical interior within the harmless exterior. Large drops of sweat glistened on his forehead.

Uncle Otto was overdoing it, of course, in his sick fear for his life and property. Despite our doubts and suspicions, my father had genuinely improved. He was no longer acting. On the contrary: he had experienced his splendid *lucida intervalla*, a moment experienced only by great minds when calmly confronted with—philosophically prepared for, as it were—death.



Where have the glittering picture frames gone from these pages, the violent-painted fiacres, the flowers that wither in their vases? Where have the trains gone, and the hanging baskets that sway on the platforms of provincial railway stations? Where is the bluish light from the first-class train compartments? Where is the lace that flutters like a fan on the green plush seats? Is it possible that the embellishment machine, the crystal vessel through which the current passes in the electroplating process, has come to a halt so soon? Where is the gilt of the antique picture frames, or the smile of the Mona Lisa? We are witnesses to a great breakdown in values. Due to dampness and sudden changes in temperature, the gilding has peeled off the picture frames, along with the color of the guardian angel's wings and the lips of the Mona Lisa. Our furniture, having been dragged around the railway system as slow freight at the time when my father was playing his role as the Wandering Jew, was scratched and is now falling apart, rotting as if contaminated with *phylloxera*. Little red bugs, which my mother called by their popular name "American bugs" and my father *Ageronia Mexicana*, have transformed our dressers into wrecked hulks rescued from the sea, bereft of their sheen and riddled with a whole labyrinth of tunnels. From time to time great hunks of wood would break off of their own will, and on the inside we discovered some Indian message in magnificent hieroglyphics that we chose to interpret as a voice from the Other World. My mother's Singer sewing machine, too, vanished in the confusion of war like an orphan, a runaway oversensitive to tremors. That was a heavy blow to all of us, especially my mother. A similar fate befell the other object that our family had once treasured: our ancient couch, the one the color of rotten cherries, disintegrated somewhere along the line between Budapest and Kanjiza. To the very end, however, it never failed to give off its fine sound. According to my father, who had attended the claim commission's inspection, the couch had a resonance that made it sound like a harpsichord.

Dampness and greenish-gray mold, the color of decay, now reigned in our house. This misfortune derived from the inability of our kitchen stove to generate a real flame: we lacked a real blaze, there was no glow. This made more of a mess in the house, at the beginning, before we grew accustomed to the smoke. After we had had a good cry we would move through a cloud of

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bluish-gray smoke as if it were our natural element, and in our spiritualized language we called it our “hearth” and we would cough, choke up, as if smoking some expensive, strong cigars that combined the aroma of evergreens with the idea of a hearth. We fired our stove with dry pine cones that we gathered in the woods in the autumn and carried home in big sacks, like coal. Oh those wonderful ore pits, that gold mine! Oh Count’s forest, my father’s forest! Dew would be dripping from the trees, and the resin—mixed with the smell of the evergreens—had a prophylactic effect on us and who knows what else. There was joy in our strolls through the woods in autumn. We would be making our way home, weighted down with sacks, and stop at the edge of a thicket to catch our breath and wait for evening to come. Then a hunter’s horn would bleat a greeting somewhere in the distance, and a solemn stillness would descend on us.

Our father’s ghost hovered in the woods. Didn’t we hear him blowing his nose into a scrap of newspaper only a few minutes ago, while the woods reverberated with a triple echo?

“We have to get going,” my mother would say at that point. “Lord, how quickly it gets dark here.”

*William J. Hanna*



Цртеж: Ђ. Симић



**Milorad Pavić (1929– )**

Milorad Pavić was born in Belgrade. He studied at Belgrade University and now teaches literature at the University of Novi Sad, pursuing his chief interest—the study of Serbian literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Pavić began writing poetry in 1967 (*Palimpsesti*) and short fiction (*Gvozdena zavesa*, [The Iron Curtain], 1973, and *Konji svetoga Marka* [The Horses of Saint Mark], 1976). He has achieved his greatest success with novels, *Hazarski rečnik* (Dictionary of the Khazars, 1984) and *Predeo slikan čajem* (Landscape Painted with Tea, 1988), both of which have been translated into many languages. His other prominent novels are *Unutrašnja strana vetra* (The Inner Side of the Wind, 1991) and *Poslednja ljubav u Carigradu* (The Last Love in Constantinople, 1995). Pavić successfully and playfully mixes reality and phantasy, creating a complex world where the borders between the present, past, and future are erased and where man seeks, often unsuccessfully, to unravel the mysteries of existence. Pavić is one of the most popular Serbian writers abroad.

*The Dictionary of the Khazars (Excerpts)*

It was after this promise that Dr. Isailo Suk woke and found the key in his mouth.

When he stepped out into the street, the afternoon was ailing; a plague of light was blighting the radiance of the sun; an epidemic of boils and rashes spread and erupted across the sky, infecting the clouds, which wilted and sagged in their faltering progress.

The week had received its monthly wash, and Sunday was already a reek in the air, breaking wind like a cripple on the road to recovery. And there in the distance, along the scabby skyline, Suk's spent days shone blue, small and healthy, devoid of calendar names in the happily vanishing herd, free of him and his worries, leaving dust in their wake.

One of the children who had been playing in the street, swapping pants with the other boys, stopped in front of the newsstand where Dr. Suk was buying the paper and peed on his trouser leg. Dr. Suk turned around with the expression of a man who notices in the evening that he has been going around all day with his fly unbuttoned. Just then, however, an utterly unknown man slapped him in the face as hard as he could. It was cold outside, and Dr. Suk felt the warmth of the assailant's hand through the slap; for all the pain there was something just slightly pleasant about it. He was about to argue with the malapert when he felt the wet trouser leg stick to his calf. Then he was hit by another man, who had been standing behind the first, waiting for his chance. Dr. Suk now realized it would be better for him to move away, which is what he proceeded to do, not understanding a thing except that the second slap had smelled of onions. But there was no time to lose, because other passers-by were converging upon him. There seemed to be something perfectly natural about the way the blows began raining down upon him; Dr. Suk started to feel that the hands behind some of them were cold, and this he found curiously agreeable in the entire disagreeable affair. He had warmed up now. There was yet another fortunate circumstance in this scene. While he had no time to think, because one can do very little thinking in between one blow and the next, he did notice that the slaps were sometimes sweaty and that they were driving him from the Church of St. Mark toward the square, along the road he had intended to take in the first place, the road that led straight to the store where he wanted to shop. So he submitted to the blows, which were bringing him closer to his destination.

Then he came upon a fence behind which nothing had ever been seen or heard. And since he was now forced to run under the unrelenting rain of blows, the slits in the fence merged before his eyes and he saw for the first time (although he had passed there before) that there was a house behind the

fence, and that a young man was standing at the window playing a violin. He also noticed the music stand and instantly recognized Bruch's Concerto in G minor for Violin and Orchestra, but he heard no sound, although the window was open and the young man was playing fervidly. Surprised, the pelting rain of blows still upon him, Dr. Suk finally ran into the store that had been the object of his sortie that morning and breathed a sigh of relief as he slammed the door shut behind him. Inside it was as still as in a cucumber jar; only the corn smelled. The shop was empty except for a hen nestled in a cap in the corner. She cocked one eye at Dr. Suk and saw everything edible in him. Then she switched to the other eye and saw all the indigestible parts. She thought for a moment, and finally Dr. Suk appeared in her mind's eye, composed once again of digestible and indigestible parts, and at last she knew whom she was dealing with. As for what happened next, let him tell the story himself.

### The Story of the Egg and the Violin Bow

I stood there in the pleasant cool and I caught the smell of polish. The violins were responding to one another; you could have composed an entire polonaise from their soft sighs, as if composing a game of chess. All you would have had to do was to rearrange the order and the sounds a bit. Finally, out came the Hungarian who owned the instrument shop. He had eyes the color of whey. Red, as though he were about to lay an egg, he displayed a chin shaped like a small belly with a navel.

He took out a pocket ashtray, flicked ashes into it, carefully closed it tight, and asked whether I had not made some mistake: "The furrier is next door. People are always coming in here by mistake." Nobody had come into his store for the past seven days, except by mistake. In fact, his store had no doors; one might say it had the creak of a door but no real doors, just a small shopwindow with a handle that swung open into the shop, letting the customer into a cramped room. I inquired whether he had a small violin for a small young lady, or a midget cello, if they were not too expensive.

The Hungarian turned to go back from where he had come, from where wafted the smell of paprikas. Just then the hen picked itself up from the cap, clucking at its freshly laid egg. The Hungarian carefully took the egg and placed it in a drawer, having first penciled on it a date—October 2, 1982—which I noted with surprise was still several months away.

"What do you want with a violin or a cello?" he asked, turning around at the entrance of his small back rooms "You have records, the radio, television. A violin—you know what a violin is? A small violin, my good sir, has to be plowed, sowed, and reaped every year, from here to Subotica, with this here!"

And he pointed to the violin bow hanging from his belt like a sword. He drew it out and pulled taut the strings with fingers that wore rings around the nails, as if to hold them in place and keep them from dropping off. Then he abstained from further conversation, and with a wave of his hand again turned to leave. "Who needs it?" he said on his way out. "Buy her something else; buy her a scooter or a dog."

I just stood there in the shop, not coping very well with this decisiveness voiced in such an indecisive, undulating language, like food that may be filling but is unappetizing. Actually, the Hungarian had mastered my language rather well, but at the end of every sentence he would add for dessert a Hungarian word that I couldn't understand. He did this now as he gave me his parting words of advice: "Find something else, sir, to make your little girl happy. This happiness is too difficult for her. And it's belated happiness. Belated," he added through the wafting aroma of the paprikas. "How old is she?" he inquired, assuming a businesslike tone.

With that he disappeared, and I could hear him getting dressed and preparing to go out. I told him Gelsomina Mohorovičić's age: seven. He flinched at the number as though touched by a magic wand. He translated it into Hungarian, obviously able to count only in Hungarian, and a strange smell enveloped the room, the smell of cherries; I saw that the smell followed his change of mood. A glass pipe now appeared in his mouth, through which he sucked cherry brandy. He crossed the shop, stood on my foot as if by accident, took out a small child's cello, and offered it to me, all the while standing on my foot to show me how cramped his shop was. I stood there and, like him, took no notice, except that he was doing this at my expense and I to my own detriment.

"Take this," he said. "The wood is older than you and me together. The lacquer is good. Hear for yourself!"

He strummed the strings. The cello vibrated with a four-note chord, and he stepped off my foot as if the chord could ease all the troubles of this world.

"You hear?" he asked. "Each string contains all the others. But to hear it you have to listen to four different things at once, and we're too lazy to do that. Do you hear it or not? Four hundred and fifty thousand," he said, translating the price from Hungarian. The amount struck me like a rock. It was as though he had peered into my pocket: he knew exactly how much I had. I had been saving it for Gelsomina. It's not all that much, I know, but it took me three years to collect even that. I told him I would gladly take it.

"Take it?" asked the Hungarian, shaking his head disapprovingly. "Sir, is that how one takes an instrument? Don't you want to try it?"

Disconcerted, I looked around the shop for something to sit on other than that cap, as though I really did want to try the cello.

“You need a chair?” he asked. “A duck sits on water, and you don’t know what to do even on dry land? You don’t know?” Scornfully he took the little cello from me and placed it on his shoulder like a violin.

“Like this!” he said, giving me back the instrument.

I took it, and for the first time in my life played the cello like a violin. De Falla didn’t sound too bad in the deep fifths, and I even seemed to hear the notes more dearly through the wood pressed against my ear. Suddenly the Hungarian changed his smell. This time it was the odor of pungent masculine sweat. He took off his coat and was in his undershirt, two gray braided beards suspended from each armpit. He pulled out a drawer, sat on the corner edge, took the cello from me, and played. I was astounded by his marvelous improvisation.

“You play very well,” I said.

“I don’t play the cello at all. I’m a harpsichordist, and I like the violin. But I can’t play the cello. What you heard wasn’t music, although you know nothing about it. That was just an arrangement of all the sounds, from the highest to the lowest, so as to judge the capacity and other elements of the instrument. Shall I wrap it up for you?” “Yes, please,” I said, reaching for my wallet.

“That will be five hundred thousand,” said the Hungarian.

An icy chill went down my back.

“Didn’t you say four hundred and fifty thousand?” “I did, but that’s for the cello. The rest is for the bow. Or don’t you want the bow? You don’t need the bow? I thought that a fiddle and a bow went together.” He unwrapped the bow and put it back in the display window.

I stood there at a loss for words, struck dumb. Finally I recovered from all the slaps of before, and from this Hungarian, as from an illness, a hangover or a torpor. I came to my senses, sobered up, and at last stopped playing in this comedy with the Hungarian who picked at his teeth. Actually, I had forgotten all about the bow. I didn’t have the money to buy it, and I told him so.

Suddenly, he slipped on his coat—there was a smell of mothballs—and he said:

“I haven’t got time, my good sir, to wait around while you earn the money for the bow. Especially if you haven’t been able to do so by the age of fifty. Better you should wait than me.”

And with that he made to depart, leaving me there alone in the shop. He stopped at the door, returned, and said:

“Shall we make a deal? You take the bow on the installment plan.”

“You’re joking?” I replied, no longer willing to play his game and wanting to leave.

“No, I’m not joking. I propose a deal. You don’t have to accept it, but at least listen.” The Hungarian lit his pipe with such pride that it was obvious he had already fumigated Pest with it.

“All right, let’s hear it,” I said.

“You will buy the egg along with the bow.”

“An egg?”

“Yes. You saw the egg the hen laid a while ago. Well, that’s the one,” he said, taking the egg out of the drawer and shoving it under my nose.

Written in pencil on the egg was the date October 2, 1982.

“You’ll give me as much for the egg as for the bow, repayable in two years.”

“What did you say?” I asked, not believing my ears. From the Hungarian again came the smell of cherries.

“Are you telling me your hen lays golden eggs?”

“No, my hen does not lay golden eggs, but it does carry something that you and I, sir, cannot lay. It carries days, weeks, and years. Every morning it lays a Friday or a Tuesday. Today’s egg, for instance, has a Thursday instead of a yolk. Tomorrow’s will have a Wednesday. Instead of a chick, it will hatch a day of life for its owner! What a life! These are not golden eggs, they’re time eggs. And I’m offering them to you at a cheap price. This egg, Sir, holds one day of your life. It’s closed in there like a chick, and it’s up to you whether it will hatch or not.”

“Even if I were to believe your story, why should I buy a day I already have?”

“Use your head, sir. Think. Do you think with your ears? Why, all our problems in this world stem from the fact that we have used up our days such as they are- from the fact that we can’t skip over the worst ones. That’s the point. With my egg in your pocket, you’re safe from misfortune. When you notice that the coming day is too bleak, you just break the egg and you’ll avoid all unpleasantness. In the end, of course, you’ll have one day less to live, but in return you’ll be able to fry yourself a fine plate of scrambled eggs out of that one ugly day.”

“If your egg is really all that valuable, why don’t you keep it for yourself?” I said, looking him in the eyes but finding nothing in them that I could understand. He looked at me in pure Hungarian.

“The gentleman can’t be serious? How many eggs do you think I already have from this hen? How many days do you think a person can break in order to be happy? A thousand? Two thousand? Five thousand? I have as many eggs as you want, but not that many days. Anyway, like all eggs, these are good for only so long. After a while they go bad and can’t be used any more. That, sir, is why I am selling them before they lose their effect. And you aren’t in a position to choose. You’ll give me a receipt for the loan,” he added

at the end, scribbling something on a scrap of paper and shoving it at me to sign.

“And can your egg,” I asked, “dispense with or save a day or an object-like a book, for instance?”

“Of course, you just have to break the egg on the blunt end. But then you will have missed the chance to use the egg for yourself.”

I signed the paper on my knee, paid, was given the receipt; again I heard the hen clucking in the next room as he carefully wrapped the cello with the bow and the egg and I finally left the shop. He came out with me, asked me to pull the door handle tight while he locked the shopwindow; once again I was drawn into one of his games. Her went off without a word, then turned back at the corner to add, “Remember—the date on the egg tells you when it expires. After the that the egg is no good any more.”



The statement about Samuel Cohen the Jew from the Dubrovnik ghetto ends with a report on his last dream, concerning the heavy, deep coma into which he plunged as into a dense sea of no return. That last report on Samuel Cohen was made to Sabljak Paša by the dice player whose life had been spared in the battlefield. What he told the pasa remains forever sewn into a silk tent on the Danube, and only fragments of that talk have reached us through the green rainproof material. The dice player’s name was Yusuf Masudi, and he was a dream reader. He could catch a hare in people’s dreams, let alone a man, and he was in the employ of the horseman who had been woken up by the spear. Now, this horseman was a prominent and affluent man named Avram Branković; his greyhounds alone were worth a shipload of gunpowder. Masudi made an incredible claim about this man. He assured Sabljak Paša that in his heavy sleep Cohen was dreaming of this very same Avram Branković.

“You say you’re a dream reader?” asked the pasa. “Well, then, can you read Cohen’s dream?”

“Of course I can. I already see what he is dreaming: since Branković is dying, he’s dreaming of Branković’s death.” These words seemed to excite the paša.

“That means,” he quickly concluded, “that Cohen can now experience what no mortal can: by dreaming of Branković dying, he can experience death and yet stay alive?”

“That’s right,” said Masudi, “but he cannot wake up to tell us what he saw in the dream.”

“But you can see his dreaming of that death.”

“Yes, I can, and tomorrow I will report to you on how it is to die and what a man feels.”

Sabljak Paša never discovered, nor will we, whether the dice player said this in order to prolong his life by an extra day, or because he really could see into Cohen's dream and find Branković's death there. But the paša felt it was worth a try. He would say that every tomorrow is worth an unused horseshoe and every yesterday the used shoe off a camel, so he let Masudi live one more day.

Cohen spent the night sleeping for the last time; his huge nose peered like a bird's body through the smile of his sleep, and that smile looked like a left-over from a dinner eaten long, long ago. Masudi did not leave his pillow until the morning, and when day broke the Anatolian was changed by his vigil, as though he had been whipped in the dreams he had read. And what he had read in them was this.

*It was as though Branković was not dying from his spear wound at all. In fact, he did not even feel it. He fed many more wounds than just one, and their number rapidly multiplied. He felt he was standing high up on a stone pillar, counting. It was spring, bringing the wind that plaits the branches of the willow trees, and all the willows from the river Mureşul to the rivers Tisa and Danube wore braids. Arrows seemed to be piercing his body, but it all happened backward: with each arrow he felt first the wound, then penetrating stab; then the pain would stop, something would whistle through the air, and finally there was the zing of the bow string as it released the arrow. Dying, he counted the arrows from one to seventeen and then fell from the pillar and stopped counting. He fell against something hard, immovable, and vast. But it was not the ground: it was death. The collision sent his wounds flying in all directions so that one could no longer feel another; and only then did he hit the ground, already dead.*

*And then, in that same death, he died a second time, although it did not look as if there were any more room for even the slightest pain. In between the stabs of the arrow he was dying once again, but completely differently; now he was dying the premature death of a boy, and his only fear was that he would not be fast enough to complete the huge job (because death is hard work) and to finish with this second death before the time came to fall off the pillar. And he hurried. He lay in that motionless rush behind the colored heating stove built like a small toy church with red and golden cupolas. Searing and icy pains surged from him into the room, as though the years were fighting to break free of his body in quick succession. The dark spread like dampness, every room in the house darkening differently; only the windows were still invested with the last light of day, hardly distinguishable from the darkness in the room. Someone with a candle was coming from the invisible vestibule and, as if the frame had as many black doors as a boot has pages, he leafed through them briefly, shifting the light as he came in. Then*



*something started pouring out of him, and he peed out his entire past, until he was empty. Like rising water night crept up from the ground to the sty, and suddenly all his hair fell out, as though a fur hat had been knocked off his head, which was already dead.*

*And now Branković's third death appeared in Cohen's dream. It was barely noticeable, shrouded by something that could have been mounds of time. Hundreds of years seemed to stand between Branković's first two deaths and this third, which was barely visible from where Masudi was standing. At first Masudi thought that Branković was now dying the death of his foster son, Petkutin, but since he knew how Petkutin had ended he quickly realized that this was not Petkutin's death. The third death was swift and short. Branković was dying in a strange bed, and a man took a pillow and began smothering him with it. But Branković could think of only one thing: he had to reach the egg on the little table by the bed and crack it. Branković did not know why this had to be done, but as the man smothered him with the pillow, he knew that this alone was important. He also realized that humanity had discovered its yesterday and tomorrow very belatedly, a million years after its appearance first tomorrow, and then yesterday. It discovered them one night long ago, when the present started dying out the darkness, caught and almost stymied between the past and the future, which that evening had swelled until they almost merged. That is what it was like now. The present was fading, smothered by two converging eternities—the past and the future—and Branković died for the third time, exactly when the past and the future collided inside him, crushing him just as he was about to crush that egg.*

*Suddenly Cohen's dream was as barren as a dry riverbed. It was time to wake up, but there was nobody left to dream Cohen's own reality, as he had done during Branković's lifetime. And so what happened to Cohen had to happen. Masudi saw how, in Cohen's dream, which was turning into a death rattle, all the names of all the things around him began dropping off like hats, and the world was left as virgin pure as on its first day in the beginning. Only the first ten numbers and the letters of the alphabet designating verbs glittered like golden tears above the things surrounding Cohen. And it was then he learned that the numbers of the Ten Commandments are also verbs, that they are the last to be forgotten when one is forgetting a language and remain as an echo when even the Commandments themselves vanish from memory.*

*That moment Cohen awoke in his death, and the path before Masudi disappeared, because a veil descended over the horizon on which, written with water from the river Jabok were the following words:*

*"For your dreams are the days in the nights."*

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*Selected Bibliography:* Anonymous, *Lexicon Cosri*, continens solloquium seu disputationum de religione, Regiemonti Borussiae excudebat typographus Ioannes Daubmannus, Anno 1691, passim; for Cohen's ancestors see: M. Pantić, "Sin vjernik jedne matere," *Anali Historijskog instituta Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti u Dubrovniku*, 1953, vol. II, pp. 209–16.

Excerpt from the Court Minutes, with the Testimonies of  
Witnesses in the Dr. Abu Kabir Muawia Murder Case  
Istanbul October 18, 1982

Virginia Ateh, waitress at the Kingston Hotel, witness in the case of Dr. Dorothea Schultz, approached the bench and made the following statement:

“On the said day (October 2, 1982) the weather was sunny and I was very upset. Veins of salt air were coming in from the Bosphorus, and with them rapid thoughts snaked their way into slow thoughts. The Kingston Hotel garden, where breakfast is served in fine weather, is quadrangular. One corner is sunny, the other has a cultivated bed with flowers, the third is windy, and in the fourth corner there is a stone well and beside it a pillar. I usually stand behind the pillar, because I know that guests don't like being watched when they eat. It's no wonder. I, for instance, know immediately, when watching a guest having breakfast, that a soft-boiled egg will sustain him to bathe before noon, fish to go to Topcisaray before nightfall, and a glass of wine to smile before bed, a smile that will never reach the nearsighted mirrors of the hotel room. From this spot by the well, you can see the steps leading into the garden, and you can always keep your eye on who's coming and going. It has one more advantage. Just as all water from the surrounding drainpipes pours into the well, so all voices from the garden also reach it, and if you tilt your ear a bit toward the well opening, you can quite clearly hear every word spoken in the garden. You can hear when a bird pecks a fly, or a shell cracks on a boiled egg; you can recognize the forks calling out to one another always in the same and the glasses each in a different voice. Since before calling the waitress guests usually mention in conversation the reason why they want me, I am able to satisfy their wishes before they inform me of them, because I have already heard them from the well. And to know something a few seconds before others is a great advantage and always of benefit. That morning, the first to come to the garden were the guests from Room 18, the Van der Spaak family, with Belgian passports, father, mother, and son. The father is elderly; he plays nicely on an instrument made of white tortoiseshell, and in the evening its music could be heard. He's a bit eccentric and always eats with his own two-pronged fork, which he carries in his pocket. The mother is a young

and pretty woman, which was why I took a closer look at her. And that is how I noticed that she was marked by a defect—there was no partition in her nose. Every day she would go to St. Sofia’s, where she would make lovely copies of the wall paintings. I asked her whether these pictures served as notes for her husband’s songs, but she didn’t understand. Her nearly four-year-old boy probably had a defect of his own. He always wore gloves, even at meals. But it was something else that upset me. That sunny morning I watched the Belgians come down the said steps to breakfast. And I saw the following: the old gentleman’s face was unlike other faces.”

Judge: How do you mean?

Witness: Join two left sides of the same face on a photograph and of a handsome man you will make a monster. Double up the sides of the soul and you will get not a complete but rather two monstrous halves of the soul. Like the face, the soul has a left and a right side. You cannot make a two-legged person out of two left legs. The old gentleman’s face had two left sides.

Judge: And that is why you were upset that morning?

Witness: Yes.

Judge: The court warns the witness to confine her testimony to the truth. What happened next?

Witness: I served the Van der Spaaks, telling them not to pick up the pepper and salt with the same hand, and after their meal they left, except for the boy, who stayed behind to play and drink his chocolate milk. Then Dr. Dorothea Schultz, present here, entered the garden and sat at her table. Before I managed to wait on her, the now dead Dr. Muawia went up to her table and sat down. You could see that her time was trickling like rain and his was falling heavily like snow. He was already covered up to his neck. I noticed that he wasn’t wearing a tie, and that she sneaked a revolver out of her handbag, but after exchanging a few words with Dr. Muawia she put out her hand and he gave her a bundle of papers. Then she ran up the stairs to the rooms, leaving the weapon on the table, under the papers. All this upset me even more. Dr. Muawia had a childlike smile trapped in his beard that resembled an insect in amber and was tinged by the green of his melancholy eyes. As though drawn by that smile, the boy from the Belgian family went up to Dr. Muawia’s table. I remind the court that the child was not yet four; There was nobody else in the garden. The boy was wearing gloves, as usual, and Dr. Muawia asked him why he didn’t take them off.

“Because this place makes me sick,” the boy replied.

“Sick?” asked Dr. Muawia. “Sick of what?”

“Of your democracy!” said the boy—word for word.

Then I moved still closer to the well and listened to their conversation, which seemed to me increasingly strange as it went on.

“What kind of democracy?”

“The kind you and your ilk protect. Look at the results of this democracy of yours. Before, big nations used to oppress small nations. Now it’s the reverse. Now, in the name of democracy, small nations terrorize the big. Just look at the world around us. White America is afraid of blacks, the blacks are afraid of the Puerto Ricans, Jews of the Palestinians, the Arabs of the Jews, the Serbs of the Albanians, the Chinese of the Vietnamese, the English of the Irish. Small fish are nibbling the ears of big fish. Instead of minorities being terrorized, democracy has introduced a new fashion: now it’s the majority of this planet’s population that’s being burdened. Your democracy sucks.”

Judge: The court warns the witness not to make implausible statements. The witness is fined. You claim under oath that all this was said by a child who is not yet four years old?

Witness: Yes, I do, because I heard it with my own ears. Then I wanted to see what I was hearing, so I moved to a spot where I could watch from behind the pillar in the garden. The child grabbed Dr. Schultz’s revolver from the table, spread-eagled his legs, crouched, and, holding the gun with both hands like a professional, aimed at Dr. Muawia, shouting:

“Open your mouth so your teeth won’t be ruined!”

Stunned, Dr. Muawia really did open his mouth, and the child fired. I thought it was a toy gun, but Dr. Muawia toppled over on his chair. Blood gushed, and then I saw that one of Dr. Muawia’s trouser legs was already dirty—he had one foot in the grave. The child threw down the weapon, went back to his table, and proceeded to finish his chocolate milk. Dr. Muawia didn’t move, and the stream of blood tied itself into a knot under his chin. I thought then, “There, now he has a tie.” Just before that, Mrs. Schultz let out a scream. Everyone knows what followed. Dr. Muawia was pronounced dead, his body was removed, and Dr. Schultz reported the death to another guest at our hotel, Dr. Isailo Suk.

Prosecutor: “I thought then, There, now he has a tie.” I would like to express to the court my profound indignation at the way the witness expresses herself. What are you by nationality, Miss-or is it Mrs.-Ateh?

Witness: That’s hard to explain.

Prosecutor: Try, please.

Witness: I am Khazar.

Prosecutor: What did you say? I’ve never heard of a nation like that. What passport do you carry? Khazar? Witness: No, Israeli.

Prosecutor: So, that’s it. That’s what I wanted to hear. How can you be Khazar and have an Israeli passport? Did you betray your people?

Witness (laughing): No, one might say just the opposite. The Khazars assimilated with the Jews and, along with everybody else, I accepted Judaism and an Israeli passport. What’s the point of being alone in the world? If all Arabs became Jews, would you remain an Arab?

Prosecutor: No comment is necessary, and here I ask the questions. Your testimony is calculated to help the accused, who carries the same passport as you. I have no more questions. Nor, I hope, has the jury...

Next to take the stand was the Van der Spaak family from Belgium. They agreed on three things. First, that it is ridiculous to believe the story that a three-year-old child ostensibly committed the murder. Second, that the investigation had established that Dr. Muawia was killed by a weapon bearing the fingerprints of only one person, Dr. Dorothea Schultz, and had also established that the said weapon (a .38-caliber model 36 Smith & Wesson) with which Dr. Muawia was killed belonged to Dr. Schultz. Third, Mrs. Spaak, as the main witness for the prosecution, claimed that Dr. Schultz had a motive for the murder of Dr. Muawia, and had come to Istanbul to kill him, which she did. Namely, the investigation established that during the Egyptian-Israeli war Dr. Muawia had seriously wounded Dr. Dorothea Schultz's husband. The motive is clear: murder in revenge. The testimony of the Kingston Hotel waitress could not be accepted as reliable. That was all.

On the basis of the evidence, the prosecutor asked that Dr. Dorothea Schultz be declared guilty of premeditated murder, entailing political motivations as well. Then the accused was brought before the court. Dr. Schultz made a very brief statement. She was not guilty of Dr. Muawia's death, and she could prove it. She had an alibi. Asked by the judge what kind of alibi, she replied: "At the time of Dr. Muawia's murder, I was murdering somebody else—Dr. Isailo Suk. I smothered him with a pillow in his bedroom."

During the investigation it had been established that Mr. Van der Spaak had also been seen in Dr. Suk's room that morning, at the time of death, but Dr. Schultz's confession absolved the Belgian of any responsibility.

The trial ended and the verdict was pronounced. Dr. Dorothea Schultz was acquitted of the charge that she had killed Dr. Abu Kabir Muawia in an act of premeditated murder and revenge, and was condemned for the murder of Dr. Isailo Suk. Dr. Muawia's murder remained unresolved, while the Van der Spaak family was set free. Virginia Ateh, the waitress at the Kingston Hotel, was fined for trying to deceive the court and mislead the investigation.

Dr. Dorothea Schultz was sentenced to six years' imprisonment in the casemates of Istanbul. She writes letters addressed to her own name in Cra-cow. All the letters are examined, and they always end with the same incom-prehensible sentence: "Our false victim saved us from death." The search of Dr. Suk's room turned up no books or papers. All that was found was an egg cracked at one end. The dead man's fingers were caked with yolk, indicating that the last thing he had done in life was to crack the egg. Also discovered was an unusual goldhandled key that, strangely enough, fitted the lock of a room belonging to a Kingston Hotel employee. The room of the waitress Vir-ginia Ateh.

Found on the Van der Spaak family's table, and enclosed as evidence, was a bill written on the back of a sheet of hotel stationery. It said:

$$1689 + 293 = 1982$$

*Christina Pribićević Zorić*

### Borislav Pekić (1930–92)

Borislav Pekić was born in Podgorica, Montenegro, in a well-to-do middle class family. His problems with the communist regime started immediately after the liberation of Belgrade in 1944 and culminated in 1948, when the police arrested him as a member of the Association of Democratic Youth of Yugoslavia, a well-organized anticommunist group. He was released from jail after five years, but the rough treatment severely undermined his health—he fell ill with tuberculosis. After a short stint at studying psychology, he became a freelance writer in the 1960s. In 1971, he moved to England, where he lived in a sort of self-imposed exile. In the late 1980s, after the one-party political system had collapsed in Yugoslavia, Pekić returned to Belgrade and became involved in politics as one of the founders of the Democratic Party. He again developed problems with his lungs which this time proved fatal, and he died of cancer in London, active both as a writer and as a public figure almost until his last day.

Pekić started his career as a screenplay writer. His first novel, *The Times of Miracles* (1965), clearly foreshadowed the two perhaps most important characteristics of his art: his antidogmatic views and his skepticism with regard to “progress.” *How to Quiet a Vampire* (1977) was long suppressed by the publishing company Nolit: quite appropriately, it offers an insight into the mechanisms of the logic and psychology of modern totalitarianism. Pekić’s central work is his seven-volume novel *The Golden Fleece* (1978–86). Like Joyce’s *Ulysses*, it is based on and often follows the narrative patterns of classical myths; like Mann’s *Buddenbrooks*, it maps out a long family history; like Huxley’s *Point Counter Point*, its inner tensions are created through a maze of conflicting perspectives and ideas. Pekić also distinguished himself as one of the best Serbian contemporary dramatists.

*The Houses of Belgrade* (1970) won the prestigious *NIN* annual literary award as the best Yugoslav novel in 1971. Written in the form of the hero’s last will, which is often interrupted by his lengthy reminiscences, the novel exposes the absurdity of modern materialism, embodied in Arsenije Njegovan, as well as the various aberrations of the communist ideology. The mixture of comic and tragic elements gives the novel a touch of absurdist burlesque, both humorous and gloomy, strongly resembling a Beckettian play performed on a Balkan stage.

Unlike many critics of modern civilization, Pekić did not indulge only in denouncing it. A skeptic who rejected the idea of progress, a pessimist who considered the world meaningless and accidental, he still occasionally offered his vision of how things should be: “Sisyphus must not give up pushing his rock uphill even if he knows that it will bounce down as soon as he reaches the top,” wrote he. “The very secret of our existence may be in—pushing.”



*The Houses of Belgrade* (Excerpt)

Finally I would have to think about it more seriously—and without old-fashioned prejudices—about those hanging facades. And about prefabricated ceilings, too. Expensive, unreliable, time-consuming tradesmen's crafts would undoubtedly be replaced by industrial work in the factories. For cost and speed of erection, there could be no competition for that kind of construction. But would those factory-built houses devalue the space they dominated, depersonalize it, take away its soul? No, because my houses wouldn't look like upturned car bodies or armored tanks. Though machine-made, their faces would still be varied, personal, unexpected. And the benefits of garden cities would be preserved: every apartment would have its hanging garden, its compact flower plot à la Semiramis. But of course no one would be able to peer into it; my buildings would defend their tenants' privacy. And the insulation would be such that they wouldn't be subjected to the noise of others. Free of soot, smoke, and dust, the air which my tenants breathed would not originate in other people's lungs; the view they rented could not be stolen from them; and even the sun would be brought nearer to them, and while it warmed them it would belong to them alone. With the keys of their home, my tenants would also receive the keys to their own lives, which they had almost forgotten about—keys whose duplicates would belong only to me.

Such gigantic dwellings, particularly if concentrated in the Arsénie Nego-van Housing Development, would be placed under complete owner control. Arsénierville would be safe, stable, unchanging, and when in time the buildings were combined into a single mass, into a symmetrical Chauvin-Mazet-like block, they would be as eternal as the tombs of the Pharaohs! Such constructions would no longer have to adapt to them. Hermetically sealed, impenetrable, indestructible, they would thwart forever all hysterical attempts to reconstruct our cities or our lives. There would be no place for subversive dreams of dynamic cities, behind which lurk Bolshevik yearnings for a change of regime.

I was just concluding my revolutionary concept when on all sides I noticed an unusual excited movement I would have noticed it earlier had I not been so preoccupied with my calculations. The people were all hurrying toward the railroad embankment. And the roadway was jammed full of red fire engines and military trucks with rubberized green canvas tops. I had no particular urge to join that animated movement, and certainly not to let it carry me along as a current carries a splinter of wood stopped an agitated passer-by who seemed, despite the camera slung around his neck, a reasonable-looking

man, and asked him: "Excuse me, sir, can you tell me what's happening on the other side of the embankment?"

The man looked at me pleasantly, but without understanding. "*Je m'excuse. Je regrette bien. Je ne parle pas serbe.*"

"*Oh, excusez-moi, je voulais seulement demander ce qui se passe là-bàs derrière la digue.*"

"*Une révolte, monsieur,*" the man said enthusiastically. "*Une révolte!*"

"*Quelle révolte?*"

"*Une révolte magnifique!*"

Was it really happening again? At first I couldn't believe it. Being a foreigner, the man could easily have misinterpreted the disturbance. It must be a huge fire menacing the town, and now the soldiers and firemen were on their way to control it.

But I too was hurrying toward the embankment. Fortunately, none of my houses lay on Zemun side. Since I wasn't personally threatened by the fire, and furthermore was incapable of looking on helplessly while houses were being destroyed, I would have returned home if I hadn't known unpredictable the whims of fire are. I considered it opportune- and all the more so since I was once again committed to my business affairs- to take a closer look, and to undertake my own defensive measures should the blaze be spreading toward my houses.

"Is the fire a big one, young man?"

"What fire? It's a riot, old man, a riot!"

I was astounded. "Are you saying things are out of hand down there?"

"What's the matter with you? They're marching on Belgrade!"

Still hoping to clear up the misunderstanding, I addressed another on-looker who was limping toward the embankment.

"In heaven's name, sir, somebody just told me that a mob is trying to force its way into town. Is it true?"

"It's true," he said without stopping. "But they won't make it, the bastards!"

I fell in beside him. "No one could be happier than I about that. But how do you know they won't?"

"I used to be in the army."

"My late brother was in the army, too. Perhaps you've heard of him? General George Negovan? I'm Arsénie K. Negovan and my business is houses."

"I was a colonel. I was in command of a battery."

I knew nothing about military units, but despite his unduly direct speech and behavior, which I put down to barrack-room upbringing, the colonel inspired me with confidence. I kept as close to him as I could, all the more so

since he shared my disgust at what was happening on the Zemun side of the embankment.

The citizens from behind were pushing me toward the underpass, on whose arch was written: BOAC LINKS ALMOST ALL THE COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD. As I began to be drawn up the slope, I made up my mind to see with my own eyes what heights of incompetence the royal government had attained in their defense of owners' interests—an incompetence which I had described in my talk about banks and bankocracy. For a property owner on the threshold of a large-scale building operation such as I had conceived during the journey to the New Township, it was of the greatest importance not to have to worry about the future of financial investments.

Even so, it's difficult to believe that this was the real reason for my ill-considered approach. The direction I took must have been influenced by a secret hope that there along the railway embankment I would obtain satisfaction for the mob's malicious attack on me on March 27, 1941, that here at last I would be revenged.

The railroad tracks crossed a sandy stretch and descended toward a dusty field covered with thistles, on which lay rolls of rusty metal fencing, concrete pipes, torn sacks of cement, and broken bricks, as if on some abandoned building site. Along the tracks and in the curve of the underpass the army, in steel helmets and standing three deep, had formed a cordon to block off the approach to the town.

"That's not the way to do it," said the colonel. "They ought to block the road with trucks, set up road blocks."

I took my binoculars out of their canvas case and trained them on Zemun. At first I could see nothing. Adjusted to a different range, the lens was blurred and opaque. As I turned the regulating knob, from out of the thick winter fog in front of me *they* swam into view; at their head was a standard-bearer waving a red flag, and it seemed as if I was drawing them toward me, luring them forward out of that fog and not at all as if they were moving forward of their own murderous volition, gathering speed from way back in '41 when they came down Pop-Lukina Street. With a sharp twist of the knob, I sent them hurrying back into anonymity. The strength of my index finger and thumb, between which I held the tiny wheel that adjusted the lens, was for an instant greater than all the soldiers waiting there beneath the embankment.

Nothing was moving out there where I'd seen them a little earlier. Then they reappeared with the flag-bearer at their head, swarming forward of their own accord, although I was careful not to move the knob of the binoculars again. Clearly I hadn't removed them far enough—only a few steps back into the fog, out of which they now surged toward me again. I spun the wheel sharply: they disappeared. But this time a shorter period elapsed before, unaided by me, the red flag appeared from the fog into which I had banished it. I

knew that the intervals would get shorter and shorter, that my binoculars wouldn't halt them, so I stopped adjusting them. I stood on the embankment as if in a theater gallery, and waited.

Soon they appeared. They dispersed the powerless mist of the lens and came on. There were more and more of them. It was as if the diseased, cataract, like fog from which they kept soundlessly appearing would never stop producing them. They were carrying their red flags, of course, and Yugoslav flags, but with the Jewish-Bolshevik red star, as if they had already seized power and were giving it a visible symbol. They were also carrying some sort of pictures, and placards which I couldn't make out because they were too far away. And I had no need to, for I knew in advance what was written on them. *They* always demanded the same thing. *They* wanted my houses. *They* had wanted them in March 1941 and *They* wanted them now in June of 1968!

"I can't see what's written on their placards," I said.

The colonel handed me a pair of bulky binoculars with a black metal casing. "Here, use mine."

"They look powerful."

"Artillery binoculars. None stronger."

"Thank you. But they'll be too close."

The colonel looked at me askance. "They will be, very soon."

The man behind me, against whom I was pressed, spat noisily. I could feel his breath on my neck.

The colonel was right. Soon, even my binoculars couldn't keep them back. Now the pictures that they were carrying on poles could be seen with the naked eye. One was Lenin. I didn't recognize the others, but they surely belonged to the same coterie. Scrawled across one of the placards in red was: "FREEDOM, TRUTH, JUSTICE! DOWN WITH CORRUPTION!" (I had no quarrel with that, though I would have added, "and banking.") "NO MORE UNEMPLOYMENT. I HAVE BEEN BEATEN UP." (I was, too, I thought, looking at the young man with the bandaged head who was carrying the placard.) "THE REVOLUTION IS NOT YET FINISHED!" (It needs to start first, you son of a bitch. But it looks as if it has started already.) "DOWN WITH THE RED BOURGEOISIE!"

Yes, take good note of that, Isidor: *down with the red bourgeoisie!* They probably meant *bloody*, but they said *red*. For them Arsénie Negovan was bloody! Arsénie, whose forebears had built this ungrateful town with their sweat and skill. Arsénie, who let people off from their rent, and whose building workers were the best paid in the country—that same Arsénie was bloody, and ought to be dragged out of his house and clubbed to death in a ditch like a dog!

All at once I was conscious of something which in my excitement I hadn't noticed: I was standing on a wooden tie between two rails just as I had at Solovkino, where beneath me the track had lain glistening in the rain. There had been firing in the town from all directions, but I can't remember whether the Reds were entering and the Whites fleeing, or the Whites entering and the Reds fleeing. I only remember a small shunting engine that rumbled slowly toward me, on whose engineer's platform was fixed a pole where five men were hanging from a single wire noose. Because of the unbalanced load, the engine was tilting to one side, and it rocked like a boat sliding down the ways to the water. It clattered on past me so quickly that I had no time to read the sign hanging around the necks of the dead men. It went on around the gentle bend behind the railway station and, picking up speed, disappeared into the gray steppes of the Ukraine.

The rioters stood opposite to the cordon of soldiers, singing. I'm not sure that I can remember the words exactly, but they went something like this:

*Awake the East and the West,  
Awake the North and the South,  
Steps thunder into the onslaught,  
Forward, comrades, shoulder to shoulder!*

But still they hadn't attacked; the lines simply rippled as if the force of the rear ranks, who could see nothing, carried forward into those in front with a violence that didn't abate despite the sharp warnings from the soldiers.

"I wouldn't even talk to them," said the colonel, taking the binoculars from his eyes. "If they'd let me, I'd teach them a lesson!"

The man behind me spat again. "What would you do then?" he asked.

"I'd go straight at them—what else? Attack both sides. I'd surround the column and smash them before they knew what was happening!"

"It's easy to attack," said the man behind us. "Why not meet their demands?"

I had to intervene. "In heaven's name, sir, *de quoi parlez-vous?* Can't you see what they're demanding? They want our property!"

"Only property unjustly accumulated," said the man dryly.

"The only property unjustly accumulated is what belongs to the banks!" This was our own ground, on which I acknowledged no superior. "I've always maintained that those damned Yiddisher banks would be the end of us! On no account should they be allowed to make a middleman's profit. Yes, by the law of the land, those industrious people who've been bearing the whole weight of social progress for centuries..."

"I couldn't even talk to them!" repeated the colonel. "They've been given freedom, and now all kinds of scum are wandering about the country!"

“... before the most illustrious gathering of the C.S.S., but to be honest with you, they didn’t listen to me then, nor do these people now.”

“Hirelings, that’s what they are,” said the colonel bitterly.

“Of Moscow,” I added.

“Not just of Moscow. All sorts.”

The man behind us spat again.

“Why are you spitting all the time?” asked the colonel. “Are you on their side?”

“I’m not on anyone’s side. If all were well they wouldn’t be worked up, that’s what I’m saying. I spat because I feel like spitting.”

“Well next time you feel like spitting, just read that.” The colonel pointed his finger at the placard: DOWN WITH THE RED BOURGEOISIE. “Who’s the ‘red bourgeoisie?’ Me, do you think, because I own a house?”

“You own a house?” I was sincerely pleased.

“Over there, to the left,” he said. “That yellow two-storied house. A beautiful house, don’t you think?”

I took the binoculars and directed them toward the house he indicated. The building was revolting from every point of view—squat, with harsh colors that reminded one of an Oriental eunuch. But it was *his*, and judging by the pride with which he spoke, very close to his heart. It was a primitive stage of the feeling of ownership.

“A fine house, colonel,” I said, putting the binoculars down. I felt almost ill just looking at it. “*C’est une vraie perle!*”

“Those hooligans have almost destroyed it! Smashed the windows with rocks—not a single one left! They opened the hydrants and turned them at the police! And after that you expect us to talk to them? If it was up to me, I’d get rid of them all.”

“That’s a political error,” said the man behind us.

“It’s an urbanist error, gentlemen!” I shouted. “*C’est une faute urbanistique!* The workers’ suburbs have been located in an encircling belt which grips the commercial heart of the city like a vise. This has concentrated the proletariat in breeding grounds of revolt and destruction. Why, gentlemen, didn’t they place those people in closed-off Soleri cones?”

“What’s all that crap about?” said the colonel.

“I’m speaking of Paolo Soleri, who designed a town like a beehive, or rather a conical anthill with internal passageways. All its exits can be easily controlled, and production carried on without any fear of revolutionary ideas or attitudes. In a word, a real town for workers. *Si l’on avait appliqué les plans de Solerie, cela ne nous serait pas arrivé, je vous le garantis, messieurs!*”

Suddenly the crowd below the embankment became agitated and began to sing:

*Arise, you prisoners of starvation,  
Arise you wretched of the earth.*

It was my last chance to leave. I had to think quietly. Although I knew what conclusions I would reach, I had no idea that afterward it would induce me to write my will, and to make the decision that I'm now carrying out. One thing, however, was beyond all doubt: Arsénie Negovan's city of thirty thousand inhabitants would not be built, nor would any of his houses ever again feel the hand of a true property owner.

The man behind joined in the chorus:

*'Tis the final conflict, let each stand in his place,  
The Internationale shall be the human race.*

"What in God's name are you singing about?" Despite the cramped space on the tracks, the colonel managed to turn around; from the side, his profile stood out like a worn ancient coin. "Well?"

"Why shouldn't I sing the *Internationale*? I am a Communist."

"I'm a Communist, too, but I'm not singing—not with that rabble. I fought for this country, comrade!"

"I fought too, comrade!"

"For what?"

"That's just what I'm asking myself!"

I couldn't understand a word of it. They sounded as if they'd taken leave of their senses.

"Gentlemen, get a hold of yourselves!"

But they'd already come to blows. They were grappling with each other as violently as the cramped space allowed, and in doing so pushed me right up to the edge of the embankment, above the sandy field where at that very moment the military cordon was under growing pressure from the frenzied mob.

*Bernard Johnson*

