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Derviš Sušić, The Bosnian Spirit in Literature

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The emancipation process in the field of story-writing literature has been much slower and more difficult, which is understandable, taking into account the fact that the basic idea of the national interpretation of Bosnian literature and its history had been the idea of the so-called "Bosnian story" that was proclaimed a model and flower for Serbian literature and that then set the tone for Bosnian literature, particularly in the period dominated by the Group of Sarajevan Writers. However, as slow as this process was, it was all the more thorough. There were two key landmarks that have determined the subsequent destiny of the genuine Bosnian story and novel in terms of spirit. These are Derviš Sušić and Meša Selimović.

Sušić had announced his specific vision of Bosnia as a special world with its own spirit and culture of perception expressed in the mentality and the human nature as early as in his first great work, *I, Danilo* (*Ja, Danilo*). This work, which for its completeness and richness excels almost everything written in our post-war satirical prose, is not of primary interest for its in part already established and recognized value. From our perspective, it is significant for having revealed an indigenous and quite specific self-possessed life of Bosnia as opposed to the romanticist and other parochial interpretations to which Bosnia was subjected. With the skill of a master, Sušić unveils the features of this world from the very first page to the last, from Danilo's neighbor trying to avoid saying hello to his neighbor, for who knows whom and what the neighbor is. Every salutation in Bosnia is some kind of password and sign of belonging to a group behind a flag, therefore he chooses the most neutral words possible to use for a human encounter: "It's scorching hot today". To that Advan from a small town, who has not left his shop storage for years, "for Bosnia is a strange land, it has the most poisonous air in the world," therefore one should not come out into the open unless absolutely necessary. This wonderful novel––which was, oddly enough, received better everywhere else it appeared than by Bosnian literature critics––is nevertheless only a starting point toward disclosing the Bosnian truth.

The latest work by Sušić, *Riots* (*Pobune*), represents an already established and clear view. This book is very significant for Bosnian literature. It is the first literary vision of our authentic Bosnian history in the past five hundred years. Its value lies in the fact that this history, like human life, experience, and destiny, is free from anything external, of any historicism, any mythology, and any national, religious, regional or other layer of interpretation. Here, it is revealed directly in the night of its full human

truth, and by that truth it directly becomes equally universal, human and prophetic in general. The Pilavijas, the Hatemićis, the converts to Islam, the serfs, the beys, the heretics, the Orthodox, the heroes, the cowards, the merchants, the paupers, the respectable citizens, and the communist firebrands–– all these are our people. This is each and every one of us, without differences as to our historical truth, like eternal sufferers and fighters, like salt in the bread of this land: hard, robust and at the same time sensitive and soft, naive and at the same time cunning, rich and poor, always passionate and always in our own house in our own ash-grey and brutal country. Strange people, derisory and ironical to any living creature, to even the greatest of the greats, but still most to ourselves, poets without myths or myth mania, tender realists, puritans, but passionate. Such people, who have followed each other from generation to generation, with only Bosnia holding them together in a string stronger than any mythic, religious, family or other tie, are the people of this land, its greatest and most complete truth. This all has made Sušić's work a first-class event in Bosnian literature and the work in which this history acquired finally its authentic artistic vision and interpretation.

Translated by Amela Kurtović

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