

Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

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Announcing the Translation of Spies

Derviš Sušić's *Spies* was translated into English by Amira Sadiković and recently published by the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The novel, part of the canon of Bosnian literature, is a series of notes written by spies or about spies stretching across the long and complex history of Bosnia-Herzegovina. A spy tries to know the country he or she spies on. The novel is a stream of poignant letters, telltale anecdotes, secret confidences, and passionate conversations of the different spies who have come to Bosnia in order to know the country and report back to Bosnia's enemies. Whether the spies are from the Ottoman Empire entering the Kingdom of Bosnia in the Middle Ages, the Austro-Hungarian Empire during Ottoman rule, the Gestapo during World War II, or Europeans who despised Yugoslavia, their reports all struggle with the problem of knowing Bosnia. The spies are curious rather than interested, and they feel the pain of this limit of knowledge. They observe without understanding, and they lament the febleness of their seemingly astute observations. Their task for their foreign masters is not only formidable, but impossible. They are oblivious to the fact that they themselves are being observed. There is something ineffable about Bosnia, which becomes the undoing of each spy whose story Sušić incisively and poignantly narrates. In so doing, Sušić shows Bosnia; he shows the country he loves.

But, I started telling you about the essence of Bosnia! You see, the essence does exist, but no one has yet understood it through logic. You can define any country easily, from the national, geo-political, ethnic or whatever else vantage point. Bosnia — no! And yet, it possesses all the continuous prerogatives of a state, it has had years of glory and years of slavery, the greatness of a European kingdom and the misery of a fragmented Ottoman province.

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