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Bridges

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Of all the things created and built by humankind as a part of life's effort, nothing in my mind is better or worthier than bridges. They are more important than houses, more sacred, and more universal than temples. They belong to all and treat all alike; they are useful, always built for a purpose, at a spot where most human needs entwine; they are more durable than other buildings and serve no secret or evil purpose.

Large stone bridges, witnesses of bygone times, when people lived, thought and built in a different manner, grey and weathered by wind and rain, grazed upon at sharply cut corners, with green shoots of grass growing or birds' nests built in their joints and hardly visible cracks. Slender iron bridges, stretched from one bank to the other like wire, shivering and resounding each time a train rushes past them as if they are waiting yet to acquire their final form and perfection, so that the beauty of their contours should fully reveal itself to the eyes of our grandchildren. Wooden bridges at the entrance to Bosnia's small towns, whose pockmarked beams dance and reverberate under the hoofs of the village horses like the bars of a xylophone. And finally, those tiny bridges in the mountains, actually consisting of a fairly large log or two logs put together by nails, cast across a mountain stream which would be impassable without them. Mountain torrents, when they rise twice a year, sweep away these logs, while peasants, blindly persistent like ants, cut, trim and place new ones. That is why one can often see in those mountain streams and meanders between rocks, these one-time bridges: they lie and rot like other wood found that came to be there by accident, but these trimmed logs, doomed to fire and decay, stand apart from other detritus and even now remind us of the purpose they once served.

They are all essentially one, they are equally worthy of our attention, because they show the place where humankind encountered an obstacle and did not stop before it, but overcame and bridged it the way humankind could, according to understanding, taste, and circumstances.

When I think about bridges, those that crop up during my reverie are not the bridges I crossed most often, but rather those which kept and captivated my attention and my spirit the longest.

Sarajevo bridges primarily. On the Miljacka River, the bed of which is the backbone of

Sarajevo, they are like stone ribs. I can see them clearly and I count them one after another. I know their arches, I remember their parapets. There is one among them which has a fateful name of a young man, small but steady, withdrawn like a solid and silent fortress, which knows of no surrender or treason. Then come the bridges I saw on my journeys from the train at night--thin and white like an apparition. Stone bridges in Spain, overgrown with ivy and absorbed in thought over their own image in the dark water. Wooden bridges in Switzerland, covered by roofs because of heavy snow; they look like long barns, internally decorated with pictures of saints or miraculous events, like chapels. Fantastic bridges in Turkey, built as if by chance, preserved and maintained thanks to providence. Roman bridges in southern Italy, made of white stone, from which time has extracted everything that could be taken, and next to which there has been some new bridge, standing for a hundred years already, but they nevertheless stand, like skeletons on guard duty.

Thus, everywhere in the world, wherever my thoughts wander or stop, they encounter faithful and silent bridges like an eternal and ever insatiable human desire, to connect, to reconcile, and to join everything that challenges our spirit, eyes and feet, to stop division, contradiction, or parting.

Likewise in dreams and reveries. Listening to the most bitter and the most beautiful music I had ever heard, all of a sudden it is as if I see a stone bridge, cut in two, with two ends of a broken arch painfully reaching towards each other and pointing, with ultimate effort, to the only possible form of the arch that had disappeared. This is the loyalty and sublime implacability of beauty which allows for the one and only possibility beside itself--nonexistence.

Finally, everything that this life reveals itself by --thoughts, efforts, looks, smiles, words, sighs--they all sway toward the other shore, to which they are directed, as if toward a target, and once reaching it, they gain their true meaning. They all have to overcome and bridge something--disorder, death, or the lack of meaning. For everything is a transition, a bridge whose ends fade away into the infinity and toward which all earthly bridges are nothing but mere playthings, pale symbols. And all our hopes are on the other side.

Translated by Amela Kurtović - © 2005 Amela Kurtović

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