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Stay Here

Aleksa Šantić

Stay here!… The sun that shines in a foreign place,
Will never warm you like the sun in your own;
The bread has a bitter taste there
Where one has no one, not even a brother.

Who would find a better mother than one's own,
And your mother is this country;
Take a look upon the limestones and the field,
Everywhere are the graveyards of your great-grandfathers.

For this country they were noble giants,
Lights who knew how to defend it,
You, too, should stay in this country,
And give the fund of your blood for it.

As a deserted bough, when the autumn winds
Tear its leaves and slash it with ice;
Your motherland would be without you,
Like a mother crying for her child.

Do not let tears run down her face,
Return to it in the world's embrace;
Live in order to be able to die
On its battlefield where glory comes to greet you!

Everybody knows and loves you here,
And nobody will recognize you there;
Even the barren limestones are better here
Than the flowers in the fields of a foreign place.

Everybody shakes your fraternal hand here –
In the foreign land, wormwood blooms for you;
For us, amongst the limestones, everything connects:
Name, language, brotherhood, and holy blood.

Stay here!… The sun that shines in a foreign place

Will never warm you like the sun in your own –
The bread has a bitter taste there
Where one has no one, not even a brother…

(1896)

Translated by Amila Čelebić – © 2006 Amila Čelebić

Notes:

- "Šantić lived most of his life in his native town, Mostar. His work, like that of many other Bosnian and Hercegovinian writers, is closely associated with his own province; he wrote with moving sincerity of the unhappy fate of his fellow-countrymen under Austrian oppression (Vera Javarek in Serbo-Croatian Prose and Verse: A Selection with an Introductory Essay [London: The Athlone Press, 1958], xxii).
- "This poem, published in 1896 on the first page of the first issue of Zora, was directed at those Muslim Bosnians who, after the 1878 annexation of Bosnia by Austria, were leaving Bosnia in great numbers for Turkish lands" (Vasa D. Mihailovich in Serbian Poetry from the Beginnings to the Present [New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988], 195).
- It is morally and tragically ironic to re-visit this historic poem found in several anthologies not only because of the recent genocidal violence inflicted against Bosnian Muslims by nationalist Serbs during what is euphemistically called "ethnic cleansing" but also because virtually no Bosnian Serbs reside today in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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