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Ćamil Sijarić, The Man of Exile

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In the year into which we have just been slid, it will pass one hundred years since the birth of the author Ćamil Sijarić. The man of Bijelo Polje, born in a village of Šipovice, from Sandžak, who spent a significant part of his life in Sarajevo. It had been a time before this time when coming from Sandžak or Herzegovina did not mean anything bad in Sarajevo, nor something good, just the same as if someone had been a Croat or a Serb. It is different today, so one may say that Ćamil Sijarić died at the right moment. At the right moment, in any way, because the death caught him up on 6th December 1989, in the form of a fast running car, while he was crossing Djuro Djaković street, in the vicinity of the Central Committee. Had he lived longer, God forbid, he would have seen all sorts of things and not a single good one. Everything that was happening after that Ćamil's December was far below the level of his prose.

He was a great author, coming from the region where many great authors were born. These ones, within the circle that could be drawn with a pair of compasses, no wider than 10 km in diameter, were: Miodrag Bulatović, Ćamil Sijarić and Marko Vešović. Although they represent one identity, from the same world and language, the three of them will never be present in the same anthology, not even in the same national literature. It is their, but also our mutual misfortune.

Last year, in the office of the director of the Bijelo Polje Cultural Centre, when I came to claim the travel expenses, I was looking at a black-and-white photograph of Bulatović and Sijarić above the director's desk. The younger author is speaking about something to the older one, and the latter is smiling cunningly. The older one is, of course, Ćamil. Always and in all times Ćamil Sijarić was, and will be the older author. It was his attitude. It has nothing to do with the age, biology and genetics.

The first book I read by him was while I was at the seaside, at Mala Duba, at the age of twelve. The title of the book was *The People of Bihor (Bihorci)*, the famous pocket edition by the Sarajevo Svjetlost from the 1960s. I found it in the cupboard of the house where we spent our summer holidays. There was no other book, just that one. And that is how I came to read *The People of Bihor*.

Some ten years later I started to appreciate that book.

Although I am not from Sandžak, and for some time now there is no more that kind of Sarajevo I could share with Ćamil Sijarić, although Ćamil is not a Bosnian, especially

not from Bosnia that would still mean something to me, although there is no more literature, nor a book where we could be altogether, nor a school at which I could read his work as the required reading, nor me attending the school, nor any required reading, although both he and I found ourselves in a no-man's-land, he as a ghost, and me as a living creature, Ćamil Sijarić is, among many writers in my language, one of those whom even today, maybe precisely today, or especially today, I feel most as mine.

For example, that wonderful story *French Cotton* (*Francuski pamuk*).
Or the story *The Hound* (*Hrt*).
Or *The Raška Country Rascia* (*Raška zemlja Rascija*).
Or, again, *The People of Bihor*…

A year before his death, Ćamil Sijarić released his first and only book of poetry, published by the BIGZ, Belgrade, giving it a simple and pretentious title *Lyrics* (*Lirika*). To be so bold as to name a collection of poems in that way, it is almost as courageous as to come to the theatre, on the occasion of the Hamlet premiere, smartly dressed and barefoot.

Moreover, he, all story telling and all epic sounding, gave his book a title like that.

Until the wartime, that would be my most favoured book by Ćamil, despite all his prose work. And then, during the war, I remained without it. Where did it disappear, did I lend it to anyone, was it stolen from me in order to be used as a fire paper, or *Lyrics* by Ćamil Sijarić disappeared from my flat and my world the way everything disappears in a war, after the evil and misery appearing for no reason, and with no source, I do not know, but the book was nowhere to be found.

Afterwards, I was searching for *Lyrics* in the antiquity stores in Sarajevo and Belgrade. I have not searched for it in Zagreb, since there is no way that in Zagreb anyone has heard of Ćamil – or anything by him.

And, of course, I have not found it, as it is usually the case when we do not find the books we have come to look for in an antiquity store.

Eventually, I stopped looking for it, and I kept reading again his poems from my memory, mind and dreams. It is better that way. All books are much better if you read them that way, but before you do it, it is good to read them in real life a few times, because if something has not been read, it cannot be kept in memory.

And then, in an old notebook of mine, I found a poem by Ćamil Sijarić, written in my own handwriting, a poem not existing in my memory. Now, when I am reading it, it seems familiar to me. I know it has been written by Ćamil because it is the rhythm of his sentence. Also, I recognize it after his way of constructing a story in a poem. Finally, I know it because the poem is a masterwork, here it is the way it has been copied in my notebook. If there are any mistakes in comparison to the original one, let me be forgiven. The poem has no title.

> There came our warrior from the war in Greece

> and brought a Greek pan and on his body
> Wounds.
>
> Women told him that the pan
> from Greece was no good, because it was shallow.
>
> We told him that even his wounds
> from Greece were no good, because they were shallow.
>
> We told him:
> At home we would have inflicted on you deeper
> Wounds.

According to the dates in the notebook, I must have copied the poem the same year when the book was released: 1988. What was my motive to copy it, I do not know. Maybe, as a young author, I copied it driven by enthusiasm and fascination, thinking I might write a comparable one if I copy Ćamil's. Or, something else has led me to copy it, I do not know.

But, what I know is that in those times there was no way the poem could mean something to me as it does today.

And I know that Ćamil Sijarić was able to describe these times, which came after our times, even before they occurred. Or it is so everywhere and in every time, after you go to Greece. As a warrior, or just like that.

If Man returns after a long absence, he always returns from exile. And such a comeback is merely a new exile.

But let it be.

This is a simple, great, with the sentence in a rhythm of a perfect sonnet, decorated poem. In it you can hear the living voice of the great storyteller, as well as the voice of his birthplace. Of all the people I know still living, Marko Vešović would be able to vocalize it best.

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Translated by Ana Stanović Obradović and Mirjana Savić Obradović.

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