Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

An International, Interdisciplinary, Bilingual, Online Journal
Međunarodni, interdisciplinarni, dvojezični, online časopis

The Land, the People, and the Language of Petar Kočić

Ivo Andrić

I will not talk about all the aspects of Petar Kočić, but only about three elements from the life and work of Petar Kočić —the land, the people and the language, and how these three elements show up in his life and work and influence them.

»The Bosnia vilayet [1] is crisscrossed in all directions by wild mountains«. With these words Austrian major Gustav Thömel began his book about Bosnia, published in 1867. That book is part of the literature of intelligence and propaganda that the Austro-Hungarian government disseminated in order to prepare for its occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the year 1878. But even tendentious and commissioned books can sometimes contain some accurate observation. Such is also this opening line. Seemingly too simple and obvious, it comprises a well-observed characteristic of a country, one important part of its reality, and a circumstance that determines people's lifestyle and influences their development and social conditions.

There are few countries in Europe where the ratio of arable land to forestland and wasteland is so unfavourable, and even fewer where the use of the part of the land that is considered arable is so irrational and unprofitable even today. It was even more so in the time of Petar Kočić and in those preceding him which were described in his literary works.

More than 50% of the area of Bosnia and Herzegovina is covered by forests, and the rest is, for the most part, either unproductive soil or grassland, and, to a lesser extent, fields, gardens and vineyards.

According to the statistics given by Đ. Krstić in 1938, a six-member family in Bosnia and Herzegovina held some 5.52 hectares of land that could be »dug, ploughed or mowed«. Even then, in 1938, this surface area had been considered »too small to meet the needs of a village«.

Therefore, one can clearly imagine the scarcity of arable land in the previous centuries in the difficult conditions of serfdom, under Turkish and Austrian rule.

The following facts should be added further. The natural wealth of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and therefore the conditions for the growth and prosperity of the people, lie in its mineral resources and in the rational exploitation and industrial use of

forests, and it is exactly in these areas that nothing was done during the Ottoman and Austrian occupations, or nothing was done in the proper manner. The subject could not even be discussed under the primitive and ruthlessly exploitative conditions of the Turkish occupation, and what was pursued in the four decades of the Austrian occupation was scarcely in the interests of the inhabitants of the country; it was far more in the interests of Central European capital, which, led by Austria-Hungary, seized on Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sort of colonial territory.

Given such deplorable economic conditions, affecting not only nutrition but also people's whole lives, what little fertile and arable land there was took on immense importance that has only grown with time. Even before the Turkish invasion took place, as well as under Turkish and Austro-Hungarian rule, the main social events in Bosnia and Herzegovina revolved around the land and what it could provide through primitive farming methods. The fight for the land has changed its appearance and its instruments, but has never ceased, becoming only more brutal and complex. That fight for a piece of arable land, and for the fruits it can bring, has masked and disguised itself throughout the centuries behind the most diverse and strange metaphysical, religious, political, and nationalistic formulas and beliefs. But wherever and whenever we are in a position to take off these masks and covers, we will see that there is the fight for the arable land and its fruits hiding beneath.

History, tradition and folklore are abundant evidence of the hunger for land. It had already emanated from the Old Bosnian stećci [2] on which the deceased would speak about *their* land and beforehand would curse anyone who would destroy or move that *biljeg*, which was a boundary marker of their land holding. The hunger was most dramatically expressed under Ottoman rule. Through all the changes and complexities of landowner-serf relations, both sides demonstrated the hunger in a variety of ways. (»A Bosnian likes nothing more than the land and estate«, noted an Austrian about Bosnia and Herzegovina.) — A Muslim folk song tells of a Bosnian feudal lord that killed »the Hungarian king«. In order to reward him, the Sultan told him: »Ask whatever you wish!«, and he replied: »Nothing else but a *muhur* (seal), so we need not go all the way to Constantinople for a land grant«. The same is wished in a Muslim folk song:

And to put in place a defterhane [3] for them,

From Stambol to white Travnik.

Hence, to have the land registers in Bosnia; hence, to have autonomy for their feudal lords. There is a similar and interesting legend about Kopčić Bey, who also distinguished himself in the battles in Hungary. When the Sultan asked him what he wanted as a reward, he wished nothing else but »as much land in Bosnia as he could encircle on his horse in one day«. The Sultan agreed to it. The story goes that the Bey, in his unusual race and with his innate desire for the land, started making such a wide circle on his horse that, in order to close it, he drove the animal so hard that it collapsed under him before he could make the full circle. But Kopčić, the legend runs, having no other option, 'threw a stone from there to encircle as much land as possible'. He buried his dead horse at the place where the stone fell, and ordered that

he himself should be buried there, once he died. The descendants of Kopčić Bey, the legend ends, still keep the Emperor's permit and hide it jealously under a beam in their house.

But also the other party in this drama, the serf, greedily wanted to acquire the land in the way he could, understandably, according to his social and legal status.

M. Filipović [4] has described the Serbian custom of burying the dead in the Visoko region, where »some earth is laid on the chest of the head of a household, once he dies. In Donji Kraj, [5] the earth is taken from behind the hearth at home (whereas, in the Zenica region, it is taken from the fields of the deceased person)«. Further, Filipović writes that some silver coins are thrown into the grave. It is an age-old custom, as we know. But here, in Bosnia, it has its own interpretation. »Some say that the money is given to the deceased so that they can pay off their debts, while the others claim that it is to buy the land from the one buried there before them«. — Therefore, the troubles with the land and the fight for it continue even after death, according to the understanding of a peasant.

But the peasant's thoughts about the land, his care and fight for it, were not limited only to the symbolism of customs and superstitious imagination about life after death. On the contrary, all his symbolism and metaphysics are in the service of earthly reality, and the reality for him is almost the same as the fight for the land and against enslavement and exploitation. A peasant mobilized all his forces of this life and »after«life in the fight for the land, spending most of his energy and ingenuity on it. In that fight, he resorted to his slyness, his power, his quiet resistance, and even his legal rights, by presenting documents and permits, using them all in turn.

One of the Krajina clans, the Čegari from Crni Vrh, deforested and appropriated much land under Turkish rule, as P. Rabrenović has noted. »While cutting the trees, they would cut out large splinters from the remaining stumps, putting them into earthenware pots, which they buried next to the stumps. When their ownership was questioned and denied, they would pull the pots out of the ground and put back the splinters into the stumps, thus proving: »This is our deforested land since olden times«.«

Therefore, enslaved, or at risk of being enslaved, the peasant did everything for his land, and against the owner-exploiter. The land became the sanctum for which, over the centuries, he would plead, flatter, lie, cheat, beg the authorities and courts, and sometimes finally even shed blood.

The land was one of the principal motives for the end of Ottoman rule and the arrival of the new Austro-Hungarian domination. Austria-Hungary requested that the Great Powers entrust it with the occupation and administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, citing as one of the main reasons the inability of the Turkish authorities to satisfactorily settle the agrarian issue, and claiming that only »a strong and unbiased power« could achieve it, and that the power should be Austria-Hungary itself, of course. In 1878, consequently, Austria-Hungary was given a mandate for the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Somewhat earlier, in 1874, Marx had written

to Engels: »The more one hears about Austria, the more convinced he is that this country is coming to its end«. In that way, one crumbled empire was replaced by another one in the process of crumbling. And Petar Kočić, who was born close to the end of the Ottoman occupation, and died close to the end of the Austrian occupation, was right to write prophetically and folkloristically in the prison in Tuzla: »I was born in captivity, I lived in captivity, and in captivity, alas, I died«. Over a forty-year period, the Austro-Hungarian authorities did not manage, or did not want, to settle the main issue for which they came to Bosnia, the issue of land ownership and cultivation, but prolonged by every means this segment of the Middle Ages in the midst of Europe, causing considerable harm both to the peasant, whom it held back, and to the landowner, whom it, in its fatal and noncontemporary way, allegedly protected. Bosnia under Austro-Hungarian rule was and remained the country with the lowest grain income per hectare, its manner of soil cultivation remained at the lowest level, and all the apparent efforts to increase crop yields and improve agriculture failed due to the existence of serfdom. »Kmetenverhältnis ist ein Kulturhindernis«, [6] wrote one well-informed and objective Austrian author. But the Austria of Franz Joseph, with its suicidal persistence of overaged organisms, stood firm. Austria-Hungary addressed the agrarian issue at the Bosnian Council at last, when it was too late, but even then it prevented and stopped its satisfactory settlement.

At one of the last sessions of the Council, a young deputy from the group of P. Kočić, Dr. Đorđe Lazarević (whom the Austrians brutally murdered as soon as the war with Serbia broke out), shouted out to the representative of the government during a discussion of the agrarian issue: »You keep promising us that you will solve this problem and you are always deluding us! You should know that the carbines have already been loaded that will settle this issue«. That was on 20th June, 1914. One week later the Sarajevo assassination was carried out, which Austria-Hungary seized as the opportunity to attack Serbia, and the first worldwide imperialist war broke out from there, which swept away the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The land issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina would be addressed by other powers and in other ways.

Such, speaking briefly (too briefly!), was the land, »the Bosnia vilayet crisscrossed in all directions by wild mountains«, the country with little arable land and a monstrous serfdom system under both Turkish and Austrian rule. That land set its seal on P. Kočić, both on him as a person and as a writer whose narrative work had the title *From the Mountain and Below the Mountain*, and conditioned his personal life and literary work, to a greater and more fateful extent than was the case with our other authors.

What kind of people did and could such a land bear under such conditions? We have mentioned something about it before. Now, let us have a somewhat closer look, again concisely and briefly, at Kočić's man, which, as we will see, represents both a man from Kočić's area and a man from Kočić's story and, finally, represents Kočić himself, since here, as is seldom the case with a writer, there is a full identity between the man and his work, on the one hand, and the man and the milieu he grew up in, on the other hand.

The man from Krajina, as his life formed him under particular circumstances, on the

restless and dangerous periphery of the Ottoman Empire, is distinctly different from the rest of the Bosnian people and is well known for both good and bad due to his constant wish for movement and change, his harshness and explosively fast reactions, his visible status and inflexibility, the cult of his attributes, even when they become his flaws and when they result in a monomaniac persistence and barren, obstructive stubbornness. The word Krajina itself has the original meaning of an endangered border area, a kind of rampart and field of combat doomed to a warrior life, and we can find the verb *krajiniti* in a folk song with the meaning *to rebel*. »Zakrajinilo«! [7]

The folk song about Hadži-Prodan's rebellion goes like:

When Hadži Prodan rebelled (krajinaše),

He rebelled, but soon he failed,

Only to set Serbs and Turks to feuding…etc.

Jevto Dedijer defined the population of the tri-border area of Bosnia, Lika and Dalmatia in the following way: »Their disposition is typical of the people living in border regions, they are angry, enterprising, impulsive, rash and with simplistic views«. P. Kočić called them »fearless and stubborn people« and said that they could only ever pray to God out loud. »Everything on this mountain and below it is angry, restless, rampant and stubborn«.

Long before P. Kočić, a Dalmatian politician and writer, M. Pavlinović, had noted down on his journey through that area: »It is no wonder that such a raging land bears enraged people«.

That is the outer, harsh and rigid side of a man from Krajina regardless of his faith, which serves as a shield for all those moral values and social qualities that he often hides within himself, but manifests in his personal life, as well as in the life of the community. The man from Krajina is similar in that regard to that French statesman who would, when people used to condemn him for his rigour and strictness towards them, answer that he is on the outside thorny and prickly, but that his roses flourished within. [8]

Such are the people of Kočić's Krajina, even when they leave their fields and pastures and, educated, move on to a wider arena of national and international life.

Gavro Vučković, a forgotten name today, is a fellow countryman of Kočić's, who played a certain role in public life in the seventies of the last century. A merchant, an eloquent and brusque man, he was a political figure and representative of the Bosnian people at the Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople in the period from 1858 to 1863. Arrested by the Turkish government and exiled to Asia Minor, he fled to Russia, and then to Belgrade. A passionate polemicist, he used to write articles in which he both attacked others and defended himself, and when it was not possible for him to publish the articles, he would write and print brochures, paying for them out of his scanty emigrant funds. These long ago deservedly forgotten brochures, rare today, contain rather interesting pieces of information about those days, and even more

about the psyche and temperament of a typical man from Krajina. The first one of them has the title *The Word of a Man from Krajina. Written by Gavro Vučković, Krajina Man.* In his articles, Gavro Vučković is »a fiery rebel beyond measure, a man and a lover of his kin«, or, at least, he would like to be considered as such. In view of the way he presents himself and wants to be presented, he is a look-alike of Kočić's classical characters, especially of those whose innate characteristics become a grotesque and picturesque comedy. (»When I sing, I do it with my whole throat«. Or: »Gavro Vučković from Petrovac has never done anything secretly and whispering, and until hell freezes over, that will never happen to Gavro«). It would be justifiable to say about him, as Skerlić once wrote about V. Pelagić: »there is some old-fashioned vanity within him and overestimation of himself«. (Apropos, Gavro Vučković sincerely admired Vasa Pelagić in his articles, and highlighted as one of Pelagić's most appealing traits »not fearing anyone but God«). Describing the night when he was taken from Sarajevo into exile with three other Serbians, Gavro Vučković gives, some thirty years before the times of Petar Kočić, a remarkable and completely Kočić-like image.

Here is how, in his presentation, the seizure looked, though it was, most probably like all the others, done by a couple of zaptiahs and under the typical Turkish precautionary measures:

»The whole army, more than one thousand people, carrying their sharp and pointed bayonets, are waiting for the four of us to leave… Many of them surrounded us, countless infantry and cavalry. It was dark, nothing could be seen around to estimate their number«.

That is how they, according to Gavro's description, passed through Sarajevo at night, in an absolute fairy-tale or folk-song atmosphere. Vučković heard some female voice that called him by his name and he wrote:

»I thought of my sabre, which was also imprisoned, and of my good horse (Acko). Oh, my Lord, if I could have them with me — he who wants to believe me, he can, and he who doesn't, I'm not asking him, that is, to believe me — if I had had my sabre and my horse with me, I wouldn't have been concerned with so many people around us, and I really wouldn't have struck aggressively like, sadly, some fellow attackers do when describing, in betrayal, etc., but I would have rushed through that multitude, and, apart from a bullet, nobody could have caught me«.

If we add to this that the opponents of Vučković unanimously claimed in their press controversies that Gavro liked to drink alcohol, not lightly, but »like a fish«, then we have a perfect picture of Kočić's Simeun and his accomplishments. And Petar Kočić was born in the same year when Vučković died.

So much for the land and the people. And now at least something about the connection between the land and people, on the one hand, and Petar Kočić as a man and writer, on the other.

Petar Kočić originated from a Serbian peasant clan of West Bosnia, or, more precisely, Bosnian Krajina or, even more closely and precisely, a certain area of Bosnian Krajina

called Zmijanje. We stress this closeness, since the smaller, the tighter, the more distinctively on its own, and the further separated from the rest of Bosnia the environment is, the stricter, more rigid and harsher the determinant way of life of these people is; and the more strongly and unyieldingly it defines and conditions a man and his deeds and actions.

We know this area and the large extended family communities quite well, since a good deal has been reported on the subject. Petar Kočić himself wrote about them (honestly speaking, he did not even write about anything else apart from that), and others also, by writing about Petar Kočić. Since his father had been widowed early and became a monk, Kočić grew up in the family of his grandfather, an extended household of 36 members, and one of his biographers is not far from the truth in underlining as the first and most important school in the life of Petar Kočić »the collective will of the household as a community«, and claiming that the household moulded his »complete and specific physical and mental structure«. Actually, in the time of Kočić, the communities and clans ceased to exist in their compact and perfect form, and, with the new living conditions, started to disintegrate into some smaller and less strongly interconnected household communities, even one-person households, but in their emotional responses, in their moral and social views, perceptions and habits, there were strong, often unconscious remnants of it all. Because feelings and views, when so deeply rooted, regularly outlive the actual conditions and the relations that had created them, and act across generations, like a moving force still alive, or like a brake and obstacle.

Of course, that is nothing new. We all come into our lives with the traces, or, if you prefer, with the burdens of the social group we belong to by origin, but I think that there is no contemporary writer of ours whose relations and engagements are so close and spontaneous, so strong and apparent, and in such a conflict with the social conditions into which life had thrown him—the first individual from his community. Petar Kočić was the first one from his clan who left, or who was rather taken away from his small circle to join the wide and complex world of contemporary European life, divided by contradictions.

Kočić’s bond with Krajina, more specifically, with Zmijanje, is evident in him from the very beginning, from his first steps, and never left him in the course of his short, embattled, and Spartan simple life; it runs through his work in numerous details, if not affecting it as a whole, from its foundations.

Expelled from a Sarajevo grammar school, expelled due to his rebellious national attitude and quick-tempered behaviour, Petar Kočić attended and finished a grammar school in Belgrade. From time to time he was starving. His father wrote to him that he could not send him any help, and that the only thing he could offer was a piece of advice: »to be steely and firm like the Kočić Head« (that is a hill which rises sharply above their village). A living person, still a boy, in fact a boy thrown into quite different circumstances, is being completely identified with the landscape of his birthplace, and is called on to be like the soil and the rock of his native place in terms of perseverance. One can see from the son’s writing that these are not empty and figurative words from his father. When he passed his Matura exam, he reported it to his father, and at the same time, as he thus entered adult life, he sent a report, not

about his health or his intellectual interests, but about his moral attitude, a sort of ritual report which an individual owes to the tribe, once he is detached and thrown into the world. Petar Kočić wrote to his father on the occasion of his Matura: »I have humiliated myself in front of no one, nor have I begged for anything, because the Kočićes do not beg. There were days, two or even three in a row, when I didn't eat anything, and yet I did not bow in front of anyone to beg for charity« (1898). And all his pride in this was, as he himself wrote, because he was »the first one from the Kočić tribe« to pass the Matura exam. Therefore, everything belongs to the tribe, both suffering and success. In other, more important matters, he would also act and behave, consciously or not, as if constantly being monitored by all the families from Zmijanje: the Bosančićes, the Babićes, the Kneževićes, the Mačkićes, the Gvozdenovićes, the Kušićes, the Guslovićes, the Blagojevićes. Because, as Petar Kočić himself once said: »They are all family and kinfolk«, and the family binds and obliges. And profoundly and permanently so!

One should by no means search for any asceticism as the cause of the ostentatious accentuation of his own poverty. On the contrary, it is just one of the means of struggle and self-defence, just the other side of the coin of that power, ruling authority and wealth which had been grabbed by both occupiers, solely for themselves. There is something typical Kočić-like and Krajina-man-like, and to some extent pan-Bosnian, in the way he accentuated his own poverty only to emphasize more strongly his independence and freedom, as a kind of power and wealth of his own. All of it has been conditioned by the specific circumstances of the history of Bosnia, a country where the common people had to develop their distinct morale under two foreign occupations lasting for five centuries. According to that moral standard and under such conditions, the notion of assets and well-being, and especially, luxury and splendour, became almost inconsistent with the idea of independence, pride, even the basic notion of honour. Only »on the mountain and below the mountain«, where life is miserable and painfully simple, could one live and remain unchanged. This is the understanding of captive, but undefeated and undiscouraged communities and nations, the psychology of revolted people who find an angry and almost voluptuous pleasure in being without any need, even the most basic ones; and if they cannot become what they would like to be, then they want to be what the others — their oppressors — can never be: poor people rich in pride.

That attitude of defiant repudiation and poverty, and the complete independence related to them, appeared constantly with Petar Kočić, especially in his youth, when a man is more than ever prone to draw attention and reveal to the world what he cares about most. In 1903, Petar Kočić, the student in Vienna, wrote to B. Popović in Belgrade: »Hungry, naked, and barefoot, with the toe holes in my shoes, I walk around Vienna and — remember my childhood, my mountains, my dear fellow mountain folks, and if I meet one of my good friends somewhere, I ask for a kreuzer [9] or two, then I drop by a tavern, where it is cheap, and write *From the Mountain and Below the Mountain*. There may be even three days in a row that I do not eat any warm dish. But I am happy, because I am independent, I do not *bendam* anyone, but the one who is honest about his thoughts and actions«.

It is neither bohemian nor a dervish way of displaying poverty; nor is it the Bosnian

trait which had been named by Austrians as »kulturfeindlich«, [10] in their giddiness and incapability of understanding other nations.

You will find no verb *bendati* (meaning: acknowledge, appreciate), neither in Vuk's dictionary [11] nor in our latest ones. Petar Kočić uses it not only in his personal correspondence but also in his stories where he describes a characteristic of a man. The priest of Mračaj, in the well-known story of the same name, says proudly and gloomily: »But the priest of Mračaj, if you want to know, *benda* little both the bishop and this court«. In the same way, David Štrbac, according to the attorney's words in *Sudanija*, »does not acknowledge any God, emperor, patriarch, bishop, monk, priest, boss, or aga«.

But the people of Kočić, those real people from Krajina, as well as the characters in his stories, and also Petar Kočić himself, are not only resilient, proud and headstrong, but they have one characteristic more: they can mock, with a particularly developed talent for satire that easily turns into sarcasm and negation. »Some of them«, Petar Kočić has written, »are of a bold character, and the others are fond of joking and mockery, and too glad to make fun of everyone in their face«. And it was also here that Petar Kočić was a man of his tribe. His satire was, as you know, a real »whip for tyrants« in many of its features, and many of his sentences have become »household words« among people. His satire is so typical of Krajina and its people that it sometimes goes beyond the bounds of literature, and far from being moderate or in good taste, it »descends into marketplace humour«, as one critic observed.

Also in his personal life, Petar Kočić wholly belonged to his birthplace and clan, both physically and morally. In the Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina he was a real scourge with his interruptions of all his opponents, which meant both the government and the majority of the Assembly. For example, when the president concluded that the absolute majority was in favour of the governmental proposal, Petar Kočić would interject: »Not an absolute majority, but a submissive majority!« If there was no quarrel, he would figure out how to cause one. Just released from jail, after one of his longer imprisonments, he started showing his Krajina defiance right away; in the guest registration form of a hotel, in the column »Arriving from?«, he wrote: »From Banjaluka, without a constable«, and in the column »Day of departure«, he wrote: »when I want«. Regarding his physical appearance, this is how P. Slijepčević described Petar Kočić: »Sturdy and strong, big-eyed, with a drooping moustache; a brigand who had just stepped out of the Bosnian forests, so his European suit fitted him in a tight and negligent manner; and on his plain, high forehead, as on a shoreline, one could still spot the air tides of white forest glades. When he spoke, it was as if the mountain spoke behind him«.

That was Petar Kočić personally, physically like a block cut out from a mountain, or rather, cut out from the Kočić Hill, and ethically — a man that belonged to his birthplace, who went through Vienna and Belgrade and Sarajevo, almost unaffected, both in a positive and a negative sense he remained what he was, bearing within himself, in Isidora Sekulić's words, »a complex of a mountainous Bosnian character«.

What shaped the torment and grandeur of Kočić's life, also formed both the strength

and weakness of his literary works. Petar Kočić was one of the writers who carried within themselves a full and pre-formed picture of the world they wanted and had to present, one of those writers who collected as many intellectual means and expressive capabilities as they needed to make their work come true, one of those writers whose existence was not devoted to literature, but whose literature and whole existence were in the service of life and certain of its needs.

It is characteristic of Petar Kočić the writer how easily and without regret he would desert the field of art and move to the area of politics, nonfiction, and science (ethnography, sociology, history). He dealt with the topics from his stories in his assembly speeches, or in the articles based on the well-known pattern of Jovan Cvijić.

[12] He wrote to Cvijić concerning his semi-scientific focus on the topic of Zmijanje: »I deeply regret not being a geographer or a historian by vocation, because I could better and more conscientiously describe this interesting region«. That shows how little Petar Kočić belonged to a specific form of expression, and how much to his »region« and to what he considered his duty and obligation towards it.

The critics of those times noted Kočić's departures from the literary terrain, but they did not stop there, going so far as to write about the too long and indeed too overstuffed, but otherwise powerful and interesting *Sudanija* that »it was one of the most boring things that even the idlest man could have written«.

That is how some contemporaries wrote about Petar Kočić, not even trying to peek behind those momentary and occasional weaknesses of Kočić the writer, to search out the deeper motives and hard conditioning which lay behind them and which deserved to be studied and evaluated, more profoundly and better than the *fin de siècle* aesthetes could have done, or than we can do here this evening.

And for Petar Kočić, the man of »one reality«, as was once well said, everything was of little importance compared to the grandeur of his passionate service to his community. The separate and different ways of expression: art, science, politics, all were ultimately one in front of his passion; and from his point of view, he could say the same of art, science and politics as he used to say of his fellow peasants in Zmijanje: »They are all family and kinfolk«.

With his rather instinctive character, he was certainly wrong, not even having any idea that he possessed the means and tools by which he could »vividly describe« not only Zmijanje but also the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and even more than that — that he had great poetic sensibility, the ability to see and feel, to say and express. Apparently, if he was aware of it, he considered his ability only as one of his means in the great battle which was the core, meaning and purpose of his life.

That same passion for serving the struggle and obsession with it was both the hallmark and the main flaw in Kočić's oeuvre. They are the reason why the whole of his work is based on a narrow platform, unlike almost all of our writers. This fact was noticed by Kočić's contemporaries, as well. For example, it was written with good reason that Kočić did not see anything beyond the Bosnian horizon, and that »not even Herzegovina« was there. One could go even further, and again with good reason say that not even all of Bosnia was there either; not even closely. In some thirty or so

stories by Kočić, there is none which has for a topic a man outside Kočić's circle. Jura Paligraf and Smajo Subaša are the only apparent exceptions; they prove the rule. Due to that great concentration of the whole interest and attention in Kočić's work, it is understandable that there can be felt a certain one-string-fiddle monotony in his tone and a poverty in his themes and variations.

His first, still beginner's story *Tuba* contains the main elements of the majority of his later stories. Already on the second page of this first story, the topic is the troubles of his countryfolk, then the Krajina uprising, David Štrbac and his badger; there is reference to a tithe of the crops to the state and a third to the landlord, even the official language is mocked. In short, there is a full register and complete inventory of all his future literary work. On that limited stage of Kočić's work the characters inevitably collide and reappear, the comparisons and whole expressions are repeated, and so on. Typically, all Kočić's characters actually existed on that little piece of land, with some of them still living there, and the critics and publicists, who have liked to dig into these things, could easily identify them. The closed environment and his attachment to it generated other flaws and weaknesses in Kočić the author, imposing on him unrewarding and weak topics and, apart from the successful satire and invective, misleading him into making cheap jokes, doubtful humour; in short, it dragged him below the level of his talent and his good taste. Further, what we named the narrowness of his platform is the reason why the whole of Kočić's work tended toward overstatement and bore the typical raised voice of Krajina people, »always a note higher than normal«, as one contemporary wrote.

The tribute which Petar Kočić had to pay also with his literary work was felt most strongly by J. Kršić and expressed most brilliantly in his study on Petar Kočić; he wrote: »Petar Kočić is a good writer and an author of a rare talent, but still it is a difficult task to consider him *only* an artist. Because Kočić was a *one-piece* man«. That is to say, there existed inseparably connected within him an artist and a fighter, a writer-poet and a man of his region. Further, he said that in Kočić »there remained little of the surplus life energy out of which a great piece of art was harvested«.

In order not to create even for a moment a false image of Kočić's work in front of you — although our task here is not to present his whole work, but only its conditioning — we should supplement that image, even in a few words only.

It should not be forgotten that all that narrowness could not prevent Petar Kočić from becoming what he was, i.e., the first true author and artist from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the author who »introduced the Bosnian countryman into Serbian literature«, the author who revived the village story in Serbian literature.

The way he was, Petar Kočić as an author undoubtedly represented Krajina better than Bosnia, and Bosnia better than, for example, Herzegovina or any other of our countries, but in his essentially narrow and specifically Krajina-like way he, on the other hand, expressed to a great extent the revolted and revolt-prone part of any soul of his times, not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina but in the entire Serbian people, even beyond these boundaries. He also gave an artistic literary expression to that deep revolt and desire for resistance, one-sided and narrowed, not complete and not perfect, but the most perfect one he could have offered in view of his origin and the

current circumstances of his times and private life. This is all. But there are not so many writers in our literature of whom this can be stated without demur.

If we could also present here Petar Kočić in his role of a national rights defender and a politician, we could clearly see where his »life energies« were flowing to and where they were wasted, the energies out of which, in J. Kršić's words, »a great piece of art was harvested«. We cannot do it this evening. Yet there is one side of Petar Kočić the national rights defender about which we have to say something here in conclusion, and that is his struggle for language purity, not only for the purity of form but for the spirit as well, even for the survival of the language.

In the complex relation between the occupying and exploitative Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the issue of language was raised from the very beginning, and P. Kočić raised it with a harshness that is more difficult to understand today, but which was justified and necessary at that time. (Just remember the struggle that was carried on by all the other Slavic nations of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the 19th century!) First of all, the occupying government introduced the German language into all major institutions and more important branches of life. And at the places where the national language remained, with local authorities, in schools, and so on, there was another danger of spoiling and distorting the language, undermining it from the inside and watering it down to the level of a poor and inferior speech meant for communication among the lower-class people and, as much as was necessary, between the upper-class and lower-class people, to a speech with no roots, spirit or sap, no beauty and style, with no relation to tradition and living sources of the wide national language, and with the pre-restricted and limited possibilities of cultural development.

That speech, on which the perfidious and limited authorities under Kállay wanted to impose the sounding name of »the Bosnian language«, in fact, sought to separate the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the larger Croatian and Serbian cultural centres, from Belgrade and Zagreb.

With his powerful and unerring instinct, Petar Kočić felt this, as a man of strong intuitions and quick reflexes. Reading Kočić's works, you have been able to see how much attention he devoted to the issue of language destruction, with what sharpness he wrote about that destruction, lashing it with his irony, often in a too broad and too overwhelming way.

But, Petar Kočić acutely felt that it was not a matter of philology, that the language issue was just part of the general pressure and general systematic reduction of one nation to a lower level of existence, suitable for domination and exploitation. As when Herzegovinian monk Joanikije Pamučina noticed very realistically in his times that we, even under the Turks, »by losing all our possessions, had lost our words and our pure speech«. Kočić's fellow countryman, Vasa Pelagić, had raised the language issue to the foreign occupier forty years before Petar Kočić. Brought in front of the Great Majlis (council) in Sarajevo, [13] as he stated in his *Autobiography*, »he was the first one in Bosnia to make the Great Majlis in Sarajevo write down the examinations (i.e., keep records) in the Serbian language, saying he was not going to speak in any other

language«.

From the very beginning, Petar Kočić raised the issue of *the language* between him and the occupier-enemy. In his famous prose poem *Prayer*, he said the following: »Oh, Lord, great and powerful and unreachable, give me the strong and great words which the enemy cannot understand, but the people can«. For Petar Kočić, the language is a whole with its people and country, holy and inviolable like them. Sometimes it seems as if all of Kočić's work had lain somewhere in the depths of the language, and he dug it up like a statue, and brought it to light and in front of the world. Kočić knew very well (or better: felt) that speaking and writing clearly and correctly also meant resisting the enemy in that way, defying it, giving a proof of one's life energy; and vice versa, that adopting the new, deformed expressions in the official language meant as much as acknowledging the fact of one's oppression and subservience, opening the way to a complete capitulation. One character in the story *Sudanija* gives a piece of advice to the defendant: if you want to succeed in court, »throw in as many of their words into your speech as possible«. And the difference in speech was considerable. Another character in *Sudanija* says something notable: »As long as a soldier keeps his bayonet out of its scabbard, you cannot be sure if you are convicted or acquitted«.

Petar Kočić flogged that language, the language of the enemy, not only in his literary work. He struggled with it in his everyday life, in the field. (In court, when asked if he had understood the indictment, he answered that he had not understood it completely, »because it had been written in some language similar to Serbian«.) He delivered speeches against that language, proposed special commissions, argued with the government representatives over some words. He pursued it to the point of pedantry, exclusivity, but only ostensibly, because Petar Kočić both suspected and knew that behind words there existed their meaning, the thought and will of the person uttering them or writing them down, and that, therefore, words can be a mobile, real and living force, which, under certain conditions, can become equal and identical to — the deed, to the reality they reflect. And that is why Kočić pushed the representative of the Bosnian government to leaf through Vuk's dictionary in order to find arguments against Kočić's linguistic opposition, and this meant half the battle was already won, i.e., not agreeing to be separated from the national unity nor permanently shifting to the narrow Austrian, so-called Bosnian track.

In that struggle, Petar Kočić showed not only persistence and aggression but much fascinating subtlety, as well as a sense of measure, philosophical sense and good manners. Dealing with the legal proposals, he used to make remarks like these: These »shalls«, »musts«, »must nots« sound disagreeable in our language. (For example: »the prosecutor shall specify the title« etc., instead of »the prosecutor will specify the title« etc.) Petar Kočić offered a fine explanation for it. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, he said, everything is generally hard and rigid anyway, »and it is no good to introduce that harshness and austerity into laws, especially when the language in use is not idiomatic«.

So Petar Kočić was not only an author or only an armchair worker regarding the subject. We know from his biographical data that he used to polish and refine his sentences in solitude. But he could do more than that. The writer of *From the Mountain and Below the Mountain* went deep into everyday life and a true struggle for

the language, as well as for all other things, for the country and the people likewise. And it seems to me that the best way to conclude this short presentation of the three crucial elements from Kočić's life and work is if we revive in front of our eyes his highlander figure pounding his fist, with thunder in his eyes, in the Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and shouting out to the representatives of one great power in his loud peasant voice, under a heavy blond moustache: »Everything has been taken from us, we have been enslaved on all fronts, but we do not give you our language. That is our hope and comfort«.

Thus we have concluded the presentation of the last of the three elements in Kočić's life and work — the country, the people and the language. Thus we have also concluded our talk on Petar Kočić this evening.

Translated by Ana Stanović Obradović and Mirjana Savić Obradović.

Editor's Note: Ivo Andrić first gave a shorter lecture on Kočić at the Department of South Slavic Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Belgrade University in the summer semester of 1949/50. A cycle of six lectures about Petar Kočić, known as "The Land, the People and the Language of Petar Kočić," the writer gave at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad in 1954/55.

Сабрана дела Иве Андрића, Књ. 13, *Уметник и његово дело*, Удружени издавачи, Просвета – Београд и др, 1981. (Collected works of Ivo Andrić, Vol. 13, Prosveta, Beograd, 1981.)

Уз сагласност **Задужбине Иве Андрића, Београд, Србија.**

With the permission from **The Ivo Andrić Foundation, Beograd, Serbia.**

Notes

1. A major administrative province of the former Ottoman Empire. ↩
2. A stećak (stećci in plural form) is a monumental medieval tombstone typical of Old Bosnia, meaning 'tall, standing thing'. ↩
3. Land registry in the Ottoman Empire. ↩
4. Milenko S. Filipović (1902-1969), famous Serbian ethnologist. ↩
5. Northwestern part of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina; coincides with Bosnian Krajina to some extent. ↩
6. »Serfdom is a cultural barrier.« ↩
7. They've gone to war! ↩
8. Of course, here we are not judging the mentality as such, but only looking for an answer to the following question: how is it presented in the work of P. Kočić, and how and to what extent did it slow down or maybe even limit his work and life. ↩
9. A small coin in Austria-Hungary. ↩
10. That is hostile to culture. ↩
11. Vuk Karadžić. ↩

12. Jovan Cvijić, Serbian geographer and university head, 1865-1927. ↩
13. Local government assembly. ↩

The preceding text is copyright of the author and/or translator and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.