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“Silent Gunpowder” - Angelo, Andelo

Darko Cvijetić

Father would often take me to the movies. He enjoyed watching films, so he used to take me with him. Only in college did I realize that I was different, that I was of the Yugoslav origin.

Of the Yugoslav or Serbo-Croatian origin - something like that.

Bota, my father, took great pride in it. Since my childhood days, he kept saying that sometime he would explain to me how I got the name Angelo.

So, he would take me to the movies, and I remember one amazing film that we watched together in 2019.

The film was ‘Silent Gunpowder’, and we watched it at an unusual afternoon film showing for the Festival of European Film Culture or something like that.

I was shocked... The film had a glaze of complete craziness, although you could not say that we were not used to watching films full of violence.

But that film, that sort of violence, was totally different, something that brought out some deeply rooted innate restlessness in my blood. On some mountain, people from two neighboring villages were fighting their own world war, and speaking the language of my father.

They killed each other so brutally, shamelessly and wildly that I felt shivers run down my spine.

This is me, I thought while watching the film, and my father, sitting next to me, was covered with sweat, absorbing the film with his face partly in a spasm.

I had never seen my dad so frightened, so ashamed...

(I later searched for the film on the Internet, the director was Bato Tzengic and the music, full of lament and horrors of mourning, was composed by Goran Bregović.)

At that point, Father tried to explain to me who I actually was and where I was from.

‘You belong to these folks’, he said, ‘they are us’.

'Who is us?', I asked him.

'Well, all, all of them are us, they just keep killing each other', he said and burst into tears.

I can't remember ever seeing my Father cry.

'Dad, calm down, please!' I hugged him in vain.

He started chaotically explaining to me how our blood was mixed up in the gunpowder juice, that it was easily inflammable, and as heavy as black soil trodden down.

'All of them are yours — your grandmother Karmela's and your relatives, and your grandfather Milutin's relatives, and also mine, all those slaughtered, tortured, beaten up, burned people, all those crying women, all those laments, my son... There was a boy that you were named after. He was good, he was my friend, we were inseparable during the war...

He, Angelo, my son, he was... he killed himself with a hand grenade, because he couldn't bear all that any longer, all that hatred and blood. In our language his name and your name are spelled Andjelo, but the pronunciation is similar... You keep his memory, my son!"

'That's why we have wings, Dad, isn't it?', I said smiling.

He looked at me.

He was crying and he said: 'Yes, that is why both of you have wings!'

'Do you know, my son,' he added, wiping away a remaining tear, 'that Rembrandt painted The Night Watch as a daylight scene...'

Translated by Ana Stanović Obradović and Mirjana Savić-Obradović

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