

Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

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

There Is Less and Less Space

Amir Brka

The earth has done its work.
We wouldn't have thought it,
my brother and I,
but a friend said to us
"Your father's gotten slimmer."
"Huh?"
"His grave is sinking in!"

We went to the gravedigger
to order the gravestone.
"Don't worry,"
he said,
"everything will be just right."

But we wanted a solid gravestone,
cost didn't matter to us.
"Don't you worry,
this one is good,
this is marble,
lasts forever."

Then we went to dig the foundation,
and brought cement and gravel.

"Watch out, don't dig so close," the gravedigger said,
"or you might run into bones."

Well,
though a year has passed,
the earth still needs more.

How much time does it need?
So we backed away
and made a big effort,
it's not as easy
as people often think.

On father's gravestone it said
that he was a tourist;
he'd traveled to Mecca.

I thought,
is that necessary?
Not to travel,
but to write such an inscription.

And I thought
of father's
knotty toes,
and backed away further from the grave.
The gravedigger brought me back.

The man had unbearably green eyes.

I don't know what my brother thought.
He kept quiet
and smoked as he was digging.

While we paused, having a beer:
"We were sloppy,"
my brother said.

Yeah, but we'll get better,
this is the first father
we've ever buried.
Now we've got experience,
I said to my brother.

Father never buried any father of his own:
he thought life was Good Field -
our old hometown.
But when death approached,
nevertheless,
he felt Evil coming.

"Do you see that beauty?"
he said to me.
"Take a good look,
my son!

Nothing of that
you can see
when you're dead."

He'd come to doubt
therefore
everything else

except the body
in which he never had
really believed.

And he asked us,
accordingly,
to choose for his coffin's cover
as thick lumber as we could
and let him see it
right away –
while he still had eyes.

I couldn't do anything about it,
(more precisely: nothing).

Then he went himself
to the undertaker.

"Time for me to go,"
he replied
when anyone asked
where he was headed.

Till then he thought
that he knew.

Now I think
that it was true
when Schopenhauer said
it's a bigger sin
to give birth
than to kill.

Though he got called
a defeatist for it.

Pascal also
holds
that a pessimist
is an optimist
who thinks.

Mother came to check out our work,
then went home by herself.
"She'll cry,"
brother said,
"Let's go to her."
I couldn't.
He didn't understand me
and stayed with me

till morning
to explain
what a fuck up
I actually was.
He only stopped
when I asked him
from what standpoint
he was condemning me;
from the graveyard perhaps?

The graveyard, anyway,
is expanding faster and faster,
as I noticed.

I thought some more
about how
one day without fail
unless something significant
changes
we'll run out of space,
and then
because of that
the future decisive struggle
will be between the dead and the living.
And I could already tell
among the second category
there will be more and more traitors.

©1998 by Amir Brka

*Translated by Wayles Browne and Sasha Skenderija - © 2009 Wayles Browne and
Sasha Skenderija*

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.