Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

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

Between East and West: Three Bosnian Writer-Rebels: Kočić, Andrić, Selimović

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Bordered by rivers and the Dinaric range, mountainous Bosnia, which once was an independent kingdom, has always been difficult for outsiders to conquer and control. The Ottoman Empire, which entered the country at the invitation of some rebellious magnates (from which came the saying "Bosnia fell with a whisper" – "šaptom Bosna pade") ruled that turbulent land for more than four hundred years (1463-1878). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the Ottoman tide in Europe receded as a result of several wars with Austria and Russia, Bosnian spahis turned homeward from their lost estates in Galicia, Hungary, and Bessarabia, placing increased pressure on the local peasantry and causing the social unrest and rebellion which culminated in the uprising (ustanak) of 1875-1878.

When their arch-enemy Austria entered Bosnia in 1878, with a mandate from the Great Powers at Berlin to restore order and solve "the agrarian problem," it must have seemed to the Moslem third of the population that this was the final blow; while to the Christian peasantry, who at first welcomed the Austrians as liberators, it soon became apparent that they had exchanged the Turkish yoke for a heavier one. Austria retained the repressive Turkish system, including the punitive taxes and corvees, and failed to abolish serfdom in a forthright manner, while courting the support of the Moslem beys, the Croatian Catholics, and the Serbian čaršija (merchant class). The Austrian failure to solve the agrarian problem over a period of more than thirty years (1878-1914) contributed directly to the events of 1914, including the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Gavrilo Princip, the son of a Bosnian Serbian peasant.

PETAR KOČIĆ

Given the predominantly oral character of Bosnian culture (in 1900, 90% of the population was illiterate), and the intimate connection between the oral bard (guslar) and the hero, as exemplified in the dual Moslem and Christian traditions of immortalizing their heros in epic songs (junačke pesme), it seems appropriate that Bosnia's first modern writer of fiction, Petar Kočić, who was raised in the oral tradition, played a direct role, through his writings and life, in the long chain of events that led to 1914.

Petar Kočić (1877-1916) was born in the hamlet of Stričići, in the mountainous area

called Zmijanje, not far from Banja Luka. Kočićk's father, Gerasim, a priest and Serbian nationalist, spent seven months in jail in the so-called "Crna Kuća" (Black House) in Banja Luka for having taken part in a demonstration during a visit by the Crown Prince Rudolph in 1888. When Petar's mother died (he was two at the time) he was sent to live with his grandmother in a peasant zadruga, an extended family of thirty-six individuals. In the zadruga each person had a specific responsibility, and before long Petar was put to watching the lambs, and later the sheep. As far as we know, Petar was an illiterate shepherd until the age of eleven, when he was sent for schooling to the monastery of Gomionica, where his father was abbot. His two-year stay at Gomionica, called "the Serbian shrine" (srpska ćaba) instilled in Petar the cult of medieval Serbia's greatness, as well as a patriotism that was both mystical and religious. Although he left the monastery after two years, completing his primary education at the Serbian Orthodox school in Banja Luka, he returned to Gomionica every summer, and it was during such visits that he heard much of the lore that would later appear in his stories.

Petar was the best student in his class at Banja Luka, and continued to do excellent work during his first three years of gymnasium in Sarajevo (1891-1894), in such subjects as Greek, Latin, German, mathematics, and "the land language" (zemaljski jezik – the Austrian term for Serbo-Croatian). In his fourth year of gymnasium, however, Petar became angry at his religion teacher over a poor grade, threw his book and swore; he was dismissed form class and fined. According to his classmate Lazar Kondić, this incident changed Kočić from an ambitious, disciplined student, into a truant and frequenter of kafanas and bars. After a couple of incidents in bars, involving the singing of nationalistic songs and a brawl, Petar was expelled from school and sent home; but he travelled to Serbia instead, finishing his gymnasium there (in 1899), under conditions of extreme hardship and want. While in Belgrade Kočić met Janko Veselinović, whose popular short stories and novels romanticized Serbian peasant life. Petar showed Janko a few poems he had written, and was advised to try prose instead.

It was not until he got to Vienna University, where he enrolled in the Department of Slavistics in the fall of 1899, that Kočić tried his hand at prose. His very first story "Tuba" (1900), begins with an idyllic country scene, but soon shifts to the plaight of two landless young lovers, Tuba and her boyfriend Blagi (Blagoje). Blagi is conscripted by the Austrian army an dies of a mysterious illness in camp at Graz – a fate not uncommon to young Bosnian mountaineers, judging from its frequency as a subtheme in Kočić. When Tuba wails at the end of the story Ümete nas Graz" (Graz has destroyed us!") one feels that she is not just bewailing her own fate, but the fate of Bosnia as well. For it was in Vienna, surrounded by the monuments of Austria's greatness, and the glitter, that Kočić's Slavic patriotism burned most fiercely, as he remembered home and the Serbian "ćaba" of Gomionica.

Nourished as he was by the heroic songs of his childhood, and by the ideological intransigence of Njegoš's Gorski vijenac (The Mountain Wreath, 1847), it was in Vienna that Kočić's "steel" was tempered, as he took part in student demonstrations and helped prepare memoranda to the Austrian government, demanding freedom of press and assembly for Bosnia, and castigating Austria for failing to make good on its promise to the Great Powers to solve the agrarian problem. Such memoranda were

not taken lightly by the Austrians, since copies were sent to the other participating powers of the Berlin Agreement. Peter Kočić must have understood the seriousness of his political activities, and the consequences they might have for his career. As he wrote in a letter to Mila Vukmanović, whom he later married:

> "I am suffering today and tormenting myself with school, only so that I may win a place for you and me in society. But you ought to know this, as well: that I shall spends perhaps the greater part of my life in jails and prisons, because of all us students are going to begin a struggle against the "Švabe" (Austrians), who plunder our nation, deprive it of its freedom, and destroy its happiness."

It is truly ironic that at the same time that Petar found framework for political action, he also found the milieu in which to develop his talents as a writer. As a member of the Serbian academic society "Zora" ("Dawn") in Vienna, he came in contact with Pavle Lagarić, also an aspiring writer. It is to Lagarić's undying credit that he recognized Kočić's superior gifts, and tht he taught Petar the elements of the new realistic short story, moving him away from the romanticism of Janko Veselinović. Petar adapted to the new style very easily publishing his first book of short stories From the Mountain and from the Foot of the Mountain (S planine I ispod plantine, 1902) within two years of his meeting Lagarić. Several of these stories he first read in draft to the members of the Zora group, making changes in response to his listerns'criticisms.

Between 1902 and 1905 Petar Kočić published three volumes of short stories, under the same title S planine i ispod planine. One story, "Jazavac pred sudom," ("The Badger in Court") he adapted into a one-act play, which has since become part of the repertory of the Belgrade National Theatre. In this story another of Kočić's characters from real life, David Štrbac, takes a badger to court in a sack, to sue him for eating his corn field. This skillfully written story and play is a thinly disguised attack on Austria (the badger), and on those members of the Serbian čaršija in Bosnia, who would settle for religious and cultural autonomy of the serfs. It was during the reading of "Jazavac" before the Zora society, in 1903, and the ensuing debate, that the Serbian students in Vienna united for the first time against the autonomy platform of the Bosnian Serbian leaders (narodni prvaci), supporting Kočić's position that serfdom had to be abolished through obligatory redemption by the state. Thus "Jazavac" made a direct contribution to the political struggle against Austrian rule in Bosnia.

Besides mocking the Austrians for their obsession with laws and regulations (David Štrbac tells the judge that since the Emperor has laws for everything, he surely must have laws for badgers that eat corn fields). Kočić pokes fun a them through a string of couble-meaning malapropisms, such as "ukopacija" (burial) for "okupacija" (occupation) and "velevlažni" (all damp) for "veleuvažni" (a term of address, meaning "most respected.") He also takes perverse delight in the confusion, perplexity, and anxiety that contact with Bosnia and Bosnians causes in the representatives of civilized, law abiding Austria. When the judge laughs at David for bringing a badger to court ["Oho, people, people! Eh, this is a real fool, the fool of crazy Bosnia! Prosecute

a badger! What else will a man experience in this crazy Bosnia! Prosecute a badger! Eh, this is a real fool, the fool of fools!"]… we laugh too, in anticipation, because we suspect that the small, gimpy David is a shrewd fellow who may get the better of the judge yet.

Another memorable Kočić character taken from real life is Simeun Djak, once the deacon of Gomionica monastery and the drinking pal of the late Abbot Partenija. Petar Kočić wrote a cycle of five stories about Simeun, a mock epic character, who while wearing his own version of an Austrian military uniform takes revenge on local Moslems for centuries of oppression ("The Violence of Simeun Djak," "The True Violence of Simeun Djak," and "Simeun Djak's Duel.") Simeun even wins an Austrian decoration, which he refuses ("Rakija, mother!") In spite of all his buffoonery, and his boasting about battles never fought, Simeun Djak is a man of the people, whose drinking makes his feelings of impotence in the face of foreign oppression. Simeun has a šaldžija (jokester/trickster) quality, beneath which there runs a stream of sorrow and muffled anger. One thinks of Kočić's eventual fate, as Simeun cries out: "If there were no jokes and stories.. believe me, my children, half the people in our unhappy fatherland would go mad and insane from sorrow and grief!"

Kočić left Vienna in 1905, a highly respected author among his countrymen. His S planine I ispod planine had been well received by Jovan Skerlić, the foremost Serbian critic of the day. Kočić went to Belgrade with his wife Milka, expecting to find work, but after a few months they had to settle in Skoplje, where he was to teach Serbo-Croatian language and literature at the Serbian gymnasium there. This was his first experience at living under Ottoman rule (Macedonia remained in Turkish hands until 1912); and he remained less than a year in Skoplje, although, ironically, it wasn't the Turks who were responsible for his departure. He made the mistake of writing an article for the Belgrade newspaper Politika ("A Notorious Wedding"), criticizing the Serbian archimandrite in Skoplje, which led to his transfer to Bitolj, a move he refused.

Within a year of his departure from Vienna he was back in Bosnia, in Sarajevo, where he eventually was given the position of Secretary of the Serbian society "Prosveta" ("Education"). He wrote his brother Llija a letter full of enthusiasm at the amazing reversal in his fortunes.

> "I have a pleasant bit of news for you. The Prosveta society yesterday, in executive session, unanimously selected me for its Secretary, with a monthly pay of 100 florins. When the full board confirms my appointment in June, I shall be completely insured for 20,000 crowns… This position is just right for me, because I won't have to depend on The Svaba [Austria], and that has always been my ideal."

But Kočić was not fated to remain long in Sarajevo, either. He evidently had not learned from his experience in Skoplje that governments regard journalism more seriously than literature, and he had applied to the "Švaba," prior to getting the Prosveta position, for permission to publish a humorous-satirical newspaper to be

called “Jazavac.” In his application, he stated that “Jazavac” would devote itself to pointing out “everything that is rotten and sick in our contemporary social life.” His request brought him to the attention of the Bosnian State Government, whose information Bureau prepared a full report on his activities since he had been expelled from the Sarajevo gymnasium ten years earlier. The report branded him “a fanatical revolutionary” and said that he was the leader of an “Austrophobic movement dedicated to organizing a panserbian uprising in Bosnia.”

Kočić’s days in Sarajevo were numbered. After taking part in a demonstration against a Croatian newspaper (Hrvatsi dnevnik), whose policies enraged him, Kočić was given forty-eight hours to leave Sarajevo. He moved back to his home region of Banja Luka, but the Austrian authorities were not satisfied with merely banishing him. They sought a pretext for putting him in jail, which Petar provided them rather quickly. In 1907 he applied for a license to publish a new newspaper, “Otadžbina” (Fatherland), which was granted. The first issue came out on the Serbian national holiday, St. Vitus’s Day, June 28, 1907. In that issue Kočić attacked Austrian rule, and its effect on the peasant. In the piece “Težak” (Farmer), a peasant attacks the Austrian judicial system [“Judge me I say by God’s justice and man’s. We don’t judge, he says, in our empire according to justice but by the paragraph.”]

For these and other comments in “Otadžbina” Kočić and his managing editor Vasa Kondić were jailed, Petar first receiving two months in the “Crna Kuća,” then eight, and finally fifteen. While he was at the jail in Banja Luka, in solitary confinement, he seems to have kept up his courage, as peasants appeared before his window and waved to him on market day; but when he was transferred to Tuzla, where he was not allowed to talk to anyone, not even to his jailors, his spirits flagged, as he began to feel alone and forsaken by his former friends. The fact that he was married and had a child worked negatively on him, and he worried about their welfare. He wrote to Milka:

> “Maybe you blame me for everything that has happened. It is not my fault, because all this had to happen. I know that you are suffering, and that you are cursing me within yourself, but you are wrong. Our people have been killed and crushed for so long, that someone had to stand up and cry out against the heavy oppression and injustice which have been done to us without cease. On this occasion that somebody was your Kočo… I know that you are already laughing bitterly at my words, and whispering: “Ej, my crazy Kočo.”

Kočić’s sentence was commuted at the beginning of 1909, as part of an imperial amnesty. His health broken, he went first to his home region of Zmijanje, where he rested for two months and collected material for a folk narrative (narodno kazivanje) about the origins of the settlers of the region. The resulting piece, called “Zmijanje,” was published in the Belgrade journal Srpski književnik glasnik (The Serbian Literary Herald) of which Jovan Skerlić was chief editor. In acknowledging receipt of the narrative, Skerlić wrote his friend of several years:

> "I have received your story, with the map… It's a very good piece, and our readers will enjoy it when it appears in our September issue. Allow me to repeat what I have already told you several times: Leave politics, which anyone can do, and do literature, in which you in your land are the only one."

For whatever reason, Kočić did not heed this advice, even though it represented a great compliment, since Skerlić was the preeminent Serbian critic of the day. When the Austrians allowed the formation of a Bosnian Parliament (Sabor) in 1910, Kočić ran for representative from his district and won. In 1911 he was bck in Sarajevo, full of enthusiasm, writing Milka in Banja Luka that he has just received an appointment to the Adminstrative and Cultural Council, a position which will enable him to bring her and their child to Sarajevo to live with him. He wrote no more stories, except for "Sudanija" ("Trials"), which is based on his experience in jail. Instead, he devoted himself to preparing brilliant speeches for the Sabor, full of wit, scholarship, and beautiful language. His speeches on "the agrarian problem," "forest rights," and the debasement of the Serbo-Croatian language are masterpieces. Yet the brisk pace, the heavy emotions, the hardships and shocks of his life began to take their toll in 1912, as Kočić gradually lost his enthusiasm and could no longer concentrate on the work of the Assembly. In 1913 he requested permission to take leave from his job on the Administrative and Cultural Council; a several months' stay at Ivan Planina did not help, and in January 1914 he was taken to the Belgrade Mental Hospital, where he died two years later.

Petar Kočić was a Bosnian hero, not only for his literary works, but for his life. His stories were popular with the new breed of revolutionaries that sprang up in Bosnia, just prior to 1914. Vladimir Gaćinović, who associated with Trotsky and Lenin in Geneva, once stated that in gymnasium he was a "Kočićevac," which implied not only a fan of Kočić's works, but one who was ready to follow his painful path. The circle that linked the literature and politics of the day was completed when, at the funeral of Jovan Skerlic in Belgrade in 1914, Gavrilo Princip carried a wreath as a representative of the Bosnian Youth, just a few weeks before leaving for Sarajevo to carry out the assassination. Princip, Danilo Ilić, and others, while admiring Kočić's martyrdom, had learned from his example that Bosnia could not be freed through the law and the courts.

Petar Kočić served as an inspiration not only for the Sarajevo conspirators, but also for a whole generation of pre-World War I Bosnian intellectuals, among them the future Nobel Prize winner, Ivo Andrić.

IVO ANDRIĆ

Ivo Andrić (1892-1975) was almost the complete antithesis of Kočić, both in temperament and background. A Croatian Catholic, from an old Sarajevo family of craftsmen, Ivo lost his father when he was two, spending most of his childhood in Visegrad, where he lived with his aunt and uncle, a Pole, who was commander of the local unit of the Austrian gendarmerie. In comparison to Petar Kočić's childhood, Andrić's orphanhood seems to have been relatively comfortable; he was fussed over by

his childless foster parents, had his own room (the best in the house), and read voraciously. Meanwhile, his real mother remained in Sarajevo, where she worked in a cilim (rug) factory, visiting her son each summer for a few weeks.

Andrić loved Visegrad and his schoolmates, and even after he left for Sarajevo, to attend gymnasium (1903-1912), he returned each year for summer vacation. He did not distinguish himself in gymnasium, repeating a year because of a failure in mathematics, and losing his scholarship from a Croatian society; but he did gain recognition as a poet, publishing two poems in Bosanska vila (1911), a very prestigious literary magazine, one of whose editors was Petar Kočić.

Ivo was popular among his fellow students, becoming head of the Croatian Progressive Student Organization, which under his direction merged with the Serbian progressive group, as an expression of the growing spirit of Yugoslavism among Bosnian students just before 1914. When the Sarajevo students decided to protest the Austrian dissolving of the Croatian Parliament (Sabor), in 1912, Ivo was a member of the student committee that planned the strike of February 18-19, which was brutally suppressed by the police. (Andrić is said to have held a dying young worker in his arms, while bullets whistled overhead.) His participation in the strike seems to have been Andrić's chief illegal, anti-government act. Yet biographers have continually aggrandized his role against Austria, ignoring his somewhat half-hearted disclaimers, while linking him to a "movement" called Mlada Bosna, which was no movement at all, but merely a name applied to the Bosnian student ferment by none other than Petar Kočić. (Kočić also liked to call Serbia the "Piedmont" of the South Slavs.)

In the summer of 1912, after graduation, Ivo Andrić left Sarajevo, making a touching farewell speech to the members of his student organization, at the railway station. In the words of one of his biographers, Miroslav Karaulac: "Andrić leaves Sarajevo at the moment when it becomes the very center of pain in the long neuralgia of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy." It seems clear that by the age of twenty, and particularly after the experience of the strike, Andrić had made a decision in favor of poetry and life, rather than politics and martyrdom. As Radovan Vucković writes: "By some deeper subconscious instinct and feeling of creative responsibility he distanced himself from the action which the future assassins were undertaking."

Andrić's next stop was Zagreb, where he enrolled in the Mathematics and Natural Sciences Faculty a strange choice for a poet who had flunked math (Karaulac guesses that this was the only department for which there were scholarships available). But Ivo had come to Zagreb not for math but poetry, and he had no problems making the acquaintance of writers like August Matoš, Ljubo Vizner, Krešo Kovačić, and Vladimir Cerina, because he already had some reputation both as a poet and a political activist. Indeed, when an anthology of young Croatian poets was published, in 1914, (Hrvatska mlada lirika) Ivo Andrić was the only Bosnian poet included. It was during his stay in Zagreb that he also developed a close attachment to Evgenija Gojmerac, with whom he later corresponded from prison.

In the fall of 1913 Ivo left Zagreb for Vienna, where he enrolled in the Department of Slavistics at the university. There he attended Milan Rešetar's lectures on "Serbo-Croatian Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century," as well as Josef

Jireček's "Government and Nations of the Balkan Peninsula in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century." In keeping with his Yugoslavism, Andrić joined both the Croatian "Zvonimir" student group and the Serbian "Zora" society the same club to which Petar Kočić had belonged ten years earlier and before which he had read and discussed his "Jazavac pred sudom," and other stories. But unlike Kočić, who had struggled with fierce poverty during his Vienna years, Andrić lived comfortably, renting a room in a fine old building just a few minutes walk from the university.

In the spring of 1914 Ivo continued his peregrinations, moving next to the Jagiellonian University in Cracow a change facilitated by his patron, Dr. Tugomir Alaupovic, then a member of the Bosnian State Council and formerly Andrić's professor at the gymnasium. His reason for asking for the transfer to Cracow was that the climate in Vienna was bad for his lungs. (He had first asked Alaupovic to send him to a Russian university, but this was not arranged.) One gets the impression, as one observes Andrić's travels, that he is trying to move as far away as possible from "the center of the pain," from the explosion the he knows will take place. When the news of the Sarajevo assassination reached him, on June 28, 1914, he didn't return to his room to gather up his papers and belongings. He set out directly for Zagreb, where he met his wealthy friend Čerina, and together they left for the coast. But Čerina left Andrić at Rijeka, proceeding on to Italy, while Ivo made his way to Split, where he waited for the police to arrest him, since he knew he was on their list of suspicious persons.

It is possible that Andrić had planned to go to Italy, too, but when his papers did not reach him in Rijeka (they were sent from Cracow to Zagreb and then returned to Cracow by mistake) he was forced to remain on the coast. In a few days he was caught in the Austrian dragnet, along with hundreds of Dalmatian nationalists, eventually ending up in Maribor prison, where he spent seven months. It is typical of Andrić's good luck that the Maribor prison was a model institution for its time. Nor was he kept in solitary confinement, as Kočić had been at the "Crna Kuca" in Banja Luka, and in Tuzla. Andrić has called Maribor prison "a small university," in which he began his study of English and had the opportunity to associate with other who shared the same culturally interests. (One is reminded of Milovan Djilas's comments about Sremska Mitrovica prison in the 1930's, when Mose Pijade transformed it into a communist training school.) It was in prison that Andrić studied Sören Kierkegaard's Either … Or, to which he is said to owe much of his philosophy, and it was also in Maribor that he began to read Walt Whitman and translated Oscar Wilde's "Ballad of Reading Gaol," with the help of a German version.

Yet in spite of the benefits he derived from sitting in an Austrian jail, including the patriotic notoriety, one does not have the impression that Andrić had strong convictions to sustain him during his captivity. For example, in the very beginning of his imprisonment, he wrote Evgenija from Split: "If you only knew what prison is like (and especially the Split one) you would be thankful to God that you are alive and free, and you would sing all day long and run in the grass." And later, from Maribor, he would write her: "It's unbelievably hard for me, harder than it's ever been; if I get through all this in one piece I'll know that God really loves me. Pray for me and write often. Do you understand?!" In other letters he tells Evgenija that his main concern is for his mother, that his health is so bad, but he will try to pull though for her sake, because he is her only son.

Andrić was no model revolutionary, but he made good use of his prison experience, publishing two volumes of poetic reminiscences: Ex Ponto (1918, the title an allusion to Ovid's Epistolae ex Ponto) and Nemiri (Unrests, in 1920). In Ex Ponto he writes of his humiliation, when cursed and spit upon as he marched through Maribor with the other prisoners ("they thought we were Serbian prisoners"); and in Nemiri, in his "Priča iz Japana" ("A Tale From Japan"), Andrić has transformed his student rebellion, jailing, and prison experience into an anecdote about a "Japanese" poet's heroism, finishing with a somewhat self-serving "sayonara" to the whole political arena. In the tale, the poet Mori Ipo has conspired with a group of 350 conspirators (the exact number of prisoners who were on the boat with Andrić from Split to Rijeka) against the decadent empress Au-Ung (Austria-Hungary?); he is banished for three years (like Andrić) but finally returns in triumph with the other conspirators. When the 350 assemble to divide up the power, they send for Mori Ipo, but he sends them a letter instead. He writes: "I humbly beg you to forgive me, because I cannot share authority with you, as I shared the struggle. Poets unlike other men are faithful only in the hour of calamity… . We poets are born for struggle; we are passionate hunters but we do not eat the prey." Ipo-Ivo also informs the committee of 350 that he is leaving, but "if any calamity of danger should befall our Empire … and the necessity arises for struggle and help, send for me." Andrić's prison experience turned out to be fertile ground for his creativity, not only in his early poetic works, but also in his later prose, in the short story "U zindanu," ("In Jail"), for example, and in his novella masterpiece Prokleta avlija (The Devil's Courtyard), where his knowledge of prison atmosphere makes us feel like we are inside the Stambul prison with Friar Petar.

In March, 1915, after the Austrian government decided that there was insufficient evidence with which to prosecute him for treason, Andrić was released from Maribor prison and exiled to the small village of Ovčarevo, Bosnia, in the custody of Friar Alojzije Perčinlić, Franciscan curate of the local church. Ivo's mother came to Ovčarevo as well, serving as housekeeper for Friar Perčnlić, while she nursed her son back to health. Andrić's confinement to Ovcarvo was more difficult for him than his imprisonment, according to a fellow Maribor inmate, Niko Bartulović, who wrote the foreword to Ex Ponto. At least in prison, says Bartulović, Andrić had the company of his friends, and within the four walls they were "free to comfort one another without fear and to encourage one another." Andrić himself wrote concerning his time in Ovčarevo: "My days pass in vain. The most beautiful wellsprings of my soul have dried up. I have lost contact with everyone who loves me and understands me" (Ex Ponto).

It must indeed have been difficult for a young man who had grown up in Bosnia, and had left it to attend university in Zagreb, Vienna, and Cracow, and who had tasted the bohemian life, to suddenly find himself thrust back into that Bosnia, limited to the company of a Franciscan friar and his mother, in a hamlet whose very name conveyed the image of shepherds and sheep. Yet Andrić's own picture of his exile in Ovčarevo is not totally bleak. For example, one letter to Evgenija is full of pious confidence that Divine Providence has sent him to Bosnia for a reason, and that his stay there would somehow be for the best. He tells her how he helps Friar Perčinlić, in his work with the parish youth, teaching the children to sing religious songs and raking the grounds. And even though we may sympathize with Andrić the young man, who is sometimes bored to the point of desperation, still we become excited at his intuition (or faith) that he has been forced to return to Bosnia for a reason. For while he is teaching the

children to sing “Muka Hristova” (“Christ’s Passion”) and raking the grounds, his mind or rather his subconscious, still in a state of shock at the contrast between Zagreb-Vienna-Cracow and Ovčarevo, has begun to look at this Bosnia in a new light. It may indeed have been at Ovčarevo that Ivo Andrić had his first major creative vision, as he followed the humble Friar Percinlić about his parish duties, listened to the Franciscan lore about their struggle for survival against the Turks, visited the monastery of Guča Gora near Travnik, and read the beautifully laconic chronicles from Turkish times.

It was in these humble Franciscans that Andrić, still a devout Catholic, found his own Croatian heroes to match the Serbian and Moslem junaci of the epic poems. Andrić’s Friar Marko, in the short stories “U musafirhani” (“The Guest House”) and “Kod kazana” (“At the Still”) is stubborn like Bosnia, and refuses to learn, but he is also able to withstand extreme hardship, is unwavering in his celibacy, and given to spells of “zanos,” a Bosnian kind of euphoria which is sometimes akin to religious ecstasy. (The Serbian monk Simeun Djak, in Kočić’s Simeun Djak cycle, is also given to zanos.) These Bosnian Franciscan friars, by the way, who belonged to a province called by the Church “Bosna Argentina” (Bosna Srebrena), followed their own set of rules, sometimes carried guns and dressed in civilian clothes, even owned land, and bribed Turkish officials.

In writing the stories of his “Franciscan cycle” Andrić was aided not only by his personal experience in Ovcarevo and Zenica with Father Perčinlić, but also by his research for his Ph.D. dissertation: Die Entwicklung des geistigen Lebens in Bosnien unter der Einwirkung der turkischen Herrschaft (The Development of Intellectual Life in Bosnia under the Influence of Turkish Rule, Graz 1924) in which he concluded, concerning the Ottoman rule in Bosnia: “It destroyed the fibre of Bosnian society and fatally wounded its spirit… . The Turks imported every species of oriental corruption.” Andrić was also aided, in choosing his plots and main characters, by the publication of the chronicles of several Franciscan monasteries (Fojnica, Kreševo, Kraljeva Sutjeska, Guča Gora), in the Glasnik zemaljskog muzeja (Herald of the State Museum) in Sarajevo. Glasnik also published several Moslem historical documents, including Mulla Bašeskija’s chronicle of life in Sarajevo in the second half of the eighteenth century, as well as Bašagic’s Kratak uvod u proslost Bosne i Hercegovine (A Short Introduction to the History of Bosnia and Hercegovina and Kapetanovic-Ljubušak’s Boj pod Banjomlukom godine 1737 (The Battle below Banja Luka, in 1737), from which Andrić drew his story “Mustafa Madjar.” Andrić’s use of real life characters (most of his monks were from the three monasteries of Kreševo, Fojnica, and Kraljeva Sutjeska) seems to be a reflection of oral tradition – particularly the epic tradition, which was even stronger in Kočić, who took almost all his characters from real life, without bothering to change their names.

Although something can be said for the influence of Kierkegaard on Andrić’s Weltanschauung, particularly with respect to his later pessimism and ambivalence toward the struggle between good and evil, one should not overlook his native ground, where the scent still lingered of a medieval Manichean-like heresy called “Bogomilism,” which flourished until the Turkish invasion. Andrić discussed this heresy in his doctoral dissertation, and although he doesn’t identify it by name in his stories one feels its presence, as for example in “Kod kazana,” where Friar Marko

reflects concerning the struggle between good and evil, and God's role: "How powerful is evil, how brave, even proud; it is everywhere, even where a person least expects it. And God often deserts His own, and leaves them to wicked fate… . There is as much of it as God has given us. Now what can I do about it!"

Ivo Andrić's exile to Bosnia, as a result of his student activism, was pivotal in his creative development, forcing him back to his own soil. He never got far from Bosnia creatively again, even though he travelled for twenty years and lived in several European capitals, as a member of the Yugoslav diplomatic corps (1921-1941). And when he was forced by war into a second exile, this time in Belgrade from 1941 to 1945, he returned in his mind to Bosnia, and wrote the two major novels (Bridge on the Drina and Travnik Chronicle) which brought him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961.

MEŠA SELIMOVIĆ

A third Bosnian writer-rebel, who reminds one of Petar Kočić in his uncompromising idealism, and of Andrić's Friar Marko in his stubbornness and moral integrity, is Meša Selimović.

Meša Selimović (1910-1982) grew up in Tuzla, in a once rich, traditional Moslem family. When he was eight years of age, Bosnia became part of the new Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, created as a result of President Wilson's Fourteen Points and the Treaty of Versailles (1918).

Although he went to a Moslem grade school (an experience which he seems to have largely detested), Meša attended an integrated secondary school (gymnasium) in Tuzla, of which he had the fondest memories. His Memoirs (Sjećanja) give detailed descriptions of his teachers, which included a former member of the Russian court, an erstwhile French cavalry officer, and a classics teacher who not only taught Greek, Latin, and philosophy, but knew all the European languages as well. Meša takes pains to emphasize that his was no ordinary provincial school. ("If we, their students, have accomplished anything in life, we owe it to those brave, gifted people.")

One of his teachers, however, the Catholic priest Dr. Drago D., provided Selimović with an insight into the complexity and inconsistency of human behavior. Dr. Drago D. defended Meša before a teacher's council, for having written a paper questioning the existence of God, while the Moslem mulla favored expelling him from school; yet this same Dr. Drago D., during World War II, emerged as the local Ustaše (Croatian Fascist Party) chief, who sent Serbs and Jews to their deaths at the concentration camp of Jasenovac. Selimović tells us that one of Drago D.'s victims was a fellow teacher, Danilo Salom, a Jewish teacher of mathematics. Young Ustase, former students of Salom, were sent to get him, beating him in his home and on the street. Drago D. was executed by the partisans, at the end of the war. ("He was shot one dark October morning, when our units liberated Tuzla, in 1944… . That inglorious wartime end to a life which until 1941 had seemed completely pure, troubled me considerably.")

Meša went to Belgrade in 1929, to begin his university studies; he worked very little

his first year, spending his evenings in kafanas and bars and losing money at cards. But the world economic crisis, which bankrupted his family, forced him to become serious. He became a boarder at a Moslem student dormitory, Gajret (Arabic for "zeal"), supported by a charitable Bosnian society of the same name. He also became a Communist fellow traveler, associating with Milovan Djilas, and the bright Moslem Hasan Brkić, also from Bosnia, and a member of the Communist Party in Belgrade. Brkić instructed Meša to join certain student organizations, and to get elected to leadership positions so that the Party could influence their policies. Selimović doesn't tell us in his Memoirs why he worked for the Communists, but one suspects a mixture of motives, including disgust with the dictatorship of King Alexander Karageorge, his own feelings of rootlessness as a Moslem in a Serbian-oriented state, coupled with the attraction of an international movement, as well as the appeal of Marxism as a panacea for those difficult economic times. Yet when Hasan Brkić asked him to become a member of the Communist Party, Meša Selimović declined, saying that he didn't want to lose his independence.

> "That's what I said to Hasan Brkić. Hasan remembered that during the War, he didn't forget or forgive my youthful vagary, even though we were good friends. Whether for this statement, or because others, too, saw my peculiarities, there was always in my party file, from 1941 to 1951, that I was an intellectual and an individualist – a completely negative characterization."

Selimović adds that he realizes it was his fault to have maintained his own opinion about everything, in a time of "armed revolution," but he adds: "If I had succeeded in overcoming my own nature, I probably would not have become a writer."

After finishing Belgrade University, in the Department of Serbo-Croatian Literature, Meša returned to Tuzla, becoming a teacher of literature in the same gymnasium where he had been a student. He taught there for seven years, the only support of his family. All of the Selimović children, including his two brothers and sister, were either members of the Communist Party or skojevci (members of the Communist Youth), and when war broke out in June 1941 they quickly became involved in the resistance against the Nazis and the Croatian fascist state, which had taken over Bosnia. With his brothers and his sister, Meša smuggled supplies to the partisans, listened to foreign radio broadcasts, disseminated news from the Eastern Front, and sheltered Communist fugitives. This was dangerous work – particularly since the Selimovići were known as a Communist family and their house was searched weekly, either by the Gestapo or the Ustase.

Selimović's description of their arrest and jailing reads like a novel at times, as one delights in the šaldžija (joker or trickster) element in his jail adventures. Locked in arm and leg irons, in solitary confinement for three days without food or drink, they are helped by a less restricted prisoner, who trickles water and bread crumbs to them through a funnel made of paper. Then, a peasant who is a nighttime guard, with the unlikely name of Andrija Božić (Andrew Christmas), opens the door to their cells at night and allows them to walk about; and finally they are released with the help of a

prosecutor sympathizer, who purposely prepares an ill-constructed case. Of his imprisonment Selimović has stated: “My strongest impressions of the war are connected with my imprisonment, and it is them that I remember most often.”

It was after he and his siblings left Tuzla, to join the Partisans in 1943, that Meša came in contact once again with Hasan Brkić. Brkić was now head of Agitprop (Agitation and Propaganda) for Eastern Bosnia, and had Selimović assigned to his staff. In the Memoirs he tells us how Brkić burst out laughing when he read a propaganda leaflet Meša had prepared, one calling on the peasants and “fighters” to revolt. Meša had tried to be original, quoting the Russian poet Demjan Bednyj and avoiding clichés like “workers, peasants, honored intelligentsia”; but Hasan Brkić explained to him that “repetition means security, it instills clam in the person who reads or listens, training him to move within a circle of recognized concepts and that is very important for psychological conviction.”

“When I told him,” says Selimović, “that this was the technology and psychology of prayer, he answered that this was correct, and that fact should not be treated ironically.” Selimović tells us that he had never heard the psychology of propaganda explained so convincingly, as it was by Hasan Brkić that day in the hills of Eastern Bosnia. Their discussion, related extensively in the Memoirs, highlights a crucial difference in the attitudes of these two Moslems toward human individuality. After the war, Hasan Brkić rose to positions of power in the new government, while for Meša Selimović another rebellion lay yet ahead.

In November, 1944, as the war in Yugoslavia was drawing toward its close, Meša’s brother Šefkija was executed by a partisan firing squad, for having removed a few pieces of furniture from a public warehouse, to replace his own furniture stolen by the Ustaše. It was announced that Šefkija was shot “to set and example,” because he was from a well-known Communist family. The news of his brother’s execution, while stunning Meša, did not prevent him from giving a scheduled party lecture a few days later. It was this adherence to duty, in the face of deep personal sorrow, that Meša could not forgive in himself later, for it seemed to him that he had placed party loyalty above his brother. (One might say that he had temporarily become the type of person Hasan Brkić had been trying to create of him a Party automaton.) It was this moment of self-degradation that he had in mind when he wrote in his novel The Dervish and Death:

“What am I now? Stunted brother or unsure dervish? Have I lost my human love or have I weakened my faith, thus losing everything?”

Selimović gives us a few details about Sefkija’s death, but it does seem possible that his brother, a battalion commander, had exhibited some of the same individualism as Meša and had made enemies, who finished him off when they go their chance. It may have been this confrontation with the old Balkan tribal mores that struck Meša to the core, as he was forced to accept not only the loss of his brother, but the shattering of the ideals on which he had based his life for 15 years.

At the end of 1944, Selimović moved to Belgrade where he was assigned to the War Crimes Commission, and where he met with Milovan Djilas, now a high officer in the

Yugoslav government and head of the Agitprop. (Djilas would experience his own disillusionment, but a decade later.) Meša tried his hand at writing a few short stories about the war, which he published in Nasa knjizevnost (Our Literature), of which he was an editor. And he married a partizanka, in what was perhaps an impetuous, irrational attempt to keep from breaking with his past.

The marriage lasted less than a year, with Selimović leaving his pregnant wife for Darka, the daughter of a prewar Serbian general, who had died at Dachau. Darka was Selimović's salvation. As he told one interviewer:

> "I was very fortunate to find her. Truly, if I had tried to create a model of the woman I wanted I would surely have made a mistake I could not have found such a perfect woman… . And I can say that without her I wouldn't have written half as much I wouldn't have written anything."

Selimović's rejection of a partizanka for the daughter of a royal general was anathema, according to the code of morality prevailing in Yugoslavia right after the war (a code described by Djilas in his first "heretical" article, "Anatomy of a Morality," in 1954.) Meša was fired from his job and dismissed from the Party, and in 1947 he and Darka set out for Sarajevo, to begin a new life.

Like Andrić's forced exile to Bosnia, from 1915 to 1917, Selimović's return to Bosnian soil was crucial to his development as a writer. For the next ten years he, Darka, and their two little girls lived from hand to mouth, borrowing from their friend Risto Trifković, while Meša worked a variety of jobs and tried to write short stories at night. His first volume of short stories was "lost" at the publisher's (the only copy he had). Yet he kept on writing, at Darka's insistence. He said of this period of extreme hardship: "This was a cruel but perfect school of life." In 1950 he published his first collection of stories Prva ceta (The First Company), and after he was made an editor of Svjetlost publishing house he continued to write, publishing his first novel Tišine (Silences, 1961) and a second novel Magla i mjesečina (Fog and Moonlight, 1965), and finally, in 1966, he was ready to drop his "bomb," Derviš i smrt (The Dervish and Death).

From the very beginning, in 1945-1956, Meša Selimović had worked at developing his own style, his own "voice," shunning the dictates of socialist realism. His early stories are reminiscent of Hemingway short sentences, beautiful, careful description, dialogue without any circumstantial detail to interrupt the flow of words. The theme of his lost brother appears, partly disguised, in his first novel The Silences. The hero is on his way back to Belgrade, at the end of the war, wondering whether his brother is still alive. When he gets on a darkened train, with is friend Duško, he thinks:

> "Maybe my brother is among these people… . He had been in prison, in a camp, in some of our units, but now I can't find him. I only hear rumors. I know what Dusko is asking me Do you really think you will find him? Yes, I think I will. It's impossible that I won't find him. I loved him more than

> myself or at least as much as myself. He is too good, too handsome, too dear not to be anymore."

Both he and Duško walk through the aisles of the train, calling for his brother in the dark. This silly-sad stunt, typical of young men suddenly released from extreme pressure, shows how Meša was still troubled by the unseemliness and unlikelihood of his brother's manner of death seventeen years earlier. This excellent novel, reworked in 1965 and given more plot, is notable for its lack of partisan chest-beating, it's honesty about the feelings of returning veterans, their difficulties with their emotions, and their bitterness toward civilians even while wanting to be accepted by them. And because it is written in the first person, unlike Meša's short stories, one feels that stylistically it represents a big step toward the kind of inner psychological exploration, akin at times to zanos, which is the strongest characteristic of Meša's later style.

Selimović's next major work, Magla i mjesčina (Fog and Moonlight, 1965), called "a real masterpiece of partisan literature" by one critic, was an experimental novel in which he tried to present the psychological totality of a situation by viewing it through the simultaneous inner monologues of the main characters: a farmer, a partisan commander (his brother), the farmer's wife, and a young city-bred partisan with whom the wife falls in love. In the end both the farmer and the young partisan are killed by the Germans, and the woman buries them together. There is no increase in understanding, no epiphany from reading the novel, but rather a nagging sense that this partisan activity is disjointed and meaningless in the eyes of the civilian bystanders who are anchored to real life. There is much beautiful writing in this book, descriptions of country, with sensitive shadings of feeling that one would not expect to find in a novel about war, written in a land with a heroic epic tradition.

None of Meša Selimović's war novels and short stories inspired more than a modest response from the public. In this sense, by comparison to more popular writers of the wartime generation (Lalić, Cosić, and others) he was ahead of his time. When his next novel appeared, Derviš i smrt (The Dervish and Death, 1966), the Yugoslav public was ready for him, however, and his book was an instantaneous success. Set in eighteenth-century Sarajevo, The Dervish and Death is really about contemporary Yugoslavia, as Meša tries to treat once again the pain of his brother's death. The main protagonist, Ahmed Nurudin, whose name means "light of faith," is the skeikh or chief dervish of a branch of the Mawlawi sect of whirling dervishes. Nerudin learns that his brother has been imprisoned, and he visits the local judge (kadi), police chief (muselim), and mufti, trying to effect his release. But he meets with either indifference or threats of violence. The sheikh's faith in the Ottoman system gradually weakens, until finally he learns that his brother has been executed. As he says:

> "Twenty years I've been a dervish. I went away to school as a little child, and all I know is what they chose to teach me… . I always knew what I was supposed to do the dervish order thought for me… . And look, it happened that misfortune struck my brother. I don't like violence, I think it's a sign of weakness. But when it was done to others I kept silent, I refused to condemn, even admitting that sometimes evil must be done for

> the greater good. But when the whip of power struck my brother, it also cut me to the quick… .I know that boy, he is incapable of crime. But see I don't defend him strongly enough, and I don't justify them; it only seems to me that they have done evil to me together, almost equally, hurt me, confronted me with life outside my true orbit, forced me to take a stand."

We are never certain whether it is grief for his brother, or anger at the insult to his position, or a combination of the two that forces the dervish act. He plants the seeds for a local rebellion, kills the kadi, and takes over as judge. In time, under the influence of traditional procedures (the use of spies, informers, etc.) he becomes like his ruthless predecessor, falls victim to intrigue, and as the novel ends he is waiting to be garotted in prison.

This novel is the story of the conflict between ideology and life, between power and love. Still cautious, Selimović uses and eighteenth-century setting to demonstrate what would have happened to him if he had taken the road of power and had waited to take revenge on his brother's murderers. (He must have had many moments when he considered taking revenge.) Yet he shows artistically that he had been able to reach a position of power, he would have become in the end like those whom he despised, and would have died spiritually, if not physically like the dervish. In this sense The Dervish and Death was a catharsis not only for Meša Selimović, but for all Yugoslavs who suffered injustice, both during the war and immediately afterward. This fact, plus the beauty of its style, helps explain why the novel won universal acclaim, its author winning the coveted Njegoš prize (1969), which is awarded only once every three years.

Meša confronted the conflict between ideology and life one more time, in his small novel Ostrvo (The Island, 1973), his only work to be translated into English (by Jeanie Shaterian, published by the Serbian Heritage Academy, Toronto). In the chapter "Da li da umre stari mandarin? ("Should the old Mandarin die?") he forces us to ask ourselves whether the death of any individual can ever be justified in terms of the common good. Bold and explicit, this story leaves no questions as to the author's position. It is a final civilized answer to men like Hasan Brkić.

Selimović's last major novel, Tvrdjava (The Fortress, 1970) is about modern-day alienation and its healing through the power of love. The author himself states, concerning this novel:

> "The fortress is every man, every society, every state, every ideology. The main hero wants to find a bridge to other people, to come out of the fortress, because he knows we are being split apart and destroyed by hatred, and only love will sustain us, or at least the faith that some sort of understanding is possible between individuals and society. Guided by that faith and desire… . he remains morally pure."

Just as the The Dervish narrated Selimović's personal experience of the loss of his brother, his grief, and the symbolic death, so The Fortress relates Meša's resurrection

through his love for Darka. Set again in eighteenth-century Sarajevo, this story uses many names and details from Baseskija's Chronicle, and is more heavily dependent on Baseskija for background than was Andrić's story "The Way of Alija Djerzelez." But Selimović's novel is really about his own move to Sarajevo with Darka in 1947, and their struggle to survive. His hero Ahmet Šabo is a returned veteran, who marries a Christian (Tijana), and is refused work because of his criticism of the regime. He is helped by his friend Mulla Ibrahim, a scribe, whose life he had saved during the war.

The Fortress, like The Dervish and Death, is written in the first person, which gives both novels a very different tone from that provided by the omniscient, impartial narrator in the Andrić's works. Selimović's heroes have a tortured sensitivity to every evil thing that is happening around them, and his Ahmet Šabo shows a stubborn unwillingness to accept evil as a cosmic force on a parity with good. In this sense Selimović transcends the Absurd, restores a redemptive power to the universe (love) and, thereby, meaning, while rejecting the oriental fatalism and autochthonous Manicheism of Andrić.

This article has attempted to show how the heroic oral epic tradition in Bosnia became transformed after the Austrian Occupation on 1878, producing the writer-rebel who played leading roles in Bosnia's struggle for freedom and change. The three writer-rebels discussed: Peter Kočić, Ivo Andrić, and Meša Selimović represent three generations and three different religious backgrounds, and each spent time in jail. In the final analysis, all these factors Bosnia, religious backgrounds, and jail, played crucial roles in their art. They each have a love-hate relationship with their native region ("Bosnia is a whore," cries Kočić's David Štrbac), which is a product of her sectarian divisiveness, narrowmindedness, and insularity. Perhaps, given her tortured history and ideological diversity, it is only appropriate that just as a Bosnian Serb fired the shots that started the decline of world imperialism, so, too, in our day a Bosnian Moslem has mirrored in his art the eventual death of divisive ideology.

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