Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne
An International, Interdisciplinary, Bilingual, Online Journal
Međunarodni, interdisciplinarni, dvojezični, online časopis

The Hilt

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A man who has never known suffering cannot be self-reliant, nor can he recognize his own value. —Joseph de Maistre

We who passed through the siege of Sarajevo
shall, of course, gain nothing.
An experience that will serve no purpose:
as if you lost your arms and won a violin,
as Rasko would say. You can't even tell
others about it. Can you reconstruct an ancient
jug from the lonely handle that made it to
our time? We should lock it all up in the soul
and forget. But at least we shall, from now on
have a touch more self-respect, I hope,
like the fighter who takes a billion blows
but stays on his feet and his mangled face
in the mirror tells him who he really is. We
experienced our own limits. For to know who
you are, has always been the victim's privilege.
To know how much you can bear, without
exploding—that is the only property that you
shall, if you survive, bring from this war,
endless like the handkerchief a magician pulls
out of his hat. This knowledge—a saber which
we shall not draw very often from the scabbard.
But at least I will keep my hand
on its hilt.

Translated from the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian/Montenegrin by Zvonimir Radeljković

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