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

New Poems

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AWARD

In the courtyard of the National Library,
workers are loading a truck filled to the brim
with obsolete books, sentenced to death by combustion
in the city's heating plant in order to free
shelf space for new popular items.
The truck moves and a few lighter copies drop
onto the sidewalk. A thin one with a maroon
paperback cover lands like a leaf in the wind
and fans open before a girl passing by.
She crouches down and scans a couple of
verses. "We'll save you, poor thing," she says,
pushing the poetry into her boyfriend's knapsack.

I saw these young homeless lovers again the
next evening under the Old Town stone bridge.
As they were getting ready to retire in their
sleeping bag, pressing their bodies
close to each other, she pulled out the book
and he took out his lighter. His thumb
was burning while she read aloud, but he kept
the flame going until the lighter ran out of gas.
I don't know of any poetry book that would ever
receive a greater honor.

December 2012

Translated by S. Skenderija, S. Krueger, and E.W. Browne
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BOOKS

I was moving often during the war, each time
forgetting a bundle of books or leaving behind
those I couldn't carry further. Eventually

I smuggled my empty hands across the border,
but I believe the books are still alive.

I'll never know whose dust they breathe in the shelves,
yet I don't think anyone is ever opening them. As if they were lying,
irradiated, in the cabinets of the abandoned homes surrounding
Chernobyl. The woods have spread across the land
and mutant beasts have taken over… Just deer with fallen antlers
poke their heads through the windows and sniff poetry.

January 2012

Translated by S. Krueger and S. Skenderija, September 2012
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BOSNIA

1.

For years I have not lived in the country
I was born in. But I visit it, in the same
way we as children used to go see our
next of kin. Although among your
own, you feel like a guest.

2.

Here and there I don't recognize a word.
And many faces. In villages, empty
homes and full graves. If you push
a door open, the only living things you'll see
are a bright *ibrik* for coffee and white *finjans* behind it.
As if a hen with her chicks were crossing
a low dining table.

3.

Disappointment gets old and dry with the years.
But it doesn't lose its heaviness.

January 2012

Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović, December 2012
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