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Literary Life *in the territories of the former* *Yugoslavia*

(before and after its disintegration)

Although literature and literary life are undoubtedly two different things, their numerous connections, interactions, crossovers and influences of cause and effect can not just be ignored. Literature, the art of words, is created by an author, who needs solitude and peace for his/her creative process. The work, once written and published, needs a reader, who again requires similar conditions to read, be it for simple aesthetic pleasure or for the purpose of research. Both the reader in the process of reading and the author in the process of creating withdraw from the noisy crowd and everyday life, to reemerge again, the latter after the act of creation, the former after that of reading, from their private lives into the public life, into a specific arena with its particular winners and losers. In the case of the writer-work-reader-and-everything-else-related-in-any-way-to-any-of-the-above chain, this arena is called the "literary life". The authors return there time and again whether they like it or not; very few have managed, particularly for any length of time, to resist being drawn into this whirlpool inside which some are blinded by the harsh brightness of the limelight, and others swallowed by the darkness of anonymity and oblivion.

Like all artists, authors nowadays are, on the one hand creators, working in private at their desks, far removed from curious eyes, and on the other hand they are public media personalities. If compared to politicians or athletes or singers or musicians, authors rarely appear in the glare of publicity, except for

such instances as when receiving the most notable awards and prizes; but they are nonetheless absolutely present in everyday life, as people of flesh and blood. Literary life is thus the author's social environment, the ambiance of which can be either encouraging or not for his/her life, creative output and the fate of the work. It encompasses all social relations, with particular emphasis on everything related to the author and to writing which sets the author apart only to reintegrate him/her via their work. This includes the more or less supportive attitude of the state and its institutions to culture, more specifically to literature, authors, their creations and readers, embodied in an adequate number and variety of publishing houses, literary publications, bookstores, libraries, translators to and from foreign languages, teachers and lecturers who can present the book to the reader and really enhance the culture of reading, then literary critics, theoreticians and historians, organized writers' meetings and everything else that can not be so simply enumerated here. In short, literature, in the narrow sense of the word, as the sum total of literary works, is an esthetic phenomenon, while literary life in the broad sense of the word, including everything cited and not cited above, is a cultural and sociological one.

An author – according to Boris Eichenbaum's text which deals with the phenomenon of literary life in Russia in 1927 – at times wonders "how to write", and at other times, "how to be a writer". These questions, like many others, have remained relevant to this day, and will undoubtedly be so in the future.

In an orderly society, free of major conflicts and in times of peace, an author is probably more concerned with the question of "how to write", while in a disorderly, conflict-ridden society or in troubled times of war, with the other question, of "how to be a writer", since the answer does not depend only on the author him/herself, but also on the environment and the circumstances of his/her existence and creative production. In times like those experienced toward the end of the twentieth century in Central and Eastern Europe, characterized by tectonic social shifts, both these questions acquired additional weight and even ethical and truly existential dimensions. This was so for many writers, if not the majority of them, and in particular in former Yugoslavia, which in the early 1990's saw armed conflicts and bloodshed between its constituent nations as a federal community disintegrated into what were to become independent states. This last war in the Balkans, in a century otherwise pockmarked by numerous and bloody wars, differed from all other wars. Its objective was not to keep the integrity of the existential territory of its inhabitants safe against some common external enemy; it was an internal conflict of its citizens which overnight turned ostensible love into intense hatred, pricking the balloon of *brotherhood and unity*, along with several other extensively and frequently used pompous catchphrases of ideological manipulation and political illusions on which the country had been based. Although much that happened in that period is hard to grasp, it is understandable and

even obvious that the *unity* of the state mosaic could not have been preserved after the *brotherhood* had revealed its cruel and murderous face, which was fratricidal and of Biblical dimensions. The events before, during, and after this war clearly influenced the fate of writers, and consequently also that of literature and even more noticeably literary life on the territory of what was formerly one country.

Literary works created since the early 1990's in Yugoslavia by authors—members of all nations and national minorities, i.e. Serbians, Croats, Slovenians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Muslims or Bosnians, Albanians, Hungarians, Italians, Jews and others, are not only linguistically diverse, but also stylistically recognizable and – most importantly – very valuable. A detailed analysis of the particularities of the individual nation or minority's literature, and a subsequent comparison between them would be a very interesting project, but beyond doubt also demanding, time-consuming, and difficult. A study of their reception, interpretation and evaluation, analysis of language, style, structure, content, ideas and genre, temporal and typological placements had best be left to experts, literary critics, theoreticians, historians and others. Those who will attempt this will have to tackle the individual work or oeuvre of an author either with the methodology of the traditional, classic humanist and historically pragmatist approach, or perhaps via a more recent, aesthetically formalist one, or else will busy themselves with determining the general characteristics of one or the other of national or regional literatures, created by writers within a more or less broad or narrow finite space, e.g. a province, republic, state, or on a less determined territory, regardless of their nationality or the language in which they write.

If we focus, albeit briefly, on literary life in the so-called new Yugoslavia from the second half of the 1950's until the early 1990's, we can establish its variety, which certainly stems from the particular geographical position and political status of the country, its mosaic structure consisting of five republics of which one, Serbia, also had two autonomous provinces, then the coexistence of several nations with their different languages, religions, histories, cultural traditions, general customs and other distinctive features. This had its positive and negative aspects, its bright and dark sides. The way it was, Yugoslavia, on the one hand, revealed the possibilities of the coexistence of several nations, and on the other hand could hardly gloss over the frictions between them stirred up primarily by the nationalists within each nation, many of whom were also politicians wielding power, be it in favor of unitarism or separatism. The basically unsolved nationality question was grist to their mill, along with the never forgotten or forgiven interethnic massacres during the Second World War, which had been extremely brutal in Yugoslavia, and the injustices perpetrated by the regime either on individuals or on entire nations. To cite one example, Bosnian Muslims, nowadays called Bosnians, were only granted the right to state their national identity as late as 1971.

Repressive measures aimed at individuals were most numerous in the staged postwar trials and exemplified by the island gulag Goli Otok. They existed in one form or another the whole time, albeit not to such an extent as for instance in the Soviet Union or other countries of the eastern block. Compared to them, Yugoslavia had far fewer persecuted or incarcerated writers, but the fact that there were such instances can not be ignored.

The politically historic significance of the revolt against the resolution of the Cominform and Tito's 'No' to Stalin in 1948 can not be denied, even though they were followed by exorcism and a showdown with those who thought differently. However, many authors probably found the paper delivered by Miroslav Krleža at the Third Congress of the Yugoslavian Writers' Association in Ljubljana in 1952 more important, as it ended the influence of the then predominant poetics of socialist realism and enabled a higher degree of freedom of creation and a plurality of poetics, despite the fact that a single political party, the communists, ruled the country for almost half a century. The fruit this bore was a variety of individualist – non-collectivist – works, among them some of indisputable quality. This was confirmed by the Nobel Prize won by Ivo Andrić in 1962 "for the epic power with which he depicts the scenes and fates from the history of his country".

The case of Ivo Andrić – a "Serbo-Croatian poet, writer, and essayist" as it says in the 1986 Slovenian *Encyclopedia of Nobel Prize Winners* – is especially interesting for a number of reasons. The works of some writers in the former Yugoslavia, particularly in the so-called Serbo-Croatian linguistic region, belonged (as they still do) to two literatures, although they were written in a language that bore a single name. Andrić's work could be said to belong to three literatures: Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian-Herzegovinan. He was of Bosnian catholic origin, a Croat from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and as an author, especially in his early years, had a true affinity with Croatian literature; he was included in the anthology of young Croatian lyricists in 1914, he wrote and published his first books, *Ex Ponto* and *Unrests*, in *ijekavski*, i.e. the western or Croatian variant of the language later called Serbo-Croatian, and spent a long time researching the cultural heritage of the Bosnian Franciscans. Many excellent critical texts have been written on his work in Croatia and in other parts of the country, and in addition to that an extensive issue of the magazine *Most/The Bridge*, published in English by the Croatian Writers' Association, was dedicated to him. After the First World War he declared himself as belonging to Serbian literature and wrote in *ekavski*, the eastern or Serbian linguistic variant. The themes dealt with in the majority of his works indicate that he remained attached to Bosnia throughout; he also donated the monetary part of the Nobel Prize to Bosnian libraries. After the prize his work was translated into languages into which it had not been translated previously and aroused attention world-wide. And not only his work, but also works by other Yugoslavian authors, as his success really put Yugoslavia on the world literary map. Prior to that, his work and the work of other eminent

writers had been translated into all the languages of the nations and national minorities of Yugoslavia.

In addition to the Serbian and Croatian literatures, the Slovenian and Macedonian also had a special status among the literatures of the individual nations. This was above all due to the languages which set these two literatures clearly apart – like the literatures of the national minorities, Albanian, Hungarian, Italian and others – from the Serbian and Croatian literature, or rather, the one written in a language that from the early 1950's, following the grammarians' compromise in Novi Sad, was called Serbo-Croatian. This was a scientific attempt, definitely influenced by politics, to homogenize a number of related and in many aspects similar languages on the territories of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro. Perhaps this was done with the best of intentions, but it is common knowledge – which also turned out to be true in this case – that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, especially if those good intentions are not preceded by careful deliberation and long-term planning. Croatian and Serbian literatures have been consistently dealt with separately, and with good reason. The names of literatures into which to slot the works of authors from Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina presented more problems. And not only the names. Until the 1970's, writers in Bosnia and Herzegovina who did not feel themselves to be either Serbian or Croatian had to declare themselves as pertaining to Serbian or Croatian literature. Thus Mak Dizdar opted for Croatian literature, and Skender Kulenović, Meša Selimović and some other writers, for Serbian literature. Had they not done so, they would have remained, nominally at least, outside the then only existing literatures. The simple fact was that no other anthologies but Serbian and Croatian ones existed. And the anthologies after the 1970's, which comprised authors from Bosnia and Herzegovina regardless of their nationality, had difficulties naming the literature. Before the most appropriate name – and acceptable to the majority, since some rejected the shorter variant Bosnian-Herzegovinan, and others the long and awkward 'the literature of the nations and national minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina' – was constructed, the literature divided into three national ones: the Serbian, the Croatian, and the Bosnian. Just before the war which rent asunder Bosnia and Herzegovina, the anthologies of Serbian, Croatian and Muslim poetry of the 20th century were published in Sarajevo, the city whose destiny in the war is well-known. This division not by language – which was and has remained the most sure-fire criterion for determining which literature a certain work belongs to – but by nationality, has evicted from their shared home all those who wrote in the same language, but did not belong to any of the three nations. These anthologies, whichever way we understand or evaluate them (as they do contain a lot of quality poetry), have – like similar later publications – changed the image of literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina and at the same time influenced the change in the relations between writers,

or rather, the entire literary life which had in those few fateful years been altered completely throughout the entire land formerly known as Yugoslavia.

The war in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990's was for some people primarily a civil war, for others a religious war since Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Muslims fought in it, and for others again something else beyond that. After the outbreak of the war – although some people do say before, but that is mainly the people who started it – Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence. The union of Serbia and Montenegro assumed the name of the hitherto common state, primarily to stay present in the international institutions and inherit the common state assets. Also the existence of this union soon came under question for the same reasons which had jeopardized the former federation and accelerated, or perhaps even caused, the process of disintegration. Apart from Kosovo, Montenegro has remained the only target of Serbian unitarism, and Montenegrin politicians are faced with a difficult choice: either to try to negotiate with the new authorities in Serbia for a truly equal relationship between the two nations, or to test the possibilities of secession and independence at a referendum, which may prove difficult, since the views of Montenegro's population on this subject are divided. Numerous writers have not remained inactive in regard to these and related issues. Many have gone into politics and aimed their efforts at the realization of either expansionist or secessionist plans, which have further complicated the relations between writers in Yugoslavia, bringing them to a head and in some cases to a final break-up. In the generally tense and disagreeable atmosphere due mainly to the politicians and those in authority, this contributed to the partial or complete cessation of the hitherto very lively cultural life, causing immeasurable and irreparable damage to the cultures of all the peoples who had previously lived together.

It is the task of political analysts and historians to determine the exact reasons for the break-up of Yugoslavia. The roots of this must be very deep and reach far into the past, which is at least partly hazy to many; it certainly is to myself. It seems, though, that the disintegration process was at least speeded up, if not even brought about, by Serbian nationalism and unitarism as well as the nationalism and separatism of other, less populous nations which were in opposition to and at the same time supported one another. It started in the late 1980's in Kosovo with strife between Serbians and Albanians. The publication of the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences revealed the Serbian nationalists' plans to implement the idea of a Greater Serbia, which triggered a chain reaction and inflamed the roused nationalism in other nations. The Memorandum was written by academicians, many of whom were authors gathered around Dobrica Ćosić, who was, as I wrote in 1992, the author of the *time of death*. Behind the implementation of these plans through all available means, by killing civilians, children, women, old people, with gang rape, by besieging and razing towns, with the mass exodus of displaced persons and refugees, even with the genocide of

individual nations, there stood the politics of Slobodan Milošević. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the plan was carried out by poet Radovan Karadžić, my contemporary and literary colleague, surrounded throughout the war by writers who had left Sarajevo with him and then destroyed it. Here, like elsewhere, it was not difficult to triumph over the unarmed populace with the aid of the very well armed Yugoslavian People's Army, which had overnight transformed itself into the Serbian Army. All the nationalism-blinded writers who engaged in war-mongering, encouraged assaults or even took part in them personally as aggressors and conquerors, failed the test of humanity. As also did those who 'wisely' kept silent, be it out of agreement with the bestial acts or not. Although it is not possible to equate the work and the author, it is nonetheless hard to believe in the love for one's fellow human being professed in the work of a writer whose hands are bloody in the literal or figurative sense. Just in Bosnia and Herzegovina over 200,000 people were killed in the war. Without talking about Vukovar, Srebrenica, and other sites of the worst atrocities, I will limit myself to the torching of the National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo. The blaze which devoured the books of many writers from the formerly common country, including those who started the fire, shed light on many things, as well as on the fact that in times of trouble, when some authors were fighting for survival, there was no solidarity between writers. Exceptions only confirmed the rule, the most outstanding definitely being the fund-raising action to provide financial support for writers from the war-afflicted territories, and in particular from besieged Sarajevo, which Boris A. Novak, the then president of the Slovenian PEN, later also the president of the Peace Commission, organized and carried out within the International PEN. Other forms of expressing sympathy with fellow-authors who found themselves in the worst possible situation, which war undoubtedly is, were as a rule acts of individuals, who either tried to save others' lives, help them find temporary or permanent residence in another country, or saw to it that their works – which they had dedicated their lives to create, as befits artists – were translated and published.

The events a few years before and during the war completely paralyzed literary life on this territory. All forms of interethnic communication were either hampered or completely blocked, contacts were discontinued not only among writers, some of whom had formerly been personal friends, but also between writers' associations. For a certain time translations of works by authors from other parts of the disintegrated country were not published, not only because of the difficulties which numerous literary magazines and publishing houses suddenly encountered. There were no exchange visits between writers. Many traditional writers' congresses, which used to be so frequent in the former Yugoslavia, were no longer organized or else had been transformed into, metaphorically speaking, village events. After 1990, when the common state began to come apart at the seams, printing houses no longer sent the complimentary issues of all books printed to all national and university libraries. Books printed

Sicer pa je sreča nekaj, kar začutimo takrat, ko vemo, da je nekaj samo dobro, za vse dobro, da nikomur ne škoduje, da nikogar ne omejuje. Zavistnežu ne moremo pomagati, če je zanj vsaka sreča drugih nesreča. Vendar vemo, da nekdo trpi, da bi se mi lahko veselili, se smejali in bili srečni ter zadovoljni, pa smo mogoče hvaležni, čutimo dolžnost biti hvaležni, ne moremo pa biti srečni. Ljubezen, pristna ljubezen do bližnjega ne vzbuja slabe vesti, je veselje za tistega, ki ljubi, in za ljubljenega. Žrtvovanje, še posebej dolgotrajno, pa je ječa za žrtvujočega se, in še bolj za tistega, ki mu je žrtev namenjena.

Žrtvovanje je vse tisto, kar noče umreti, kar se trpinči, da bi ugodilo drugemu za vsako ceno, predvsem pa nikoli ne pomisli, ali je žrtev v resnično dobro sočloveku ali pa ga peha v brezizhodnost odvisnosti in občutkov krivde. Lahko smo zasvojeni z odnosi, z alkoholom, z delom, z mamili, z igrami na srečo, s hrano ... Lahko smo zasvojeni celo s kakršnim koli prepričanjem ali vero in taki vrsti zasvojenosti pravimo fanatizem. Vsakršna zasvojenost je izraz strahu, ki, kot rečeno, lahko preraste v sovraštvo in na koncu v nasilje do sebe ali drugih. Žrtvovanje se odeva v tančico ljubezni in kljub prosojnosti oblačila mnoge ljudi zavede. Še celo, bi si upala reči, kristjane, ki si Kristusov evangelij in določene stavke iz njega razlagajo kot zahtevo po neskončnem potrpljenju, po popolnem žrtvovanju in samozatajevanju. V tem se skriva past, da prevaramo sami sebe: samotrpinčenje razglasimo za krepost.

Ljubezen si moremo torej ponazoriti na dva načina: kot smrt in kot prebujenje. Še bolje pa je, da rečem naravnost: ljubiti pomeni umreti. Smrt (nobeno, še tako veliko trpljenje, je ne more nadomestiti) sama je neke vrste popolno prebujenje. Dokler dejansko ne umremo, moremo umirati samo za hip in le za hip se zato prebudimo. Moremo pa nizati take trenutke. Če je najmanjši del svetosti dejanje ljubezni, je sedanjí trenutek okvir, ki je dan vsakemu človeku, da vanj uokviri sleherno svoje dejanje kot dejanje ljubezni ali pa ne. Vsakdo, kdor naredi dejanje ljubezni, razume, da žrtvovanje ni povezano z ljubeznijo. Da je njeno nasprotje. Da žrtvovanje ubija ljubezen.

Ljubezen zato imenujejo tudi postajati eno. Sveto pismo pozna ta izraz, saj Jezus pred smrtjo moli, da bi vsi postali eno, kot sta eno on in njegov Oče. Sveti Pavel pravi, da skuša vsem postati vse. Cerkveni očetje (Gregor iz Nise, Evagrij Pontski) in svetniki (na primer Vincencij Pavelski) ter razni duhovni pisci krščanstva uporabljajo ta izraz. Bog je namreč postal eno z nami, ko se je učlovečil. Duhovna pisateljica Chiara Lubich našteva točke "umetnosti ljubezni" in med njimi na zadnje mesto vedno postavlja izraz "postajati eno", kot pristno in popolno ljubezen.

Trpljenje nas prebuja, zbuditi pa nas ne more popolnoma. Zato se usode ljudi pogosto korenito spremenijo šele ob smrti najbližjih, življenje pa se spreminja na podoben način, kadar umiramo v dejanjih ljubezni. Če se namreč žrtvujočemu se bližnji smili, ga ne ljubi. Usmiljenje je lastnost Boga, nekoga,

ki ima neskončno premoč nad drugim oziroma drugimi. Ta svoje premoči ne izkoristi in zato se človeka usmili. Ko ga postavi na svojo raven, ko Bog celo umre za človeka (!), vzpostavi odnos ljubezni. Človek nad človekom nima, ne bi smel imeti in si ne bi nikoli smel vzeti popolne premoči, zato je Jezus zapovedal kot osnovni odnos med ljudmi ljubezen. Ljubezen ni kršena samo z očitnim nasiljem, temveč zmeraj, ko se nam bližnji smili. Usmiljenje je namreč sprejemljivo samo za neprižadetega, strahotno pa je za tistega, ki ga je deležen.

Žrtvujoči se leži na oltarju, a noče umreti. Hoče videti učinek svojega žrtvovanja. Kako bi ob tem ne mogli reči, da preveč zahteva? Da pravzaprav ničesar ne da? Nasprotno. Vse hoče obdržati in vse dobiti, četudi ni v človeški moči imeti vsega naenkrat. To je mogoče samo Bogu, človeku pa je dano, da ima v rokah v enem trenutku eno samo stvar, v tisti pa je vse in nič hkrati. Ljubezen je popolna odpoved – da nekdo ljubi (za poskus trenutnega posedovanja ljubezni), mora izgubiti vse, mora umreti. Prav na koncu se lahko zgodi, da ljubeči dopolni svojo ljubezen z žrtvovanjem. Tako kot Jezus. Žrtvovanje je zato lahko le vrhunec izkazane ljubezni. Ne more pa žrtvovanja kronati ljubezen.

Žrtvujoči se ne pozna in ne more spoznati, doživeti in dati ljubezni, hkrati celo zapre pot do ljubezni tistemu, za kogar se žrtvuje. Žrtvovanje je neke vrste neodplačljivo posojilo, kajti obresti so previsoke. Žrtvujoči se si domišlja, da lahko komu prihrani trpljenje, ga obvaruje trpljenja in smrti s tem, da se sam muči. Ko mu odvzema njegovo

trpljenje, mu jemlje tudi življenje, polnino življenja.

Ženske se največkrat žrtvujemo. Biti žena in mati za ženske pogosto ni sreča, ampak trpljenje. Nekako mislimo, da tako mora biti. Še več. Biti ženska je, tako se mi zdi, v naši družbi pogosto razumljeno kot izrečen ukaz – (po)trpi. Žrtvovanje zaslužnjuje, ljubezen pa osvobaja. Preprosta ponazoritev tega je v dejstvu, da se moramo nenehno ločevati, se razhajati in včasih dokončno oditi (na primer otrok od staršev). Medtem ko žrtvujoči se ne prenese odhoda, ker bolj misli nase in na svojo izgubo, če pa že, odhajajočega otovori z vsemi mogočimi priboljški in pripomočki za lažje življenje, da ljubeči odhajajočemu samo svoj blagoslov. Ljubezen ne bo samo znala vedno znova stopiti v stik, ljubezen bo vedno v stiku, nikoli pa ta stik ne bo obremenjujoč, omejujoč. Ljubezen zaupa in zato da ljubljenemu tisto, s čimer bo prišel najdlje v izbrani smeri – pa tudi in predvsem najlaže.

Svobodo nam dajejo drugi. Sami si jo lahko vzamemo samo z nasiljem. Odgovornost pa si naložimo sami. Odnos ljubezni je sklenjen, kadar TI ljubi tako, da me pusti svobodnega, ker se zaveda moje enkratnosti in neodvisnosti, in kadar JAZ odgovarja na ljubezen s sprejemanjem odgovornosti za vzpostavljanje, vzdrževanje in razvijanje odnosa. Dajati svobodo in sprejemati odgovornost sta dve plati iste medalje, in medsebojne ljubezni ni brez ene ali druge. Žrtvovanje pa ni ne eno ne drugo, ni dialog ljubezni, temveč monolog neke vrste strahu pred njo, monolog prikrite sebičnosti.

Because of their deeds many writers are beyond doubt guilty of the fact that among the masses of refugees from Yugoslavia scattered all over the world there is also a large number of their professional colleagues. Not only authors from Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo, but also from Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. An especially large number left during the war. Some have already returned. But there remain to this day more writers from Yugoslavia in foreign countries than there were dissident authors from Eastern Europe who had managed to emigrate to the West in the time of the heavy-handed socialist-communist rule. The changes in their lives, which have become filled with uncertainties, will leave profound traces in their writings, if they have not done so already. Although an author's decision to live in a foreign linguistic environment, without direct contact with the language in which he/she writes, without his/her readers, is a particularly hard one to make, returning is not, or will not be, any easier for those who have so decided. For the very reason of the consequences left by the nationalistic savagery, not the least of them being a pronounced intolerance of one another.

When discussing the events in the former Yugoslavia, their genesis should not be overlooked. Otherwise it might seem that all the participants in the Balkan tragedy are equally to blame. It is true that in certain moments they all proved to be equally brutal, including those who did not choose means when defending their bare lives. Some committed crimes to take revenge for crimes previously committed. But whatever the case, equating the criminals and their victims must not become acceptable. Just as the separation of aesthetics from ethics must not become acceptable, since they are indivisible in real literary masterpieces which deal with the individual and the universal at the same time.

The most important changes in the life on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, which reflect the different, frequently tragic fate the people, including writers, have had, and will continue to have an influence on the changing form and content of literary life in this region. Not only because it is no longer the literary life of more or less equal nations inside a common state, but a literary life which will be created by truly equal citizens of several independent and democratic states and which will not be based on political interests, but above all on a genuine interest in the literature of another nation.

Let me conclude with the poem I wrote in 1992, at the time of the worst besieging and destruction of my home town, entitled *Sarajevo will – even if it's gone – remain what it was: "a broken jug/ can never again/ be what it had been// but/ a jug/ remembered / can never be broken"*. The same seems to apply to our former common country. Disintegrated, it will never again be what it once was, and neither will the literary life within its old territory. Those who had been a part of it will only be able to reminisce about it. But there will be another literary life, to which most will be contributed by writers who have struggled for democracy and peace. Whatever it turns out to be, this life will probably be less concerned with what had previously cast shadows

over and incessantly endangered it. We can only hope our descendants do not repeat our mistakes and those of many writers among us who could not or would not avoid getting involved in politics which instigated militant nationalism. Or politics which did not permit nations, previously united in a common state, to separate and realize the dreams of their nation-states without bloodshed, as has been done, for instance, by the Czechs and Slovaks. Fortunately, no evil lasts forever. And neither will the partly or completely frozen relations between writers. Although several more or less serious aftershocks can still be expected in this area, the ice is already beginning to melt. Lately numerous authors, in Slovenia and other states, in particular young authors who had not been caught in the wave of nationalism or intoxicated by politics or the craving for power, have been endeavoring to reestablish contact with fellow authors from the former Yugoslavia. This is one of the preconditions for the writers to start cooperating fully with one another in all ways, and, free of all prejudice, past or recent, become involved with not only their own literature, but also the literatures of the other nations, because they deserve such an involvement. And in doing this never forget that literary life is the humus in which literature germinates, as well as its natural environment in which it either blossoms forth into luxurious growth or else withers.

Translated by Tamara Soban