Our dossier:

**X-CHANGING CREATIVITY**
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This issue of our journal will be especially dedicated to the project READ - Regional Network for Cultural Diversity – funded by the European Commission and implemented under the leadership of Goethe Institut, Skopje, in collaboration with five partner organizations: Instituti i Librit dhe i Promocionit (Albania), Krokodil (Serbia), Kalem Culture Association (Turkey), LOJA Center for Balkan Cooperation (North Macedonia), and Qendra Multimedia (Kosovo). As it can be seen, the space of the action is Balkans. It shall be a contribution to intercultural recognition and to reconciliation by opening new channels of communication for independent cultural organizations, offering them networking opportunities away from the political stage. It is a novelty for the region.

The project READ started this year, in the difficult conditions of the pandemics, and it will continue until 2024. It consists in several kinds of activities. One of them is that of the residency of writers, artists and translators from the Balkans in other countries of the region, being hosted by the above mention partner organizations for a period of one month. In total, there are ten such residents each year of the project, while in 2021 an independent committee selected the ten residents among more than 120 applicants. Another activity is that of the literary international festivals, with a prominent participation of Balkan authors. This same year two festivals took place, one in Prishtina, organized by Qendra Multimedia, and one in Tirana, organized by Instituti i Librit dhe i Promocionit. The objective is to organize ten festivals until the end of the project.

A third kind of activity is “READ on wheels”, which consists in a regional mobile library, a bus stocked with books and other content from the project partners. It is a multicultural and multilingual mobile library that will tour through North Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Albania and Turkey during a period of three years, with special focus on schools and libraries. During 2021 it is travelling through North Macedonia. The idea of the mobile library is based on the long-standing experience of Goethe Institut with running library and culture buses across different countries, including France, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Belarus, etc. Like the residency program and the literary festivals, “READ on wheels” aims to promote intercultural reading skills and, therefore, the recognition and empathy towards the Other, but with the specific difference of providing access to reading and cultural activity to young people in small and hard-to-reach communities where such opportunities are either rare or completely non-existent.

And, last but not least, there is still another kind of activity, or should we better say it in plural, activities, because it is multiple and is intended to have a more especially pervasive effect: each of the five partners of READ provides appropriate financial support, by open calls, to other organizations for multilingual and intercultural projects, with a preference to youth organizations. The objective is to support ninety projects over the period of three years. It gives to READ a new dimension of capillarity.

All these, in as much as they were implemented during 2021, and they were impressively so, is presented in this issue of our journal.
In the previous issue, *The Bridge* published an announcement for a Call of the European Cultural Foundation related to cross-border exchange of creative experience (it can be found here: https://bridge-magazine.net/?p=1032). We consider this kind of exchange highly important; we consider it indeed one of the most importantly inherent aspects of the universality of culture and of diversity as a condition of culture. In this issue, we are publishing the interviews that we made to the creative people in residency during 2021 (Tetovo, Belgrade, Istanbul, Pristina, Tirana), in the context of READ¹, hosted by the partner organizations, which is one of the fruitful forms of cross-border cultural exchange. To all of them we put the following questions:

1. How important is for you the relation between your own creative activity and your societal or cultural surrounding?

2. What is more important for you as a writer/artist/translator, your directly personal surrounding, the town, or the country in which you live, and why?

3. What is your experience as a resident in the city you choose in the context of this program?

4. Why do you write/make art/translate?

¹. These are interviews with all of them, except one, Azem Deliu, from Kosovo, one month in residence in Istanbul. Unfortunately, he couldn’t answer (note of the editor).

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**DENIZ BESER – TURKISH ARTIST IN TETOVO, NORTH MACEDONIA**

Shaping the personal environment, according to the character of the person

1. I think that it will create a handicap for artists to produce art in isolation and disconnected from their social and cultural environment. In this respect, I prefer to include social and political effects, cultural images and stories in my works. It is also a relationship that feeds me in terms of inspiration and takes my work to a different point.

2. As a visual artist, my personal environment, the cities I live in (Vienna and Istanbul) and countries (Austria and Turkey) are very important to me. Our memories make meaningful the city that we live. The connection we establish with the city, and the social opportunities creates different dimensions. I believe that the personal environment is shaped according to the character of the person, the possibilities offered by the city, and the social class and economic situation of the person. Economic support and contributions are provided to artists and independent art organizations in Vienna, which is my official residence city. Unfortunately, artists cannot find this type of support in Turkey. There are many material and moral obstacles that Istanbul artists have to grapple with. Of course, that doesn’t mean that everything is easy.
During my stay I observed daily life, local culture, motifs and languages in North Macedonia. My research-based project consists of an exhibition created with different mediums, a fanzine workshop, an open studio event, and a ‘fanzine’ project as a printed publication. Questions and topics such as ‘What are our similarities?’, ‘How do we live with the differences we have between us?’, ‘Different languages, common words’ and ‘Similarities of Differences’ are the focus points of his research.

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ALBAN TUFA – WRITER FROM ALBANIA
IN PRISHTINA, KOSOVO

Fresh air and memories of war in Pristina

1. My literature, it must be said, is small, for the reason that I briefly turn 30 years old, but even as small as it is, it tends to touch as much as poetry, as well as some types of prose (essays, stories and a novel). I say this because even though I am still in this craft, I like most, not to say like any writer work with two elements: imagination and memory. Let me analyse these two elements very briefly. Imagination in my idea is an attempt to overcome reality, to escape from the reality that surrounds me, to pass to the current normal situation. These transitions or transcensions are experienced in the mind by means of our images or visual systems, which in one way or another resemble those who aim at us as the first, and our mind has works of its own existence and functionality. While memory is the sum of our moments and experiences (strangely enough emotional experiences prevail), which come to mind in the most complex ways. Certainly driven by the stimuli of the present. Largely in my opinion, memory is the most biographical thing that appears, and which is already in the process of being published. The novel tends to take in a longitudinal way. However, I will try to be as concise as possible. I generally write about my concerns, but they also appear to me as a problem to someone and many. I think that a young writer or poet, when he starts writing, does it either because he finds it beautiful, or because he likes to be read by others, or to please a girl, or because, in the end, he wants to convince the listener that he has something to say. This is a nice question, but the answer is extremely delicate and for the question to get the right answer, it has to be taken in a longitudinal way. However, I will try to be as concise as possible.

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3. Let me give two answers. The first answer, lightning, is that very well, wonderful. The second answer is certainly much longer. For the first time in Pristina I was in 2019 with my uncle at a book promotion. It was Sunday. Pristina was quite quiet. No traffic and with fresh air as much as I felt like it was burning in my lungs. The second time I was in January 2020, also Sunday and very cold. I was with my girlfriend (already my wife). In 1998 I was 6 years old. In the village, we had a “Sharp” satellite receiver, and every day we watched on TV news about Kosovo (Pristina). The images were horrific: fleeing people, smoke, flames, people killed and bodies thrown away. Both times I was in Pristina these images came to my mind. This place so beautiful, very close and very far from that war in a very strange way. The third time I was during one month, as part of the READ residence, throughout June-July 2021. I chose Pristina for two reasons. The first, because it gives me an interesting place, new to the war and a rich cultural scene compared to Tirana. The second reason is the fact that I think (I was thinking at the time), that first I had to meet in Kosovo, make friends, etc., and after that to claim to have passed outside the Albanian-speaking territories. I was very well received at the Multimedia Center. I made many friends and met many others. I read poetry at the Oda Theater and at the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy at Hasan Prishtina University. I also did one of the most important things in my literature: I wrote my first novel, which I had in mind for several years, and which is already in the process of being published. The novel tends to explain or trace how a family where its members do not communicate with each other can not irreparably.

4. I have read some writers’ responses and even some essays where they try to explain the reasons why they write. I agree with most of the reasons, and the fact that I unknowingly agree may also come as my reason. Why I started writing, as I said in a question above, the sources of concern for a writer in the beginning, so I will not deal with this and will skip straight to the first reason why (I continue) to write. Gabriel García Márquez somewhere says that “if you can live without writing, then...
Coming back, this opportunity to do things again, darling, occurs only to find peace. We know that a second chance is the way to repentance, after repentance comes disappointment, concluding a returning circle. Coming back, especially sudden coming back, occurs due to forgetfulness to get the key, to see the details of a photo, to start things in the name of God.

While some returns force to get the taste of yesterday, like the bee that returns every day in the same soil, in the same flower, like the man in the old house to renew some memories.

So I come back to you every night mitigating all conflicts with the world as he soaks white clothes in water and bread crusts in milk.

I don't get tired of coming back to you as the night does not get tired returning to the day, quiet, without any metaphor. You are my day that defines me redefining the world a little, the self a little.

Coming back is simple, darling, it's the most beautiful obligation we have to fulfill. You know, written on the forehead every time you tell me: you should be back soon today. That's enough to understand that you love me without noise and without pathetic words. We both know we're growing, so instead of saying I love you, you write to me: Are you coming?

I am convinced that in addition to water, meanings also take shape, that form of our worlds of escapes and returns. You know the tricks of returning, therefore you never forget to write to me: I am coming back.

Translated by the author
Danilo Stojić is a Serbian author born in 1981. He has published texts and stories (both in Serbo-Croatian and English language) in different magazines, internet sites and collections of stories. From late 2005 to early 2008. From 2006 started working with video, both as narrative and experimental media. His first novel, Vreme poluraspada (Fallout period), was published in 2012. During the last few years, besides his usual writing, he has been in the process of publishing a collection book Ovde smo da idemo (We are here to go). This project was officially initiated on the centennial of William S. Burrough's birth (2014), however it has been in development since 2008. The book is a result of his friendship with Udo Breger, translator and photographer from Basel, who spent time with Burroughs and also published some of his works (as well as translated them to German). Together with the interview, we are publishing one of the poems that Danilo Stojic read in the literary festival in Prishtina.

1. Well I think that it’s crucial in many ways, as something that cannot be avoided. Not that I would ever want to avoid or exclude my surrounding’s influence, on contrary – my work is always some kind of response to contemporary occurrences and gains from cultural and societal inputs. No matter how fictional the nature of the work is, it’s always provoked by injustice, unhealed wounds or anything else in society that I feel I need to deal with in my own way. Even if the nature of my dealing with it is metaphorical or purely symbolic.

2. Always direct surrounding: city I live, cities, towns and places that I visit. They are all directly pouring themselves into my writings, very often as characters and not just as locations. Nature of my work is strongly based in mixing those locations with their atmospheres in new constructions that exist on paper in my writings as narrative maps and suggestions for playful usage of spaces around us. My process in that is trying to mimic uncertain and unknown mechanisms of dreams and combining known and remembered places as we do when we dream them. And regarding country in which I live – all I can say there is that I never had feeling of being a part of any country (no matter how many of those appeared and claimed me during my life so far) as much as I felt for myself and people around me as hostages of conflicts, bureaucracy and different kinds of misunderstandings. But also those conflicts have a lot of influence in my work, I would be ignorant to state differently. The main thing for me is, to put it simply like this: city (town, village, forest or any surrounding you are from) is a real place, and country (like nationality) is always make-believe concept, so it couldn’t never outgrew importance of something that is real.

3. I had my residence in one of the tough moments of pandemic, the situation in Pristina (as well as a lot of other places) worsened, so the lockdown and strict measures were back in practice. So I was shortened to some of the features of the place and program, like going out after 10pm or enjoying cultural life in city, but didn’t let that bother me much. I got to know city pretty well, made some really good connections and what is most important, created a whole new piece of the puzzle that fits my new book perfectly. In lot of ways I’m thankful for unique perspective of the city in given circumstances. Shortly said – this experience gave me the idea for completion of my book, and that was the most important thing for me. And if we add the fact that I was part of wonderful polip festival, heard and met so many interesting writers there, all of that just builds up my experience of residency to higher level. And for not meeting Pristina during the night, or in the...
Exploring the known town over and over again, can be seen as searching for the hidden treasures in your own backyard, buried and forgotten about in childhood. Forgotten like a dream, that once seemed to hold the key for some very important door.

A method is walking the streets until the blisters on your feet start to cry, dragging your fingers across different facades until you come to difference of every grain of sand engraved in, mapping every crack in the asphalt on the road, connecting skylines into one, neverending broken line... all these exercises can easily turn into meditation of rearranging cities and places that you keep stored in your mind, making new places out of different quarters of cities, real or dreamed or only picked out from the movie screen... its a road to help you prepare for the future...

To be more precise - its the road for taking the future back. An old promise, a real progressive future... planet-city future in which the trains of the world are now just local transportation, one skyline roars the mountains and valleys and waters... super-bridges that are emerging from the oceans and the star sky is forever poisoned by the street lamps and open windows throughout which the neon songs of the TV programs are flickering against the dark, shining on the passer by planes and other flying vehicles...

And then you can just come to a halt, in front of a filthy puddle that oozes from the broken drain pipe in the middle of the street, and cannot but pause to contemplate the choices. Sometimes the reflection beats the original.

The open sky isn’t anything new as a sight, but when you spot it in a dirty, muddy hole in the ground you cannot but wonder how all that open space and mountain sized clouds managed to fit in this step limited lake beneath, and turn its few centimetres of deepness into real abyss...

By Danilo Stojić

Translated by the author

full cultural swing, because of the pandemic restrictions, well let’s say that the city gave me enough as it did to come back and meet that side of it some other time.

4. I was always writing. Always was in love with the written word and wanted to do something in that field, in fact, ever since my parents hooked me up to books. That is the simplest and easiest answer. But giving it a thought, writing is the field where I see myself as totally free, where I am in most control over my creation – not that I always have or want to have control. But that is where I see my expression in its purest form. I also work as video editor, and I do a lot of collage videos, which has influenced my writing a lot lately, so I approach this craft of writing also as a video editor sometimes, working with excerpts or short writings that I don’t see to fit anywhere as complete, so I edit them together and mix in experimental texts. But maybe the most accurate and direct answer to the question of why I write is that I find word document or piece of paper as my comfort zone, and all that I lack in social skills or intellect, I can hide and disguise into something with more worth when I start writing. Simply put: when I can’t express something or take full grasp on my thoughts differently, I write it down and it works. At least for me.

TAKE BACK THE FUTURE
Mehmet Berk Yaltırık was born 1987. In 2010, he graduated from Trakya University, Faculty of Letters, Department of History. He completed his master’s degree at Trakya University in the Department of History in 2014, in the field of General Turkish History, with the thesis “Dasht-i Kipchak campaigns of Mongols”. He is continuing his doctorate, which he started in 2017, in the same department. He started writing stories on his own blog since 2009. Later, his research articles and stories were published on his various websites, fanzines and journals. He mainly writes historical horror stories about Balkan folklore. He worked as a history consultant in some fiction works, especially in some volumes of Devrim Kunter’s “Seyfettin Efendi” comics. Together with his interview, we are publishing the text that he read in the festival in Tirana, a fragment from his story “Blood owner”.

1. My biggest source of inspiration for my writings and related fields has been either my own culture or neighbouring cultures. When writing historical stories, borders inevitably get mixed up. Along with my own history, I started to be interested in the histories and cultures of the Balkan nations. Folk tales, legends, superstitions, even motifs on dresses, daily life, food, folk songs are my main sources. I build my stories on this rich oral treasure. In a border city at the westernmost tip of Turkey; I have been living in Edirne for 21 years. In a border city at the westernmost tip of Turkey; I have been living in Tirana for 21 years.

2. The city I live in impressed me more. It was important to search for old and new faces in a historical city, to read traces, to rediscover wars and migrations, to touch folk narratives. Living in a place and hearing people’s voices is more effective than learning from the pages of a book.

3. Within the framework of the READ 2021 Recidency program, I was hosted by Instituti i Librit dhe i Promocionit in Tirana for a month. I was familiar with Albanian culture from history pages and folk songs. However, it was only after I got to know them that I could learn fully. In some of my stories, I have included figures from Albanian history. Living in Tirana directly gave me new inspirations, new story titles.

4. I love re-imagining old stories and resorting to fantasy elements. I like to write about the unlived adventures of people I haven’t seen, and to fictionalize them myself. Horror stories are fun. In the past, our elders used to tell these stories to spend time by the hearth fire. I do this nowadays through pen and keyboard.

While they were passing through ridgeways and valleys, they talked about “lesser evil” kind of topics in order to forget the fear of death. They were talking about the djinns’ weddings with booming drums echoing through the mountains, fairies choking brides by the river, vampires and upirs jumping from their graves with their shrouds from Serbian lands, the bloodthirsty voivods of Wallachia and Bogdan, which were all parts of Balkan beliefs. While they were watching the shadows, deserted villages, ruins of castles, and abandoned cemeteries, they passed through the storm and torrent and through the roads reeking death, praying countless prayers, thousands kinds of fears in their hearts. Days later, when they reached Delvina, even though it was the evening time, the first thing they did was to visit Veli Pasha’s pavilion. After being accepted to his presence and showing reverence, they submitted that they solved the witcher issue. When Hamza Ali presented his services, the pasha accepted it: “Come after you have solved this problem. I will myself write a message with my own hands and send you to Yanya. I will get you accepted as a soldier under the command of our pasha father, as your wish!”
the Mesopotam village under the darkness of the evening, they headed for Reşad Bey’s mansion. They had realized the eerie silence as they were passing by the houses. Hańza Ali was not aware of it since he was used to it, but Behram and Bosnali, who went through the warzone, could see this dreadful detail when the warfare hit their own lands. It was the same silence with the silence of the ghost-like people in the migration convoys or the immigrant tents. The fact that they could not have come across with any patrols wandering in the town increased the uneasy feeling they had. It seemed that an unspeakable evil had settled down upon the door, the windows with some rotting garlic and crooked crosses hanged, upon the houses no light coming out of their windens. Even the horses seemed uneasy with this horror. The men felt their windows. Even the horses seemed uneasy with this horror. The men felt as if they had jumped into the jaws of death while trying to get away from it.

As they were climbing the hill towards the stone mansion, Behram, considering the earlier surprised face of Bosnali, told Hamza Ali that he should pay no heed to the appearance of the Bey, and then continued to summarise the story of the “Bernusha” tradition and Reşad Bey Hamza Ali was surprised: “I’ve heard it from Albanian brethren. But I did not know that they were granted the title of Bey. So, they are really counted as man!” When they arrived at the stone mansion, they saw that about forty soldiers were waiting beside the wall with torches in their hands instead of patrolling or being on guard duty. There were crosses and garlics hanged on the wooden door of the mansion. When the soldiers who were feeling extremely sleepy saw Behram and Bosnali, they ran with joy towards them, as if they have reached the remedy for their ailment. Behram asked one of the soldiers during the tumult: “Çfarë po bën këtu? Ku patrullë?” (What are you doing here, where is the watchman?). At that moment they saw the garden doors opening and Reşad Bey himself coming directly towards them. First, Reşad Bey invited the newcomers inside the garden: “Come in, I’ll tell you what’s going on…” Then, he turned towards the soldiers: “Don’t move anywhere. If you see that thing, shoot it!”

After the arriving party got into the garden, Reşad Bey personally saw to the closure of the doors and ordered them to barricade the door with a log. When they saw that there were crosses and garlics hanging on the windows and a huge wooden cross placed at the door, they 20 wondered what had happened during their absence. They followed Reşad Bey into the mansion. With the order of the Bey: “Don’t remove your shoes, get in like that” they moved into chamber and stood hand and foot. When Reşad Bey closed the door, they saw the garlics and crosses hung onto it even from the inside and began to worry. Behram, trusting the history between them, went to Reşad Bey: “My bey, what has happened here?” Reşad Bey was in a state of worry and fear of death which was extremely rare: “It showed itself…” As he looked at Hamza Ali who carried a janissary headgear, Hamza Ali ashamedly kissed the ground since he found this tradition of counting a woman as a man because she is dressed like one strange. Bosnali introduced Hamza Ali: “Hamza Ali, one of the janissaries of Belgrade, vampire hunter, vampirovic, dampir… Whatever he is…” It looked like Reşad Bey’s eyes grew wider: “Dampir? I didn’t know.” Hamza Ali beamed for a moment: “Dampir? I didn’t know. This creature, does it pester other villages?”

When I was a little kid there were stories of dampirs finding out much worse things. So, you are one of the janissaries of Belgrade…” Hamza Ali gestured his desperation with his two hands: “There is neither Belgrade nor its janissaries left, my Bey. You asked for me and I answered. You said blood sucking fiend not coming from the earth. You’re afraid even though you are protected by the crosses and garlics?” Reşad Bey started to tell the story with fear in his eyes that he could no longer conceal: “The witch master told us to hang garlic so that it can protect. After Behram and Bosnali left, nothing happened for three days. Then my men patrolling the village saw an owl. Someone waved his rifle at the animal, and its head turned into a crore and scared the soldiers. The night after that someone felt faint and opened a window and something grabbed her hands and tried to get her out. When she screamed, we all rushed outside. It had gigantic arms reaching out for the woman, and then it disappeared. We called for a bode from the village and he hired a priest to bless the houses. After that it started to come at night tapping with her fingernails to windowspanes or scratching the doors. The soldiers won’t leave the mansion. Even I cannot leave…” Hamza Ali asked while he was playing with the handles of the swords and daggers on his belt: “This creature, does it pester other villages? “No, bre, only here.” “Got it, more. My bey, do you have a swine farm or a slaughterhouse here?”

Translated by Pelin Kaat Belenli
I believe that culture is the only space where borders don’t exist; where one can move freely without needing a pass; where instead of opposing one another, we can open the dialogue for new and difficult topics.

Literature is the only space where people from different cultures and nationalities are connected through storytelling and through the essence of being human.
I am very sure that if I were in another place my writing would have different elements, even if the essence of writing will remain the same, because I write what I feel and not what I see. But for every artist there is a need to be in a place where the freedom of creation is not dependent on the other subjects.

2. I have asked myself about these many times. Everything is important. All the things that you have mentioned because they are gathered in between. As a writer you can’t function only by the personal surroundings, or just the town. The writing is a live matter that changes and gets a form from everything that you get to know. And if a writer knows how to make all this in a form, I think that is a perfect thing and a great writer. I think the most important for a writer is to be conscious about the time, the things that happened between his life. Among these things, reading good literature is an important thing too.

3. The experience was quite interesting. I met great artists and great people. It was inspiring too.

4. Most of the time, when somebody has asked me this question, I always ignore this and preferred not to answer. Not because I didn’t like the question, but because somehow, I am afraid, and I don’t want to sound pathetic. But the truth is that I write for myself (to save myself), and the other who reads me to understand that he is not alone in this world, where loneliness is the biggest disease of the human being. I write to remember. I write to know myself and you to know yourself too. I don’t want the other to identify me through my writing. Art is not a selfish thing. When I write I am everyone and I write for everyone that I have met, or I will meet one day. The writing - the only way to be alive.
Dorđe Božović teaches theoretical and areal linguistics at the University of Belgrade Faculty of Philology. He graduated with a BA and MA in general and Albanian linguistics and got his PhD in theoretical and Balkan linguistics from the same institution. In the previous ten years, he translated a number of books and works of contemporary prose, essays, poetry and drama from Albanian, written both by the affirmed authors, such as Arian Leka, Lujieta Lleshanaku, Veton Surroi, Adil Olluri, Jeton Neziraj, and others, as well as by the emerging and rising authors on annual short story competitions “Biber”.

ĐORĐE BOŽOVIC – SERBIAN TRANSLATOR IN TIRANA, ALBANIA

Albanian literature, my second career

1. As a linguist and literary translator from Albanian living and working in Serbia, I would say my societal and cultural surrounding is of utmost importance for my work. Literature is an integral part of the culture and the society in which it is produced and consumed; it is not written nor read in a vacuum. In this context, I see my work as a translator as a very pronounced form of social engagement.

Every new work that gets translated from another language brings with itself a new perspective, and maintaining multiperspectivity is very important for this post-conflict society. There were times, not so long ago, when a translator’s job as mine would be impossible in Serbia. Nothing guarantees that such times won’t return, unless we prevent them. Translating is a prerequisite and a means of connecting the experiences and overcoming barriers that constantly threaten to be imposed upon us. In the end, I translate texts which ought to communicate with the local audience, and not just do it for my own pleasure.

2. All those scales are important for an individual, but I must add to them the regional and the international level, too. At least for me, being a university worker and a translator working with languages, most of the work has to be carried on in an intercultural setting and in spaces beyond our parochial boundaries; otherwise it is not done properly.

3. My stay in Tirana was very useful for my future work and activities. I got a chance to visit the Tirana Book Fair, which takes place every November, and to learn about the Albanian literary scene at its busiest place and time of the year. I also made a visit to the Faculty of Foreign Languages at the University of Tirana and held a workshop on literary translation for the students of various Slavic and Balkan languages. The workshop was very well attended. I met the students who are training to be future translators and language experts and their professors of Russian, Bulgarian and Turkish, with whom I had a very nice time.

4. Some would say that there are no coincidences, but I did start translating almost by accident. By my primary vocation, I am a linguist with an interest in the Albanian language. That’s really a theoretical, not a practical endavour. So, I was never interested in actually becoming a translator, but the translation chose me, I guess. I started translating Albanian literature ten years ago and very soon it became my second career. In fact, I found it complements my work in linguistics well. By translating texts from one language to another, I get to dive deeper into the mechanisms of both languages. Translation is a hard manual labour, but it is also a creative process, full of deciphering tasks and new discoveries. I don’t think that anyone, not even the authors themselves, enter that deep into the underlying structure of their own texts, decompose them entirely to closely examine each, even the smallest of their parts, and then rebuild them again, as the translators do. It is really a shame that, for the most part, this deciphering process stays confined to the translator and other people don’t get to see much often how the translations are actually made; they only get the final product. This is something I was talking about in the workshop with students and I plan to write more about this in the future.
ELENA PRENĐJOVA – MACEDONIAN WRITER IN BELGRADE, SERBIA

Belgrade, my unique experience

1. It’s a two-way influence – my societal and cultural surrounding influences my creative activity and vice versa. Sometimes the influence is strong, sometimes gentle. When I was a student, I wrote an SF short story of the human race creating a new world on another planet and consulted the anthropology lecturer for opinion. She reminded me of an important aspect – that the people colonizing the artificial planet had their past knowledge acquired on Earth to use in the new surrounding. Thus, the relation between the artist’s creative activity and their societal and cultural surrounding is direct, deep, and crucial. The artist is shaped by their cultural and societal background, as well as their art, no matter how universal art is. After all, the first lesson any artist gets from the senior fellow artists, or life itself, is to write/create out of their personal experience, or experiences are based on our realities i.e. the culture and society we as persons belong to.

2. To me, as a writer, freedom is most important; freedom of speech, freedom of thought, to have full liberty as a person, because, in my opinion, only the free person, the free spirit, enjoys the luxury of being creative. Freedom corresponds with creativity on so many levels. However, in terms of the art scene, the geopolitical base of the artist is, unfortunately, indeed important. There are world art centers, and if the artist is there-based, they get mapped in the global artist scene more easily. Globally, efforts are being made to decentralize all society’s aspects, but it’s an ongoing process. I am an urban poet, the motifs I use in my poems are deeply rooted in the city’s neighborhoods and contrasts; for example, walking out of a two-million city on foot is an act of pure adventure, even foolishness. Namely, walking enabled me to make smooth transitions in the city’s neighborhoods and contrasts; for example, walking out of the futuristic Belgrade Waterfront into historic Ze-man and vice versa, like walking out of an SF movie set into a fairy tale movie studio. Furthermore, when you are stationary in a single place for a long period, you are inevitably introduced to new people that you would never have the chance to meet in the comfort zone of the city’s touristic paths. For instance, the beautician I visited during my stay there was literary the highlight of my stay and inspired me to create a character of the prose project I am currently working on. Last but not least, I had the time and pleasure to participate in several poetry readings (where I first met some of the fellow poets which I was a poetry slam gathering organized by my host organization K.R.O.K.O.D.I.L.). Two months after one of the poetry readings, a month upon my arrival back home, a third party contacted me on behalf of a couple present at the reading to ask for the lyrics of the poem I was performing. They even remembered some of the lines, how amazing!

3. The project I applied with was a Serbian-Macedonian translation of the poetry collection ANTIETELA (ANTI-BODIES) by Nemanja Dragač, Serbia’s most awarded young poet. ANTIETELA won the 2020 “Spassoje Pajo Blagojević” national poetry award for the best poetic manuscript. The residency enabled me a direct author—translator collaboration, workshop-like. Spending time and discussing with authors is the key to good translations. Once, when working on the translations of my slam poetry, the Bulgarian/Macedonian-to-Italian translator Davide Fanciullo stated that he wanted to meet me in person so he would feel my energy, hear the nuances of my voice, and see my body posture – all that speaks volumes of my creative personality reflected in my spoken word poetry. Thus, for me, as well, was very important to meet the poet I translate, to get to know the mentality of his speech, to understand why he chooses the precise words he chooses, and not synonyms, or why he uses the syntax he uses, which is not standard... these elements affect the choices I make in my translation.

As far as the residency itself is concerned, Belgrade offered me a unique experience. As a half-blooded Serbian with relatives living in Belgrade, the city has always been a way of a holiday home to me, vacating in the physical reality. Having Belgrade within reach for pleasure, I had never previously experienced it as a two-months workshop. The first lesson any artist gets from the senior fellow artists, or life itself, is to write/create out of their personal experience; our experiences are based on our realities i.e. the culture and society we as persons belong to.

The first lesson any artist gets from the senior fellow artists, or life itself, is to write/create out of their personal experience; our experiences are based on our realities i.e. the culture and society we as persons belong to.

I did during the residency. Due to the pandemic, I avoided public transport, and moving around a two-million city on foot is an act of pure adventure, even foolishness. Namely, walking enabled me to make smooth transitions in the city’s neighborhoods and contrasts; for example, walking out of the futuristic Belgrade Waterfront into historic Zeman is like walking out of an SF movie set into a fairy tale movie studio. Furthermore, when you are stationary in a single place for a long period, you are inevitably introduced to new people that you would never have the chance to meet in the comfort zone of the city’s touristic paths. For instance, the beautician I met during the residency. Due to the pandemic, I avoided public transport, and moving around a two-million city on foot is an act of pure adventure, even foolishness. Namely, walking enabled me to make smooth transitions in the city’s neighborhoods and contrasts; for example, walking out of the futuristic Belgrade Waterfront into historic Zeman is like walking out of an SF movie set into a fairy tale movie studio. Furthermore, when you are stationary in a single place for a long period, you are inevitably introduced to new people that you would never have the chance to meet in the comfort zone of the city’s touristic paths. For instance, the beautician I met during the residency.
SHQIPE MALUSHI – WRITER FROM KOSOVO IN TETOVO, NORTH MACEDONIA

Tetovo, the great beauty behind a ‘modest city’

1. My creative activity is very important for me. I have always lived my entire life a creative way especially being in the U.S.A. We had to work different jobs, and after work, study and write. Writing and creating was my soul’s fulfillment, thus I would forget the hard work required to survive. I was always involved with the Albanian American community, and creativity was so important to create events that gathered people and motivated them to be creative. With creativity always came positive thinking and belonging. Our identity was strengthened, our culture was always renewed by creative activities. We learned to create together, we shared stories of our homeland and our families and that was so beautiful and made us very proud. Now that I am back living in Kosovo, I am so happy because I found myself belonging to the artists’ world. I am now part of a theatre group in Prishtina, filled with young talented people. I had a great chance to meet youth in Northern Macedonia through READ program with Center for Balkan Reconciliation LOJA; their creativity inspired me and helped build stronger ties with each other. Enhanced ideas and collaboration with one another with their team and their community. My life with creativity is like an ocean constantly moving and enriched every minute. I believe that people, surroundings. Then I feel love and feel connected to the people that surround me. This feeling encourages me to give back to the community and share all I have with them in this case is my love, creativity, experience, and knowledge.

2. As a writer the first important thing is my purpose of expressing the ideas and feelings, the second important thing is desire to change things for the better and at the same time reflecting on our traditional values. I write everywhere, the place is not so important, but beauty is. I get inspired and motivated when I am moved by the beautiful spaces, and built my own creativity. I believe that love is all there is. It helps me make a positive change. It helps me connect with others to see through the same eyes. Writing film scripts gives me an opportunity to become a window for others to see through the same eyes as I do. Hence, writing is a process that helps me learn, helps me express myself, helps me connect with others and helps me make a positive change. I believe that love is all there is.

3. To my dismay, it was a great surprise. When I was told I would be going to Tetovo, in Northern Macedonia, where I didn’t know anyone, I was clueless, but I thought I shouldn’t create a judgement before I go, and if I didn’t like it, I could always leave. I was so surprised to discover so much beauty in a city that portrayed itself as a very modest city with humble people. Meeting LOJA’s team was my great surprise, they welcomed me with so much openness and acceptance, so much respect and love. Each member of LOJA devoted time to introduce me to his or her projects; the leader of Loja, Bujar Luma, was incredibly welcoming, informative, and inclusive. This all made me feel and home. Slowly I made new friends, I discovered a poetry festival that was organized there for 25 years in a row and had a chance to meet many international poets. Also, Tetovo theatre was very active, I attended a classical beautiful play written by Anton Chekov “The Bear Proposal” and acted by many actors of Kosovo and Northern Macedonia. I participated in LOJA’s mobile library going to schools and spending time with young students from the 1st to 7th grade, discussing reading and why was so important to read. Visited the Art Exhibit, talked to people on the streets, visited markets, attended a concert at Alliance Française, and discovered many monuments standing side by side like mosques, tekkes and churches. I also participated in two conferences that LOJA organized and discovered an extraordinary program that LOJA’s team conducts with their non-formal trainings at the Universities. They also use art as a tool for change. I had a very hard time parting from these people and this city. There was so much love and hidden creativity, so much culture and tradition, and so much hope for building future through new friendships. I finished my project with READ and we all celebrated. I am most grateful to the READ project that enabled me to be part of such elated and enlightened experience of creativity, exchange, and inclusiveness. This wouldn’t have been possible without READ program.

4. I write because I see the world with beautiful eyes. I want to capture the beauty in every story, every moment, whether stories are sad or happy, easy, or difficult. Writing poetry helps me define my feelings, understand the reality of evolution of life and humanity. Poetry gives me energy to move and feel alive. Writing essays is part of my duty to observe and capture that which needs to be changed in our lives and our societies. Writing film scripts gives me an opportunity to become a window for others to see through the same eyes as I do. Hence, writing is a process that helps me learn, helps me express myself, helps me connect with others and helps me make a positive change. I believe that love is all there is.

SHQIPE MALUSHI is a writer, poet, performer, public speaker, gender adviser, an empowerment coach and leadership trainer, using storytelling to raise awareness, building leadership and peace-building through cross-cultural issues. Originally from Kosovo, she moved through transforming herself from an immigrant to the world citizen. Her stories have been published internationally, and her publications include a book of poetry “For You,” in Albanian, and “The Gift of the Prophets,” in English; “The Secret of Dreams,” and “Beyond the Walls of the Forgotten Land, Albanian Mythological Tales as told by her Grandmother” Her work on women’s empowerment expanded beyond boundaries strengthening relationships in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Iraq, India, Kosovo, Albania and USA. She is involved in humanitarian causes, overcoming racial, cultural and religious differences.
In 2021, two festivals took place in the context of READ project, one in Prishtina, *polip International Literature Festival*, from September 10th to 13th, organized by Qendra Multimedia, and one in Tirana, *the International Youth Literary Festival “Tirana-Gate”*, from October 8th to 10th, organized by Instituti i Librit dhe i Promociionit. In both of them, the discussions were focused on fundamentally interesting topics. In Prishtina, the central subject was that of the identity politics, or what is called “cancel culture”, and its consequences for literature. To quote its presentation by the newsletter of the festival, these are some of the questions addressed during the discussions: “Where does the artistic freedom end, and when does the necessity of being ‘politically correct’ begin?... What is the border between creative freedom – who determines that border? – and has that border been eroded or reinforced in the ‘era’ of ‘cancel culture’? Does art require an ‘ideological guardian’?” It was a reflection on Balkan experiences placed in the context of global discussions around these questions. In Tirana, the central subject was The Other: identity and diversity; the Other as a challenge to the Self and as an opportunity to enrich the Self; the different and the common, or, to quote the opening speech of the Director of the festival: “discovering the common, the different, but also the similar between the cultures of writing in the centre and in the periphery of Europe”, with the underlying question of which is the periphery and which is the centre, and by defying the implied hierarchical categorization, inasmuch as literature by its own nature tends to do so with any exogenous criterion of authority.

In both festivals, the sessions of discussion were combined with sessions of reading literary texts. We are publishing a selection of them.

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**From polip, International Literary Festival, Prishtina 2021**

**ON THE RAILS**

*By Stanka Radjenovic Stanojevic*

The days smell of childhood chlorophyll.
Children of memories in perfect order three by three
Clover leaves.

(Sorrows always remember us when everything is fine)
The colour of a facade murmuring maturity within us.

Shadows of the walls can claim even the homeless!

But the shadows of the treetops are falling on the dream.

Another day of the motionless wagon wakes.

Translated by Ivana Maksic

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By Stanka Radjenovic Stanojevic was born on 1977 in Cetinje, Montenegro. She graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy in Nikšić in the Department of Serbian Language and Literature. She has won recognitions and awards at poetry festivals. Some of her poems have been translated into English, Albanian, Macedonian and Slovenian, and published in numerous magazines for literature.

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*Adela Demetja is an artist, curator, writer and producer born in Tirana; she lives between Tirana, Albania and Frankfurt am Main, Germany. She combines poetry with sound, video, photography and performance. Her poems have been included as part of performative exhibitions in Albania and in the United States.*

*By Adela Demetja***

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We belong together like things
the sea brings at shore

A child in a sunny afternoon finds them laying next to each other

Takes them home hangs them above his bed

To never think of their past again
A gigantic fish lay stretched on its side atop a heap of fishing nets. Its belly glinted mother-of-pearl in the dawn, its black fins coming into ever sharper relief the closer Antonio got to the monster. His footsteps were slightly uncertain. He was pleasantly drunk, infused in carefree joy until a few minutes ago, having spent the night in the best company the city had to offer. Suddenly, he felt the breeze blowing off the land towards the sea. That’s life, thought Petrinelli, almost sober now from the stream of cold air. One day you play *trešeta* and *briškula* all night long, served tripe in tomato and onion sauce courtesy of the cement factory director, with red wine alongside for your blood count, and the next day death can wipe you out, no matter what you do for your health.

He thought of his mother; he always remembered her when he thought he had grounds for a guilty conscience. He could be glad she wasn’t waiting for him now, calling for him through the half-open door to her bedroom, asking if he’d got home safely and how he was. Despite that relief, loneliness overwhelmed him for a moment.

He slowed his steps, focusing on the enormous fish. Strange that the fishermen had just left it there. They’ll surely come soon to take it to the fish market, he thought, sobering up slightly. The oily black sea washed against the quay walls and there was a clatter, whirr and screech, the sounds of anchored ships that Antonio Petrinelli had never paid any attention to before, despite being born right there in the port city. They seemed particularly loud to him now, though.

He was only a few yards away from the heap of fishing nets. They had cork floats attached around their edges, which looked like dried figs. My skull is a camera obscura, he thought, reminding him he had to turn everything he saw upside down. What he’d thought was the belly of a fish was suddenly a man’s belly, his white shirt in stark contrast to an unbuttoned black suit jacket. The tail fin was clearly a pair of trousers ending in black patent shoes, while the fish head was actually a white face with traces of blood and wide eyes beneath dark hair combed back off his face.

He felt as if in a dream, except he knew he wasn’t asleep but swaying through Split harbour on his way home. And he had to hurry; he could feel his stomach contents rising into his gullet. The juicy tripe, brown sauce and rich red wine – he really couldn’t get away with it. Not in the middle of the city at this early hour; he couldn’t just vomit here.

Those damned movies! Ever since his mother had died he’d fallen for the new fashion and was never out of the cinema. Now look what it got him. His mind was conjuring up...
film scenes before his very eyes. As a consequence of a spontaneous ruling by the Royal Interior Ministry in Belgrade, the city’s brothels had been closed for three years now. Their owners had gone all the way to the capital in person to protest, explaining that a port town without brothels was like a brudet stew without fish, a Splitska torta without raisins or a steamship without a chimney, but it was all in vain. The biggest city on the new kingdom’s coast was to be chaste and virtuous, at least officially. The women merely relocated to the dark doorways of the dank stone houses and the dive bars in the old town’s back alleys, where the seamen and other clients kept an eye out for them.

Karlo Cambi, the police officer in charge of that sector, had said in an interview with the local paper *Novo doba*: ‘Not much has changed for us in the vice squad. Except the waiters in the harbour bars are less friendly than the madames used to be.’ The interview didn’t make it out of the censor’s office, so the general public never got to read his sober analysis. The chief of police, still new to the job, warned Officer Cambi about his laid-back approach to journalists but that didn’t seem to bother him. The chief tried to temper his words by adding: ‘You take care of the refugees and their helpers in the port instead, that’s more important to us right now than the whores. And keep a lookout for communists meeting up in the night bars.’ Karlo Cambi’s eyes were fixed on the wall behind his boss, rendering it impossible to read what he thought of such instructions.

At the last words, they patted the shoulders of the man in the middle, who they were holding up on either side. ‘We don’t mean you, Mauro, we know you think like an Italian. But you’ll forgive us for telling the truth. Everyone knows the Italians are superior to all other nations in Europe and the world, not just the Slavs. The ancient Greeks, they were pretty good. The French too, now and then, and maybe the Germans as well, but you can forget all the rest. The Spaniards ruined the language of the Romans and mixed their blood with Arabs and gypsies. The English are stuck up and have terrible food, just like the Scandinavians with their raw polar-bear meat.’ They meant to continue the litany but they couldn’t think of any more nationalities, so they stopped.

Three young men striding across Prokurative Square that morning were discussing this and other grievances. Their quiet curses filled the dawn: ‘porca miseria,’ ‘porca Madonna,’ ‘porco Dio.’ They went on indulging in vilifications of various ministers in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia – ‘rimbambiti cretini,’ ‘testi di cazzo,’ ‘faccie di culo.’ In the end, the three of them – actually only two of them, as the middle one was silent – called the whole government ‘figli di puttana.’ Then they put their arms over each other’s shoulders and walked on. From behind, it looked like the trio were putting on an exotic folk dance.

The men had all sorts of other reasons to be unhappy with the politics of the state they lived in, and once they reached the square by the theatre they gave vent: It was an undisputed fact that after Italy’s soldiers had performed heroic feats in the Great War, their homeland had been cheated out of important territories, to wit: Istria and Dalmatia, including their own city. It was a proven truth that Benito Mussolini was the best politician of all time. He had made Italy great again and seen through the English and Americans’ foul play. It was an undeniable veracity that the Italians were a far more civilised and cultivated culture than all the Balkan nations put together.

At the last words, they patted the shoulders of the man in the middle, who they were holding up on either side. ‘We don’t mean you, Mauro, we know you think like an Italian. But you’ll forgive us for telling the truth. Everyone knows the Italians are superior to all other nations in Europe and the world, not just the Slavs. The ancient Greeks, they were pretty good. The French too, now and then, and maybe the Germans as well, but you can forget all the rest. The Spaniards ruined the language of the Romans and mixed their blood with Arabs and gypsies. The English are stuck up and have terrible food, just like the Scandinavians with their raw polar-bear meat.’ They meant to continue the litany but they couldn’t think of any more nationalities, so they stopped.

The city was still asleep, the passenger ships in the port dozing too. The fishing boats had not yet returned, but had someone stood by the quay wall at that hour and looked out to sea, they would have noticed the flashing lights on the horizon between the islands.

Translated by Katy Derbyshire
the evening’s eyes are dripping
as these drops drop inside the infusion bottle
that tightens your wrinkled arm

now I saw the most beloved eyes in the world
as they are sleeping wearily in the bed of this dark hospital
I saw you tired and numbed for the first time
I saw your pain
hanging as a pale neon
over the silence of the night

we have been here several other times
the first time it was when I was born,
you held my name in your wrist,
you were tender then
as an excellent pupil on the first day of school,
you never thought that one day you’d melt down in life
as this boring infusion
that our lives were nothing but two faded autumn leaves

sirens come and bring other women
other young men killed drunken
in the unwashed streets of Prizren
cars pushing each other
toward the neighbouring hospital graves
you are only sleeping,
you are breathing

I remember when I used to play with your long hair
and you would tell me short stories
about those who are gone and those who’d come
about father’s boredom

and brother’s childhood
but about us we never talked
who cares, tonight you’ll listen to me long enough
tonight, you won’t say anything
about the nights when I would come back home drunk
about time wasted
about women I have loved,
and who never loved me
more than you ever did

for a long time I’ve been willing to find a song for you
but I never had enough time
I was drinking for the one
who left with the very first airplane for the Distant City
where all the sewage from this world’s betrayals is being discharged
for a long time I’ve been willing to love you like this,
only with my eyes

it doesn’t matter,
what matters now is for you to wake up
see, the light is coming out with some confused raindrops
see, I am here as well,
watching the most beloved eyes in the world
see, you are awakening from a horrible dream
which is leaving like an uncalled taxi
with the last drops of this infusion

don’t give up,
we have all the time in the world to die…

Translated by Fadil Bajraj
One day he told us about a place where people do not want to die; they just live on, till they’re fed up, till they’re jaded, and when they go out, they iron their wrinkles one by one, they put their bones inside their clothes or in a bag leaving out – when they still have them – the teeth only.

They carry on till they turn into touchwood, dry and coarse, and sometimes they forget themselves in yards, staying too long under the sun they get scorched.

Another day he told us about a place where they’re terrified of scratching their heads, cudgeling their minds, rack their brain. They solve their dilemmas with a coin, heads or tails they read the cards to make decisions and if someone suddenly gets the hint of an idea, they start jumping and yelling to send it away.

They put scarecrows on every street corner hang horseshoes and horns on their doorframes and the city walls are thick and armored like scales. But in spite of all, at times thoughts find their way into the skull of some ill-fated one and she is left going to great lengths to hide the fact that they will stay with her until she dies.

Another time he told us of another place where people refuse to forget. Thus, the bodies and genes remember not just grandparents, but all the generations, the olden days beyond towns, early hunting, and caves.

In that place, when children are born, people gather around them and they say: look, this one has transparent skin, like we did when we lived off fishing in the fjords and the sun was scarce, so we could not afford color; this one reminds us of when the earth was all silt and mud and our bodies grew shorter and stronger in the rice fields. But how hard it is for them in cases when the ripples of ancient evil shake the pond water so violently that shattered skeletons wash ashore.

In late summer we found him walking along the street, – he’d been drinking – and he told us of a place where people take in all the world into their stomachs; they know everything, and what they don’t know, they learn and having learned it, they review it, repeat it, again and yet again, like prayer on a rosary, they spin it in their heads, tell it out loud to others probably in an effort to understand what one does when the fears take over for example, he said, fear that you’ll die or won’t, or fear that you can’t escape something, or fear of confronting an irredeemable loss which was your fault completely only because you didn’t get it that it was that face (not so beautiful, but with that spark inside the eyes) that you needed more than breath, and now you’ll never have it.

Translated by the author
Honey
Do you feel that we are down here
Living on other people’s breath
They call all of us People
They can call us Crowds
It does not matter
Look at those over there
They are doped
Drugs do not kill
Drugs make you sing
They dream most beautifully
They have given up hopes
Ours are dead
They sing “live”
There is not enough room for the children over there
And our frontiers kill them
But no one can realise whether the prostitutes sing or cry
There are barking dogs among us as well
Probably the music will make them better
Who knows?
Honey
It is not so bad here because people still sing.

The Song of the Tribune

We all are down here
And we are not alone
God is so high above us that we cannot see Him
Whereas the tribune is almost always empty
Even when they appear
They want to be listened to only
Therefore we are a huge, dense, and orphan crowd
We all sing carrying blown out candles
The wind was strong and we have none to light them
The tribune is empty
Even when they come
They have not a single strip of match.

Translated by Ukë Buçpapaj

By Rita Petro

Rita Petro, also known as Rita Filipi, is an Albanian poet. From 1980-1984 she has studied at the University of Tirana, for Albanian Language and Literature. From 1993-1994 she was specialized at the University of Athens, for Philosophy and Greek Culture (Philosophical School, Capodistrian University). Rita Her works have been translated and published in French, in German and in Romanian.
MADAM K.

(fragment from the novel The Internationals)

By Ylljet Aliçka

Madam K., a high ranking dignitary from the Centre rarely visited this country, but when she did she would decry the goings-on of the local politicians and then would fervently swear that she would never set foot in this country again because of the headaches they gave her.

- I have reached the end of my tether with you! You don’t deserve my attention anyway, she shouts, glaring into the television cameras and the faces of the country’s personalities, trembling from head to foot as she spits out these words. But, later on, like a loving mother, although she has no children of her own as she is single, she manages to dominate the shattered nerves and re-commence patient advising and instructing of the wayward child, that is this ungrateful people who are so unappreciative of all her sacrifices, and then, with such munificence she unfolds what this country must do to advance along the course of progress. And, as always, she ends her visits leaving behind her exacting, but nonetheless heartfelt conclusions.

At the beginning, the locals were devastated by the whirlpaw criticism of the high ranking dignitary, a despair which, she claimed, stemmed from their inability to follow the affairs of the country in detail. Still others claim that this is the case because this country has no specific priority. And this happens, he claims, because Madam K. lacks sufficient staying-power to follow the affairs of the country in detail.

The thing was, though, that experience with elections in this country had proven that either they were rigged by the political forces in office, or the tendency was more for rotation to take place with violence. Then, the overwhelming majority of the Internationals thought that Madam K.’s alternative originated from some huge geo-strategic policy, and therefore no-one had the courage to doubt what she said.

At the end of the day even Madam K.’s unexpected stands have a reason, she is incredibly occupied with important commitments and doesn’t have the time to study statistics and routine data, and as it is often the case with human nature, she relies more on her own astute feminine intuition rather than anything else.

Thanks to this intuition, Madam K. determines leadership capacities of local politicians proceeding from the simplest of things, but, which, according to her are of outstanding significance. For instance, one meeting at one of the representations of previous years. To wind up, Madam K. issued a declaration which at first glance appeared higgledy-piggledy related to the formula of the general elections, a formula which just happened to run counter to another proposal made a few days earlier by two or three other International Representations. This intensified confusion within the political class and local public opinion, giving political analysts the courage to declare that some Internationals peddle one version and other Internationals a completely different version.

Ylljet Aliçka is an Albanian writer, scriptwriter and former Albanian ambassador in France, Portugal, Monaco and at the international heritage organization UNESCO. He wrote several short stories collections and novels, and also worked on several screenplays based on his books: one of them, “The slogans” (Slloganet), a French-Albanian movie, among others, awarded at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival and the Golden Prize at the International Film Festival of Tokyo. His books have been published in French, Polish, Czech, Norwegian, Italian, Arab, German, Persian, Esperanto and Chinese languages.
Ars Poetica
The hottest summer on record is also my quietest. I sit on the wooden bench next to the back gate and wait. The cuts on my lips are healing slowly. The back gate opens onto a lawn with a weeping willow, a copper beech, and a few pine trees, then the underbrush begins and at some distance away, the forest. On the right, there’s a ditch and beyond it are fields and a range of hills behind which the sun sets. The mouse appeared for the first time on the second day and soon realized I’m no threat. Its hole is just a step away from my feet. It’s different from the others, running diagonally underground across a kind of forecourt. Sometimes I can follow the mouse’s movements like a light breeze blowing here and there in the grass. At one point the mouse leaps unexpectedly high into the air, spins around, lands, and disappears. I hear my laughter elicit their pity. You rarely see people here. In the local shop there are rumors going around that I can’t tell where it’s coming from or if it’s actually even there. It was a question. I was unsociable. Only the following day did I realize that I can’t smile. I don’t have much to do with other people here. In the local shop they’ve gotten used to my face and flanks are unprotected. One of them stands at my bed. I try to tense my muscles. I pull my left foot back under the blanket, it’s cold. I’m shivering. I’m alone in my room. I can’t see what’s going on outside by the wall. The sound of stamping penetrates the wall. The community is celebrating the sugar beet festival. The stone wall relays the bass as tremors. Someone could easily hide in the darkness of my room. I would have to slip out of bed without a sound and glide across the floor to the kitchen, open the cabinet with the knives and grab one without hesitating or cutting myself on the blade. But before that I’d have to plan how to get upright and my back to the
farmers are saying the fields are 
and their system of burrows. The paths that run between their holes 
recognized most clearly by the field mice. Field mice can be 
about a hundred-year plague of shortfall. Newspapers are writing 
time, he says. Seventy percent crop 
don't have much to celebrate this 
of the sugar beet festival. They 
Baby, I say to Silvius. It's the name 
beats are like earthquakes. Candy 
the corpses is dark, the little bodies 
field mice on the paths. The fur on the 
village a man is fiddling with a 
warehouse on the edge of the 
dry asphalt. In front of the 
entrance. It must have been 
which I take to be its main 
using only the hole at my feet, 
ear. Today, the mouse seems to be 
inaudibly. I don't have to bother 
myself, I can speak quietly, if not 
burst from brightness. Talking to 
repeat, a mouse. I hear Silvius’ 
articulating clearly. Mouse, I 
quickly averts his eyes from my lips 
dine with stitches, sweeping his eyes 
over my shorts, down to my 
shorts. Are you an animal rights 
activist? I'm just interested, I say. Did it 
kill all the dead mice lying around 
everywhere? He looks at me and 
quickly averts his eyes from my lips 
with stitches, sweeping his eyes 
over my shorts, down to my 
sandals. Are you an animal rights 
activist? I'm just interested, I say. 
He believes the mice are croaking 
in their burrows but he hasn't really 
thought about it. I move slowly, 
trying not to breathe more quickly. 
I adapt my breath to the heat as I'd 
adapted it to the stonewall. Layers 
accumulate over the course of the day. With each hour of the day, a 
new layer of sweat on your skin and 
you feel ever drowsier and 
smaller. Bearing the accumulated 
drowsiness of many hours, I walk 
through the softer light of late 
afternoon. Feeling very small, I sit 
on the bench by the back gate. I 
greet the mouse with a throaty 
sound. When the sun is low, when 
I lower my gaze, and when I don't 
expect it, something unexpectedly 
appears on the horizon. It 
crystallizes from the previous 
night; it had only faded in the light 
of day. Figures, landscapes, a hill 
ridge in the haze of a sunset like 
the distant line of the ocean. Haze 
is a mixture of oxygen and water 
molecules, scattered light. Under 
the surface of the water, algae grow 
and under the sun dies 
away over the vineyards. That is the 
afterglow. But some of those whose 
parades I stumble into along the 
stone wall at night carry fishing 
nets with bloody pelts of the same 
red hung on the handles; these 
could be strips of the algae carpet. 

Before it gets too dark for me to see, the mouse reappears. Field 
mice don't differentiate night and 
day like we do. They're active for 
three or four hours and then sleep 
just as long. Are you getting any 
sleep? No, Silvius says. Well, yes, a 
little, mostly after five o'clock. The 
fire doesn't sleep either. You can 
hear the fire. A very high whistling. 
You can hear it sucking the air 
towards it. Like you when you use 
your spray? Maybe. Silvius doesn't 
know how his breath sounds in my 
ears. Where is it burning now? 
Silvius thinks before answering. 
The large plain in Siberia. 
Sometimes he answers according to 
the spread of the fires, sometimes 
according to the latitudes, the 
world regions, or the kind of fire. 
Via Canada he gets to Brazil. The 
rainforest is burning in Indonesia 
too. Greece, Spain, not to mention 
Gran Canaria, Portugal. All of 
southern Europe, actually: 
Germany: A tiny area, by 
comparison, Silvius says. The 
largest fire in Germany's post-war 
history. In the morning, I walk 
into the fields and look for a 
viewpoint from which I can 
overlook the entire region. When I 
get back, a woman is standing in
which I usually keep silenced, is ringing. I find it on the floor near the bed. What’s going on? I ask. It’s burning here, Silvius whispers. I go outside, cross the inner courtyard, Silvius’ feverish voice in my ear. I push open the back gate. I look up to the horizon. The spine of the land. One believed the bogland could ever get this dry, but I knew it would, Silvius whispers. Ground fires are Silvius’ favorite fires. They spread through the humus and often remain undetected. Ground fires are the hardest to put out. They can smolder underground and emerge again months later. Will the fire spread all the way here? Not as a ground fire, there’s a river between us. What it needs to become a surface fire is wind, tree stock, and a spark. It’s being monitored. The hole in the ground at my feet looks abandoned. I’m going there today, Silvius says, are you coming with me? I’m staying with the mice. Come visit me after, I say, and tell me about it. The field mouse does not appear before it gets too dark for me to see it. You can forget wildfires if there’s no wind, Silvius says. Late in the evenings, the sky is still blue and the trees are dark silhouettes in front of it. Completely motionless. Not a breath. If I look too long, vertigo sets in. The outlines of the trees are the backdrop, cut out of the sky, openings onto jet-black outer space. Beyond benign illusions of celestial spheres. Ground fires connect the upper world and the lower world. They burn what belongs to the earth and breathe the atmosphere’s oxygen. As I fall asleep, I wonder if a fire starts when you’re sleeping, do you wake from the heat, the smell, or the noise? Sometimes I have to listen very carefully to be sure that it’s Silvius’ breathing I hear when we’re silent. Maybe there’s a primordial instinct that warns us. Silvius has had trouble sleeping for years. I imagine myself sinking from sleep into unconsciousness because of the smoke. I’d like to know if the pain would revive me practically non-existent? I point at the loaves. All pre-ordered. In the display case, there is a basket of baked goods. A roll, I say. As I said, all pre-ordered, she replies. We look at each other. A shadow of pity crosses her face. Toasting bread, she suggests. I buy a package of sliced white bread wrapped in plastic. By the time I get to the apartment, the plastic is damp with condensation. Silvius has brought champagne. You really do look as if you’d been punched in the face, he says. If a man had been with me in the hospital, they would have arrested him on the spot, I reply. I can laugh softly if I don’t open my mouth too wide. When evening comes, I show Silvius the bench by the gate. We put the champagne bottle on the ground next to a plate with a few pieces of bread I’ve dried out in the oven. Usually it’s very quiet here, I say. Most of the harvest workers are put up in the village, in the fire station, or the elementary school. There’s a lot of activity. The noise of the preparations carries all the way to us. The horizon has turned orange and red. It’s back behind there, Silvius says. Tell me about it. It’s beautiful, he says, imagine a marshland with just a few clumps of low trees and bushes here and there. Far from any settlement. The security perimeter is a few kilometers wide. The streets are blocked. There’s no one around aside from the firefighters standing on four corners, too far apart to talk to each other. They’re not allowed to smoke. They’ve set their helmets on the ground at their feet, along with their heavy protective jackets. The underground fire is heating up the August day, 115 degrees was topped long ago. Imagine the silence. The site of the fire has become a sacred grove and the firefighters its guardians. They endure the heat in silence and without moving. Imagine that you’re with them, watching the broad expanse, the hot air a mirror over the ground. Just when you’re ready to dismiss it all as an illusion, a flame shoots from the ground somewhere, translucent but definitely yellow and red and blue. And they don’t do anything,
they just let the fire stay in the ground? They monitor the spread, Silvius says, they've dug ditches. Look, I say but as a tractor nearby starts with a roar, the shadow disappears. Maybe I was mistaken. I haven’t seen the field mouse for several days and assume it has already hidden in the cellar. They expect the poison delivery any hour now, I say. After midnight, when the area has quieted down, we set out. The large warehouse is the headquarters. The poison will be distributed from there. A few figures sit on benches in the glow of an outside light, smoking and drinking beer. As we approach, they stop talking. Two men stand up and walk toward us, hands behind their backs. Good evening, Silvius says. Among those who stayed seated, I recognize a woman, the one who was soliciting contributions. Hello, I say, we’ve met. I put my hand on Silvius’ shoulder. You see, my husband. You’re brave to do the night watch, Silvius says. We’re just sitting together, one of the men says. They haven’t brought their hands out from behind their backs. Have a good evening, I say. Silvius takes my hand as we walk off. Your husband, he says. Well, I was afraid, I reply. There’s no one on the streets. The harvest workers were forbidden from leaving their accommodations after eleven. Everything will start at sunrise tomorrow. Over the last few days, most of the field mice have moved on to the vineyards and vegetable gardens. They already carry the virus that will soon reduce their numbers to a minimum as always happens when the population reaches its cyclical peak. It’s still dark when Silvius and I leave the village. We’re crossing the river when dawn breaks. Look, Silvius says. What I had thought was morning mist is actually smoke. The smoldering ground fire has passed by the guards. It crossed the ditches where they had not been dug deep enough and has reached the river at the same time as we have. When Silvius gets out of the car, small flames flicker from the ground at his feet. I recognize the will-o’-the-wisps. I look down at my legs. The ground is too dry to give way. The will-o’-the-wisps know and flicker, calm and restrained, over the surface where they emerge. In the trunk of the car there is a shovel and a terracotta pot. On the other side of the river, Silvius dug a small trench to the proper depth. We place the ember we brought from the ground fire on the other bank in the hole and the dry humus begins to smolder. The smell makes us pause. Autumn, Silvius says, remember? He breathes in deeply. I press both hands to my chest. A sharp pain, an ache. It’s the smoke, I say, it gets into your lungs. The little flames stretch toward the dry vegetation, the grasses bending over the edge of the ditch. We need to hurry and pile dirt on the ember, but we move slowly. Strain your muscles. Don’t give in to the exhaustion. The will-o’-the-wisps flicker. The smoke is making our eyes water. I straighten. That’ll do. The ditch is covered. The ground fire advances persistently and inconspicuously and reaches the village ten days later. It encounters the poison still in the ground. Violent explosions bring the fire to the surface. The raging fire is soon spreading at such speed that it cannot be contained. The firefighters restrict themselves to evacuation measures. No one can distinguish the explosions that come from every direction. Only when it is all over, will they perhaps ascertain that hundreds of mines and grenades from the last world war exploded in heavily forested areas. It takes more than three weeks for the fire to move on. The region is almost completely devastated. Only a few lucky houses remained unscathed by chance. In the cellars, the field mice have survived.

Translated by Tess Lewis
The multicultural and multilingual mobile library will travel through the countries of the five partners of READ during a period of three years, with books and other content provided for each by all the partners in the languages of the respective countries, during 2021 is touring through North Macedonia, while this part of the project is carried out by LOJA Center for Balkan Cooperation. A vehicle FIAT Ducato was procured and customized into a modern equipped mobile library unit. It was officially opened in June 2021 in the village Tearce, near Tetovo. Until November 2021, “READ on wheels” visited 28 communities, some of them very hard to reach, 28 schools were involved and 28 events with different sub-activities were organized, in which 794 pupils were reached.

The activities of “READ on wheels” during 2021 include the following:
- discussion with pupils about reading and creative writing;
- presentation of stories and poetry from the local pupils (living in that community);
- storytelling and creative writing workshops;
- visit and discussions with the READ resident authors in North Macedonia (the visual artist Deniz Beser from Turkey and the writer Shqipe Malushi from Kosovo);
- discussions and workshops with more experienced and popular local authors (Bardhyl Zaimi, who writes in Albanian language, and Milena Ilievsksa, who writes in Macedonian);
- presentation of translated books from the region, whose translation was supported by the READ sub-grant scheme; cooperation with the Sub-grant beneficiaries;
- presentation of the library;
- borrowing books;
- creative workshops for making bookmarks.
In the frame of READ, once per year for a total duration of three years, an open call for proposals will be published for financial support to third parties. Civil Society Organizations from North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia and Turkey can apply for innovative multilingual and intercultural projects. The organizations can apply for support in the area of translation, publication, and/or promotion of works in order to increase access and awareness of literature beyond the national context. Approximately 40 multilingual projects will receive direct financial support.

Intercultural project, from the other side, can apply with innovative projects that focus on promoting literature, reading and cultural diversity.

In December 2020, Open call for support of intercultural and multilingual projects was published in the five project partner countries. The application procedure was easily accessible by organizations with limited managerial and administrative capacities. The selection committee consisting of 11 members assessed the 78 received applications and awarded 29 project proposals with a sub-grant.
We are highlighting here some of their projects:
- Roma Versitas Albania, in cooperation with Roma Community Comix, provided the translation and publication of an illustrated book, *Alde*, which aims to promote the human rights and multiculturalism of Roma people in the region. It was translated from Albanian to Turkish language, and published online; it was also translated to Romani language and made an audio book. The project was promoted on an international competition of International Achievement Awards.
- The project “A Cultural Bridge Built Throughout Poems” was implemented by the Turkish organization BİLŞEK Gençlik Kulübü Derneği. An anthology book including 30 poems and biography of 30 poets from Turkey and North Macedonia were translated in Turkish, Macedonian, Albanian and Serbian published in digital format. The central aim of this project is to support and promote local poets of Kahtamanmaraj, Turkey, and Gostivar, the North Macedonia, gifted people, although unknown beyond the local horizon.
- NGO Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture ACDC, North Mitrovica, Kosovo, organized five training with ten young writers, mostly students and professors from university of literature, which aimed to equip them with useful skills in creative writing workshops and to provide them safe intercultural dialogue on the publishing opportunities. As part of the project’s activity, engaged 5 people from different ethnic communities to write an Op-Eds in order to highlight and explain certain issues of importance for the literary arts and artists and overall artistic initiative in northern Kosovo.
- Fondacioni 17, Prishtina, Kosovo, cooperated with Art House, Shkodra, Albania, for the art residence “Beyond”. The aim was to create a space of cultural and artistic exchange on regional and international level. The artists Xhulian Millaj, from Albania, and Rena Begoli, from Kosovo, became part of the residence program. Several meetings were organized, with Rena in Shkodra and with Xhulian in Prishtina. They made public presentations of their research during the respective residence periods.
- The main objective of the project “Belgrade-Skopje: Tour-Retour”, implemented by Liceulice, Belgrade, Serbia, is to add to the cross-cultural cooperation between Serbia and North Macedonia, through the literary dialogue of the two contemporary authors, Lana Bastašić from Bosnia/Serbia, and Rumena Bužaroski from Macedonia. They have used the correspondence to reflect upon the literary scene in both countries, but also to the current socio-political frame of the countries we are living in, their similarities and differences.
- UBShR (Union of Albanian Municipalities in the Region) is an independent, non-governmental organization, based in Tirana, Albania. It is driven to nurture synergies and enhance cooperation among countries in the region, to promote and enhance economic and social cooperation in the larger European ecosystem, support good governance and contribute to the region's EU integration perspectives. Through the project “Cities4CultureHeritage”, it aims to activate the commitment of young people to protect their cultural heritage by informing and raising awareness about the cultural values that carry various handicraft products.
- Perun Artis Association for Art and Multicultural Development, Bitola, North Macedonia, realized two interesting books: “The New Adventures of the Twins”, a book for children by the Serbian author Milićin Djuricicov, and the poetry book “Correcting the Mistakes”, by the Albanian author Arian Leka. There were two online promotions of both books, and Arian Leka’s promotion onsite in the frames of the Annual Celebration of the Albanian Alphabet, which was created in Bitola in 1907.
- The project implemented by Kolarac Foundation, Belgrade, Serbia, consists in the publication and translation of “Clover with four leaves”, a book by the young Turkish author Ayşe Aycan Kesici. This project is important because it connects two cultures by showing that the friendship is the most important thing in one society, and if we keep supporting each other, we will be happy and successful. And when the hard time strikes, there is no better consolation than a true friend.
- The project MOCI – Mobile Open Culture and Innovation Hub, implemented by 7 Arte, Mitrovica, Kosovo, in partnership with the organization Tek Bunkeri, consists in a series of Creative Storytelling Workshops for youngsters, both in Mitrovica and Tirana. It facilitated exchange of creative productions and practices by reducing language barriers and creating relations based on shared interests, challenges and practices. Local professionals and thier youth audience were directly involved in these activities.
- From April to October 2021, the Center “Health, Art, Sport, Tourism, Education”, based in Tirana, Albania, implemented a project that consisted in the translation of a book from Turkish into Albanian, in a series of Creative Storytelling Workshops for youngsters, both in

Localia
“I will never see the world again” by Ahmet Altan, with the story of prison experiences of the author, imprisoned for political reasons. The book aims to convey through the language of art promotion of democracy and Human Rights. After the publication, it has been distributed to five universities, which will organize activities around it.

- The aim of the project Sound of Curiosity, implemented by Bis-Body Processed Art Association, based in Istanbul, Turkey is to initiate new intercultural dialogues among youths from Turkey and Albania, through writing, reading, and sound art as a contemporary art practice to give ways to be aware of each other’s culture and language. In this project, language is a tool for reading, writing, talking but also listening to each other. Young individuals from Turkey and Albania are invited to communicate with each other regardless of their language, culture, and beliefs. And they do it with words, even if they do not know each other’s languages. Does it seem impossible?

- "Stories we share" is an intercultural storytelling podcast project implemented by PVN Albania. It tends to strengthen cultural ties between the countries by producing an intercultural creative product that shows the connections and similarities between young people while combating the division and negative stereotyping that unfortunately exists in the Balkans. The aim was to create audio projects, in the form of a podcast series, to connect and share personal stories and experiences of young people in four Western Balkan countries – Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia. The targeted audience were youth from these countries, as well as civil society actors working on intercultural projects and with youth in the region.

- The project “Poetry in Motion”, implemented by Srebno Drvo, Belgrade, Serbia, consists of making a stage play from poetry. The play is based on poems 51 from 21 different authors from five different countries: Serbia, Kosovo, Albania, North Macedonia and Turkey. Modern poetry from the region brings to life key issues like love, fear, loneliness, identity, insecurity... that everyone can relate to. No matter where we come from, we all ask ourselves the same questions on our life journeys. This story about introspection and love is brought to stage by two young actors and a dancer.

- "Hidden in Plain Sight" (I fshëhur në fushë të hapur), a project implemented by Shunker, Prishtina, Kosovo, is the first multidisciplinary monography in this country. It is an all-comprehensive publication that promotes Kosovar artists who were not visible enough in spite of their talents. This publication as a result of an intensive research by the artist Driton Selmani. It comprises sketches, photos, installations, sculpture, video art and performances, accompanied by detailed documentation.
In his painting series titled Contrast Series, Beşer explores the transitions between what we see and what we speak, by transforming text into images. Trying to convey that in this series he has produced, everything is made up of poles that are interconnected, transformable and contain their opposites, Beşer tries to show new images and contrasting words by transforming a singular image on a canvas through blue and red lights.

In this series of paintings created by Beşer, the opposite of one word determines the meaning of the other. Beşer deals with the inability of one of the opposites to be independent from the other and the contradictions in the world with his works.

Regarding this similarity-difference opposition created by the opposite elements that make the universe and nature, Heraclitus refers as follows: “The opposite things come together and the most beautiful harmony arises from the irreconcilable opposites. Everything happens as a result of conflict.” Conflict, harmony and disharmony form the essence of this series of Beşer.

Most of the works we are publishing are from his exhibition in Tetovo, during his period of residency, in the framework of READ, an experience he explains in the interview that is published in olur Dossier.
THE BRIDGE AND THE MAN

By Krzysztof Czyżewski

It is an old truth that only by transcending oneself one can remain oneself. This, however, would not be possible without the imagination of dialogue, the path leading man outside the individual horizons, towards a meeting.

Motivated by the imagination of dialogue we involve ourselves in a discourse with the Other, one that could be our own voice, a supernatural being, an alternative reality, existence on another plane, untamed memory, a person with whom we share our life, a neighbour with roots in a different culture, a differently minded or handicapped roommate, a fellow-citizen of other nationality or religion... The Other is part of us and part of the community we feel we belong to. The Other we are talking about here cannot be absent or indifferent to us. If we wish, for instance, to refer to a devUSH of Buldara as the Other, it is only on the condition we include him in the same community we perceive vital for ourselves and shaping our own fate. If we presume his or her life to be a separate one, ruled by separate laws, irrelevant to our own existence, he or she will remain to us alien and distant, perhaps interesting and worthy of respect, but by no means the Other. Similarly, an angel is not the Other if it remains to us an abstract being, untouched by our reality, inner experience or faith.

The Other is part of us and part of the community we feel we belong to. The Other we are talking about here cannot be absent or indifferent to us.

Only when the Other does become part of ourselves and an integral link of the community that we belong to, we will be able to stand a chance of transcending ourselves by addressing it.

The imagination of the dialogue in action becomes an ethos, a series of actions and practical skills gained through following the code of values conforming to its spirit. This ethos integrates our individuality and community entering into a conversation with the Other, not aiming to eliminate it or lay it down on the altar of a group unity. Its integrity is essential, including spiritual and family life, as well as both social and political activity. In each of these we face the same threshold, erected before us by our own ego, our own interest, possessions, complacency about what is familiar and conforming to our established notions - the threshold which holds back man’s endeavour to achieve full humanity. It is so firmly entrenched that we have learnt to build our own individuality and community shrinking from crossing over. In consequence, we have created an identity, a social development, a raison d’État, a living space based on the negation of the Other. We are trying to find different methods of denying it in our inner life and in people around us. Cowards as we are in fighting our own limitations and fears, we become heroes of fighting the Other, nothing but a form of escape, read: escape from ourselves. In this position we easily get persuaded that by doing so we will gain a good reputation and contribute to the progress of civilization.

When a man stops transcending himself, the organs and the functions responsible for achieving it decline in him. Man experiences eradication. Because what else could mean depriving one of one’s other shore - loneliness on an island set in an inaccessible archipelago? The imagination of dialogue allows also an insight into the world that has forgotten the secrets of the craft of bridge building and makes us realize the consequences of such deficiency. If we consider here addressing the Other as the binding material of individuality and community, then this lack of ability must bring about problems in the sphere of the inner life, both social and political. Looking at it from this perspective we can perceive a thread linking the problems which until now we used to attribute to different spheres of our life. The difficulties in controlling our own ego, the separation from transcendence, the alienation and loneliness of free individuals, the culture captivated by large numbers and devoid of an intimate space of an authentic meeting, the transitoriness of personal relationships, the crisis of the family, the indifference of the neighbour, the fear of your mate, the xenophobia of the fellow-citizen, the demand for a scapegoat, the inability of building federal structures, retreat from universalism... Each of these
phenomena reveals man’s inability to transcend oneself.

One couldn’t help but get the impression that these phenomena, in large measure, express the present spiritual condition of man and describe the reality on the threshold of the third millennium after Christ. Alienation or hostility towards your fellow man based on racial or religious prejudice is, of course, nothing new in itself.

If we presume his or her world to be a separate one, ruled by separate laws, irrelevant to our own existence, be or she will remain to us alien and distant, perhaps interesting and worthy of respect, but by no means the Other.

The figure of the scapegoat is as old as that of man living in community with other people. None of the mentioned above phenomena is completely new. We should, however, feel concerned about the fact that man again finds transcending himself a great problem and in so many fields simultaneously. Additionally, we should feel warned by the fact that we perceive the disappearance of the ethos of dialogue at a special moment in time indicating a new reality surrounding us – never in the history has man lived in the condition of close neighbourhood of such a great variety of cultures, so apparently separate and at the same time, so visibly close to us, the world around him. Never, as well, have borders been so often crossed over such wide areas of the world, and physical distances have been so easy to surmount.

Obviously then, the mentioned above phenomena cause mounting tension, and addressing the Other becomes a truecivilizational challenge. The contemporary world cannot as yet face up to it. The opposite of globalization and the superficial unification becomes the never ceasing differentiation and ennoblement of separateness. The common cult of identity replaces the wanting community, a result more of deficiency and alienation than integration in what is common and general. Those distant and alien live ever closer to us, conscious of their own separateness and defensive about their own identity. It is more and more difficult to isolate ourselves, different and separate as we are, with a border or wall. This intensifies tension, threatens with a conflict, not so much ethnic or national, as it used to be not so long ago, but a cultural one, within one state, city, district, the globe... None of the notions of the age of modernity have suffered harm but by such a spectacular defeat as the notion of tolerance. Let us admit it, the rich societies of the West have been concealing behind it a great deal of superficiality, evasion of tough issues, prudery of the political correctness and plain falseness. But does it mean that, in return, we should be just granted, a thing that has already become a cultural norm, the right to manifest particularistic interest and strongly defend our own identity? Those who claim that tolerance can be effectively replaced by good laws seem not to remember that the ethos of dialogue includes the spheres of our life where no laws apply and concerns the acts that man does not have to do unto others but nevertheless can still wish to. Finding ourselves in the situation of the ever closer neighbourhood we do not augment our understanding of tolerance but incline more towards its rejection, mocking it and rendering it a commonplace (it is clearly visible in the equation of tolerance with moral relativism.)

Essential then becomes the question of the base on which one could build solidarity of the society so diverse and split inside, apprehensively helpless towards othersness, the othersness itself growing ever closer and by the same token cherishing its separateness, boasting economic and cultural contrasts and the uses of democracy. The rule of law is a significant notion, but by far too insignificant to meet the challenge. We need to create a connective tissue for the spreading borderlands, without it, and as we learned by the tragic lesson of the previous century, we shall witness the reappearance of yet another outburst of lust for domination and hatred, manipulated by yokels and Jews - Jews were everywhere. The two-headed imperial eagle seemed to be the figure of some insect. Conrad’s story of Mein Kampf, which, after Hitler, just about a hundred years ago perceived the realities of a western metropolis saying: “More and more I hated this tangle of races, this mixture of Slavs, Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, Ukrainians, Serbians... and mostly

Our Essay

Never in the history has man lived in the condition of close neighbourhood of such a great variety of cultures, so apparently separate and at the same time, so violently changing the world around him. Never, as well, have borders been so often crossed over such wide areas of the world, and physical distances have been so easy to surmount. Obviously then, the mentioned above phenomena cause mounting tension, and addressing the Other becomes a true civilizational challenge.

Man’s dialogue with the Other is a process of building. It is not given unto us, nor does it simply happen on its own. Dialogue is a craft. Those practising it from the time immemorial have been compared to bridge builders.
In the Balkans they were called neimars and treated with the respect due to the architects knowledgeable about the secrets of nature and being able to bring under the control the powers of chaos. Later, the name went into oblivion and together with it the secrets of the craft. Bridge building became a technique. The old tools were neglected, and choosing new ones no one cared for equipping them with the functions that neimars employed. It brings to mind a comparison to Esperanto, the language almost forgotten today as it seemed useless in the era of the general domination of English satisfying the technical need of communication, the English language is devoid however, of an attitude characteristic for the ethos of dialogue, the matter of substance for Ludwik Zamenhoff and the practitioners of Esperanto.

Sufficiently long we have experienced the community life without the neimars' workshop and without the schools of philosophy of dialogue which could teach the craft of bridge building. It is not the time now for pondering over what it could be like if such workshops had existed in a significant number earlier, while - equipped in technologically more and more advanced tools - we have already practised the skill of destroying bridges. One can doubt the value of the dialogue workshop created by Martin Buber in Germany, in the fascist era. Growing up in Lviv, he became conscious of an alternative to living together in a multicultural city - after all it was not to be living in separation, such a possibility does not exist in a modern society; the alternative was to close the ranks against the Other. Someone might say it was already too late for a philosophy which seemed unpractical and unnecessary in those times. Masses of apprentices already filled then the workshops of ideology that demanded murdering the Other so that the threatened identity could re-establish the immemorial ritual of the community binding. And though the death toll among the people stigmatized as racial or class enemies was higher then ever in history, more significant was the number of the witnesses engaged, and consequently the participants in the rituals, eventually it was the decisive factor for closing of the ranks and their duration. The community collusions, instituted in this way during the murderous 20th century, proved permanent to such a degree that we can still feel them under the surface of our everyday life, not always sufficiently aware how easily they can be revived.

In spite of the durability of the matrices engraved in the studios of the twentieth-century totalitarian ideologies, it is them that eventually suffered a shameful defeat, it is these workshops that lie in ruins, compromising their usefulness proving inhuman and short-lived. What at first appeared pragmatic and conforming to the spirit of history, turned out to be a mere fantasy which could have turned out grotesquely laughable if not the size of destruction and suffering it brought about. Whereas the workshop of dialogue, also the one established, inter alia, by Martin Buber, from the beginning encumbered with the odium of unreality or utopianism, reveals to us today its amazing far-sightedness and vitality. Moreover, the theological and philosophical reflection developed in the workshop, which later acquired the name of the philosophy of dialogue, is read by us today, modern readers, as the art of life praxis expressing itself for instance in the rev. Józef Tischner’s ethics of solidarity.

The question of how to internalize the Other is also the question of the possibility of a modern culture of borderlands. Borderlands understood here not as a territory located at some outer boundary, e.g. of a state, but as the space of common life of different people, i.e. one where borders run across the community. Today, it is no longer an area located far away from the centre, notorious for immemorial tribal skirmishes, but famous for the wealth of the preserved against the tide of modernity, various, sometimes exotic cultural traditions. Borderlands have already become the centre of the modern civilization. Necessary in such circumstances becomes the creation of the workshops of building bridges for more and more novel and difficult “crossings”, where the imagination of dialogue becomes the matter of everyday, organic work. Before it is not too late, before the work on addressing the Other once again becomes associated with something unnecessary and before new masses of apprentices begin to fill the workshops of new soul masters under the sign of Ubu the...
King. An alternative to such a course of events is not a festival type of multi-culti or any other form of a superficial and short-term meeting of cultures. Let me say it once again: we are facing the challenge of developing the art of dialogic thinking, of creating an active culture of dialogue in the organic process of personal and community development, in a long-term process. We shall need for that purpose to learn the long forgotten neimar’s craft, re-read and useful wherever man struggles with transcending himself.

The neimar we refer to here, is not only the builder of bridges spinning opposite banks. The craft includes also the man standing on the guard of the bridge. This man guarding it, opening or closing the passage to the other side, only together constitute a true image of the construction recognizable as a work of the dialogic imagination. One that erects only the structure of the bridge at one moment will finish his work and continue to another place to deal with something new. Underlying the secret of the neimar is the fact that the bay bearer of his construction is the man inhabiting the place where the bridge was erected and for whom the work at the bridge never ends.

Georg Simmel in the essay *The Bridge and the Door* (2) writes about man that “he is a dividing being and must always divide to be able to unite - so the bare, neutral existence of two banks must first be spiritually conceived as a division if they are to be connected with a bridge.”

For the connection established by the bridge to authentically realize the possibility of dialogue and meeting, there must exist a real possibility of breaking the connection. Division and differentiation are constituent elements of communication, and of the effort to build connections. In the case of a bridge there always exists the alternative of destruction, we are aware of its fragility and vulnerability in the face of the destructive powers at the disposal of both nature and man. Perhaps, it is not apparent in the physical image of the bridge: “Generally speaking, a bridge in a scenery is usually perceived as «picturesques»” - writes Simmel. Therefore, he credited it with bringing out a mere unification and complemented its significance for the truth about man with the symbol of the door which “demonstrates that the division and the connection are only two aspects of the same act. [...] The door can be opened and therefore when it is closed, it may evoke a clearer than a common smooth wall sense of separation from everything situated outside the space”.

A bridge built in compliance with the arcana of the neimar’s craft can also contain Simmel’s door. After all, the bridge might have never come to be built, and at any moment it can cease to exist. Its existence we owe to the man who erected it and the one who was built into it as a living bay by the neimar - the man in charge of it, one who closes and opens its gate. The bridge institutes only a possibility of connection. We need the nurtured by man culture of closing and opening of the gate. “The deepest essence of man - writes Simmel - is the way he sets for himself boundaries, while still remaining free, i.e. is able to remove the limitation, to go beyond it”. Man, the doorkeeper of the bridge, once again in history of our civilization stands at the crossroads of boundaries. And again so much depends on him alone...

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