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SPECIAL ARTICLES

We had a classic: notes defining Predrag Matvejević*

Darko Suvin

Tel qu'en lui-même enfin l'éternité le change
(Such as into himself eternity finally changes him)
Mallarmé, *The Grave of Edgar Allan Poe*[1]

How can I write about my admired friend Predrag Matvejević?[2] Clearly, I can only write about what I really remember, as well as respond to his books and articles in my possession. It is not at all possible, and perhaps not necessary, to avoid the first person singular. But one should avoid what our Miroslav Krleža, a role model to both of us, excellently termed "me-and-me-ing." One should strike a balance and arrive at "me-and-predrag-ing."

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So, how am I to call these notes? "Reflections while reading and remembering Matvejević" sounds pompous, although it would be correct. The only thing I am certain about is that this text cannot be comprehensive, for two reasons. First, I knew him too little, especially when he was in his prime (*force de l'âge*, as Simone de Beauvoir would put it). True, we were appointed teaching assistants at the Faculty of Philosophy at the same time, at or around 1959, and I must have become acquainted with him soon after that — at the meetings of the LCY (League of Communists of Yugoslavia) party cell we both belonged to, if nowhere else. Still, we were novices at those meetings, compared to the

opinion makers, usually full professors, and I do not recall that he ever zealously participated in party debates (for an outline of Predrag's relations with the LCY, see his *Mondo Ex* 32–37). We were both entirely consumed by and engrossed in our work; we devoted considerable time to writing, including our dissertations, he in Paris with the well-known professor of esthetics Etienne Souriau (on whose work I also strongly relied when lecturing in Zagreb those years on the role of agents in dramaturgy). I would say that we had friendly feelings for one another, though we were not intimates meeting at least once a month, but rather in an outer concentric circle. We belonged to the same generation, and equally believed in the necessity and possibility of socialism with a human face, i.e. self-managing socialism. He published his first book in 1965 (the long essay *Sartre*), and I at the same time two (*Two Aspects of Dramaturgy: Essays on Theatrical Vision* and *From Lucian to the Lunik*, an introduction to SF), but we read each other sporadically. That changed in my case only when I started coming to Zagreb from Canada once a year, which was after the publication of his breakthrough *Conversations with Krleža* (*Razgovori s Krležom*) in 1969.

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I vividly remember our meeting in the early 1970s, probably in 1974 when I was, by way of exception, again teaching a couple of weeks at the Zagreb Faculty of Arts, an extramural postgraduate course for older students, mostly school teachers. After a conversation that I do not remember at all, I walked Predrag (referred to as PM further in the text) to the university parking lot. I had been complaining to him how my initiatives to be reinstated in Zagreb University by special invitation from the Faculty, without applying for it, had remained fruitless, and how my former English-language professor, Rudolf Filipović, who was dean at the time, said to me: "Darko, this can't happen here, you've been americanised." PM was listening closely, and, getting into the car, smiled at me and said in his charming way that excluded offence: "Darko, you are childish still...." He was right, although I do not consider childishness simply a negative quality or a sign of late development. Children believe in fairy tales, I do not think highly of those who never have. And so I believed that if a person had done what I had, the motherland might find him useful. To be sure, even during the six years after 1959 as I worked and taught in the Faculty as *asistent* (a kind of most junior lecturer), I had become acquainted with the cold sea undercur-

rents of offended greatness, such as my English lit. Professor T-rina, or with the ideological suspicions I raised equally in nationalists and in this or that supporter of the embattled *Praxis* magazine[3]. In 1965–66 all of these led to the failure of being re-elected to my teaching post. In all likelihood, at the time of our conversation I was also under the influence of the New Left movement, the driving force behind the 1968 rebellions very popular among the youngsters of North America, including my McGill University. I supported their stance despite reservations: they knew quite well what they were fighting against — e.g. the Vietnam War — but much less what they were fighting for. Further, it was not at all clear to me how perfidiously and violently the Yugoslav 1968 student rebellion was crushed; so I still believed at the time in a comparatively quick advent of a just society within SFR Yugoslavia (further SFRY). Parallels with the proto-Christian community in Palestine and its belief, during the first half a century after the death of Rabbi Yehoshua, in his speedy messianic arrival are painfully clear. Were they childish? Certainly, but are they to be reprimanded?

Later, in the 1990s and even more in the "zero years" of 21st century, when we met more frequently in Rome and read each other diligently, PM would say to me: "Darko, we are working in the same direction: you more on theory and I more on practical aspects." I am not sure of the share friendship played in such closeness, disregarding or even welcoming differences: our reactions to the shock of the fall of "really obtaining socialism" were equally intense but somewhat different. It seems to me PM came to believe that almost all politics was a delusion and a waste of time, if not a criminal activity that ought to be opposed — which he did in numerous texts on the heinous deeds committed in Yugoslav secessionist wars and by new mini-governments, just as he was strongly, if loyally, critical of many (less bloody) misdeeds of the SFRY authorities. I completely agree with such an opposition stance but I like to think that politics could also be reassessed in depth (although it is very hard going). At any rate these differences did not prevent us from being allies. Indeed, starting with *Le monde ex* (The World of "Ex" — meaning ex-Yugoslavs, ex-Soviets, ex-communists) he made a deep impression on me, because I am part of that ex-world as well as he. This is overtly visible in my writings on exile and emigration, and also in two dedications of mine to PM: in a 1998 essay, where I call him "the utopian of ex," and in 2000 poem on that subject, *Fudö* (the wrathful godhead

of Shingon Buddhism), directly flowing out of reading him and dedicated "To Predrag Matvejević, who wrote for Yugoslavia."

To be sure, the framework or mode of PM's practice was the same as mine: writing texts, Krleža's "handful of letters made of lead," today electronic letters. Perhaps it would be more precise to say that I insist more on generalisations and he on specifics. In our writings we use specific details as witnesses, springboards or examples, but my detail was as a rule literary or theatrical, i.e. from narrative structures, whereas his was nooks and forgotten crannies of Venice, or odd traditions and recipes of bread, or old portolans of Syrtis Major and Minor, or the long roster of Croatian authors who were "ethnically unclean" or emigrants. This is how closer he was to tangible human practice, or, shall we say, everyday politics, but also farther from philology (which follows me like a shadow and a warning).

Still, during the past 20 years or so I have added to my philology what I call political epistemology, puzzling about how do we know what we suppose we know, which I have managed to apply to many matters — from scientific research via narrativity to fascism and poetry. This far I follow his example. But the possibility of philology being integrated into this model as a specific cognitive practice has remained my ideal: this star I have followed all my life.

* * *

Second, as an emigrant I read too little of PM — that too is one of the costs of exile. Officially no longer at the Faculty of Arts since 1965, I resided in reality since 1963 in the USA, or was on sick leave, or went definitely back to the USA and then permanently to Canada. I came to Zagreb every year regularly toward the end of May to see my parents and closest friends, stayed hardly a week and went with my wife Nena to Lošinj island, to swim and write; so I met PM almost every year but briefly, so to speak in passing. In 1982, I think, when he was in the USA, I invited him to a lecture on comparative literature at McGill University where he could address the audience in French; he stayed several days, and I lent him my dark blue *beret basque* to ward off the cold (it came back stretched, PM was large-headed). Yet it was only since the 1990s that I came to follow his books systematically, also many of his shorter texts. When in 1994 he left Paris for Rome, we started meeting there as well; our acquaintance grew much closer after 2001, when I moved to Italy. I am writing, therefore, about

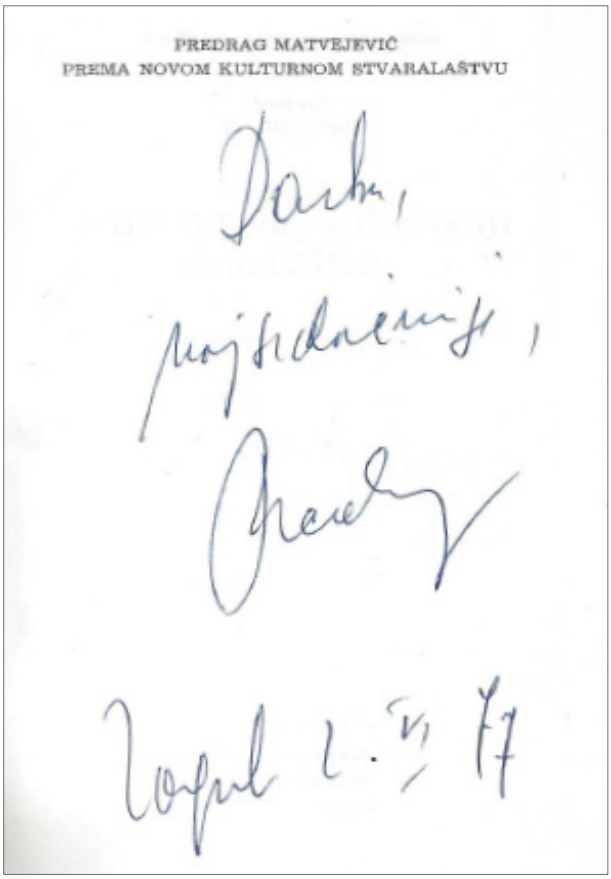
my earlier impressions but then in particular about our communication in Rome until 2008, when my wife Nena and I used to come for a week or so at a time to see exhibitions and friends. I shall also dwell on his nine books (in different languages) in my possession, of which I bought four and he gave me and Nena five as a present, and mention some from a great number of articles in electronic form received from him.

All this means that I did not systematically follow the bulk of his work on what is perhaps its affective centre — his insistence on the liberatory movement in Yugoslav culture in the quarter of century between 1965 and 1989. These notes will be woefully inadequate as far as this, to my mind still important and valuable, phase of PM's goes. He gifted me with two titles from that period. The first was *Jugoslavenstvo danas* (Yugoslavism Today), inscribed to me on July 7, 1983, with which I wholeheartedly agreed and underlined a great deal of text; this book arguably brought him greatest praise and blame in SFRY, he was hated and feared by nationalists of all stripes. Though this period of his comprises at least three more books and hundreds of articles in Croatoserbian and French, I shall here only say a few words about the other important book of that period, *Prema novom kulturnom stvaralaštvu* (Towards New Cultural Creativity*)*, which he gave me, perhaps on that very parking lot, on June 2, 1977:

* * *

Among the debates of this book, many are still relevant to present times: the problems posed and partially articulated in SFRY practice and PM's first theoretical overview of its "cultural creativity" have usually been compounded and left to fester in the post-Yugoslav dwarfish nationalisms. But I can here only mention two foci: PM's persistent struggle *against infra-Yugoslav nationalisms.* and his insistence on the *self-government* in the arts, specifically among literary authors or generally cultural workers in the SFRY. I shall now focus on the latter.

The issue was precisely summarised by PM as "turning a government on behalf of the working class into a government of the working class" (63), the workers being not only those on a factory floor but all of us living on our earnings and not off exploiting or oppressing others. Within this horizon, PM's major concern was distinguishing between newly formed institutions (e.g. workers' councils) and "self-management as a culture," a new system of values and standards that was still undeveloped in Yugoslavia. Developing this culture



Predrag's first dedication to me in a book

ought to have complemented the existing political structure, some of whose "institutions... in fact replace public opinion instead of expressing it" (90, see also generally 78–95). This somewhat — but not overmuch — cautious and Aesopian language used in the SFRY of the 1970s makes it clear enough that the liberatory culture, PM's ideal notion and point of reference, is a creative innovation precisely in relation to the central governmental institutions. Therefore, every act of this culture is "in essence more or less *deviant* (in the original meaning of the word: it departs from the well-worn path)" (91). In the end, this should and could lead to *"work and creation*... becoming two forms of creative

self-realisation as a whole" (93). As PM defined it himself, in these texts, as well as in his work on Sartre and in his Paris dissertation *Poésie de circonstance* [Poetry of Occasions], he dealt with "the sociology and theory of creation" (note on 108). One could think of other labels; but I suspect that when it comes to his recurring stylistic structure one would have to create a new narratological label and drawer (an open one, if possible).

This stance is exemplified further in his article on Krleža's *Fragmenti iz dnevnika* (Fragments from the Diary), part of the same book: "Nothing in the ranks of the political fellow travellers is more unpalatable [to the ruling party] than the *committed Left dissident*. There is no better salvation for a writer than preventing, by an appropriate dose of dissidence, his commitment from remaining narrow, i.e. becoming religious" (203). By adopting this approach, PM not only reveals the tradition on which he relies (to begin with that of Sartre and Krleža), but also how clear his vision was: an independent leftist commitment, critical towards both petty-bourgeois nationalism and the static attitude of the official Party rule; furthermore, we have to add in retrospect, this reveals how PM's approach, wedged between oligarchs in power and growing nationalisms, would be doomed to fail.

I experienced this myself in 1965–66. But I managed to understand it only a good 40 years later, writing a "radiography" or X-ray picture of SFRY, *Splendour, Misery and Possibilities* (the original Croatoserbian title translates as *You Love Only Once*, title of a popular song at the time). I was childishly stubborn, limited, and I suppose loyal.

* * *

Re-reading this book by PM, I suddenly thought: who was it that mainly influenced him? Except perhaps for a French author or two, it was evidently Krleža. The essays and evaluations at least in this book seem a sort of metempsychosis of Krleža into SFRY semantics, which Mao would call "contradictions within the people." The word "semantics" irritated Krleža, you only need to look at PM's famous *Conversations* with him, but it is in fact an innocent neutral label to mean a universally practiced meaningful and value-laden use of language. Matvejević's semantics in these essays, belonging to his (shall we say) middle phase, has the same horizon as Krleža's: creative freedom of culture among Yugoslav nations, a deviant departure from the path of imperialism as well

as from the petty nationalisms. Historically in the filiation of Epicure and Fourier, Krleža took up a stance of absolute deviation and negation as against both the Austro-Hungarian State, up to and very much including its 1914–18 war, and the dominant societal lie in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (monarchist Yugoslavia). But, regardless of the two writers' important personal idiosyncrasies, PM's post-revolutionary situation leads to greater caution and complexity: for he is speaking to official comrades engaged in the same liberatory undertaking — only now they are in power: thus no absolute deviation is possible. Instead, PM engages in constant dialogic manoeuvering in order to find within the officially fenced in *langue de bois* ("wooden language") leeways towards an opening, in places where that discourse is still inevitably marked by the heritage of Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci — whose work PM knows well and quotes in strategically important junctures, like a battlefield commander-in-chief using heavy artillery.

However, where Krleža talks about *literature* (occasionally quoting paintings as examples), PM characteristically talks about *culture,* which includes literature but is not only broader but also has a different purpose. As with Krleža, the point is liberation, anthropologically classifiable as Marx's humanisation, but it concerns all working people — such as writers — and all kinds of creative output. If I may call this semantics and psychology Kidrič's (after the founder and theoretician of workers' councils, who far surpassed the organiser of the Slovene Liberation front of 1941–45, brilliant but Stalin-like in his drive to exclusive Party power)[4], this was a Kidrič-cum-Krleža-influenced approach. Generally, the main interest of PM, officially a professor of French literature that he knew extraordinarily well and competently taught, was not directed — so far as I know — towards philological textual specificities (narratology, its space-time, agents, and other devices), but towards its strategic position in "culture," i.e. within the enterprise of liberation. The poetry of the French Resistance movement, Sartre, and Krleža, or later Andrić and others PM wrote about, all are considered from the point of view of this enterprise. Since the collapse of socialism, and with it of the hope of culture becoming an emancipatory institution, PM's best late books look for strategic allies for preserving at least a minimum of humanity: in the warm Mediterranean tradition, or in the plebeian aspect of the otherwise imperial city of Venice, or in the main invention and emblem of social justice: our bread, daily and for all.

* * *

I used to think that there were few books that I could not concisely describe and criticise, but PM's *Mediterranean Breviary* has shaken that belief. I am not able to summarise it, it is too full. I do not know how many years it took Predrag to compose it — 20, 30? A less persistent author would have despaired at the preparatory stage, all the work he refers to on every fourth page: paying visits to all the shores of that sea, conversing with fishermen and hermits, leafing through old portolans and dictionaries, those never-ending criss-cross dialogues, travels, discoveries, making notes and classifications that pour into the actual process of writing — all this in addition to the regular workload of a university professor who every year must teach, shall we say, modern French literature to the unstoppable onrush of new generations — what boundless energy resided in this Frenchified Russian-Croatian Yugoslav citizen from Mostar!

Here are, therefore, a few tangents to complement that book.

The poet Guillaume Apollinaire loved Jules Verne (whom PM's breviary also mentions). Probably thinking of passages like those in which captain Nemo and his captive guests drift under the sea and observe its whole ichthyology, he exclaimed: "What style, nouns only!" The style is that of an *encyclopedist* who wishes to convey a densely populated cosmos to the reader. The best encyclopedias are organised not alphabetically but thematically, and the choice of themes betrays the ideology of each. But how to organise that encyclopedic matter? Verne chose the framework of an adventure novel for his teenage readers, and PM I think chose what Northrop Frye, or it might be better to invoke Mikhail Bakhtin, called an *anatomy*. This ancient literary genre collects a mass of material in order to exhaust a subject, and is little or not at all concerned with fictional characters (except for the implicit character of the narrator); instead it insists on the chronotope, on spacetime that almost allegorically become the main or only "character." Know-it-all Predrag knew this too: he mentions anatomy à propos of Lawrence Durrell, a British expatriate in the Mediterranean (249), and what's more, let me add, the cultural attaché of the British Embassy in Belgrade in the 1950s.

My thesis would be that at least in the 20th century there existed a never theorised but strong tendency toward encyclopedism in Zagreb (Krleža, Ivan Supek, and so many others), which Matvejević appears to have shared, and which the title *Breviary* suits well This is an 800-years old term naming a multifunc-

tional overview of all the rhetorical genres needed by a Catholic friar or priest to perform daily religious service: psalms, lessons from the Gospels, writings by the Church Fathers, hymns, and prayers were nudging each other on its pages. Still, in comparison with the enormous tomes of Church Fathers and similar, this was a short (*brevis*) overview: a small thematic encyclopedia, so to speak, as portable booklet — the first pocket-book. Nevertheless, PM redesigned the function of this genre: his "credo" was entirely of this earth or pagan, based on articulations and values of that warm inland sea which for us starts with the Adriatic: "The Mediterranean Sea is not a sea of loneliness" (I am translating from the Italian edition of 2004, 203). This reminds me of Ivan Slamnig's thesis from the 1960s, which I liked, that Croatian literature is neither of the West nor of the East, but of the South. As against quasi-religious geopolitics, PM explicitly disassociated himself from the odd misconception entertained by his probably greatest predecessor, Braudel, who saw the borderlines of the Mediterranean wherever "the desert and Islam" started (226).

If we were to judge by success, this book could be taken for PM's masterpiece: it has been translated into two dozens of languages, from Morocco to Japan, published in ten ever larger editions with, they say, 300 000 copies sold. However, since Yugoslavia was no more, PM could not become its second Nobel Laureate...

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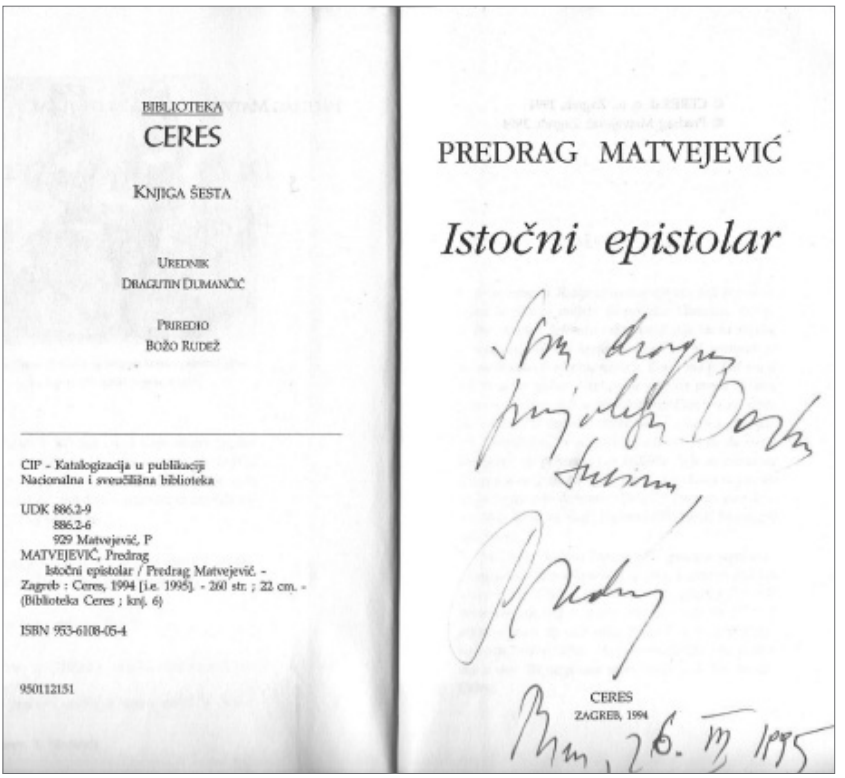
I shall borrow a comparison from Verdi's *La Traviata*: let us not forget that the title means "one who goes astray" from the narrow path of (the bourgeois understanding of) morality. Like love in the duet of Violetta and Alfredo, PM's work will be appreciated by professionals as *croce e delizia*, a cross and a delight. It will be a cross for bibliographers, because he was forever adding and changing details in editions in different languages (and in the same language), or contaminating what existed and what was new — they shall have much strenuous work going back and forth between Yugoslav (later Croatian), Italian, and French editions. But it will be a delight to read, and at the same time spiritual food — *panis angelicus*, I would say, using the metaphors of *Kruh naš* (Our Daily Bread) –for all of us and for at least a dozen of well-researched PhD theses, hopefully soon to be initiated. Following in Krleža's footsteps, of all South-Slav writers that I know, PM came closest to the ideal horizon or chimera of writing



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PREDRAG MATVEJEVIĆ

Istočni epistolar

CERES
ZAGREB, 1994

Predrag's second dedication in his Eastern Epistolary

de omni re scibili; and in this horizon, international fame, "ethnically" mixed origins, and a life full of travels he is close to his Dubrovnik neighbour, 18th Century polymath Ruđer Bošković — who wrote not only about optics, astronomy, gravity, meteorology, and trigonometry, but also about how to repair the dome of St Peter's, a library building in Vienna or the ports in Rimini and Savona.

Needless to say, a review of everything that is possible to learn and understand was impossible already in the Renaissance, when Pico della Mirandola, called an extraordinary sport of nature *(lusus naturae*), attempted it semi-ironically, and it is especially impossible after the industrial revolution, demographic explosion, and the specialisation of sciences that accompanied it. Earlier, Thomas of Aquinas could still rather successfully write a *Summa theologiae*, but already Descartes spoke only about method (and also about optics and other special

disciplines). If every branch of science, from philosophy to technology, "soft" sciences such as the humanities, and mathematics occupies a certain place on some imaginary map of the whole human knowledge, then ideally, in this topographical model, the discourse of every science should be exhaustive for its limited domain: mathematics relates everything that is possible to learn about abstract numbers, physics about forces, psychology about the human psyche, etc. Unfortunately, such State-like borders do not exist in practice, the most significant realisations in the history of science occur when the borders of official disciplines are violated and new borders appear on the horizon, as well as cognition potentially without borders: Darwin, Marx, Freud, Einstein...

I do not intend at all to compare the works of even the greatest among us (shall we say) humanist critics, such as Erich Auerbach, Walter Benjamin or Raymond Williams, to these great names: their intentions were different. But I am talking about approach and method. In the revolutionary or, if you will, critical periods of mankind, such as ours from 1914 onwards, existing institutional boundaries become fetters for the best minds. PM was not at all a typical Romanicist nor a (Yugo)slavist, nor even a comparatist, though he taught all these subjects from time to time and may be very useful to these disciplines as a challenge: for example, how are we to classify his eye-opening and not to be forgotten books *Eastern Epistolary* and *Le Monde Ex*?

* * *

My advice to future doctoral students is to start from PM's self-reflections. For example those in *Eastern Epistolary:*

> I thought about correspondences which make a whole, about reading New Testament epistles which are called Epistolary in Mediterranean monasteries. Some of my letters are written as pleas, some as prayers. The genres of breviary and epistolary are cognate: *Mediterranean Breviary* and *Eastern Epistolary* were written at the same time (130–31).

But now I do not have enough spacetime to write about this very important book. The fact that it has not achieved world fame and seen as many translations as *Mediterranean Breviary* or *Our Daily Bread* should be ascribed to hysterical neoliberal triumphalism: namely that all good and bad sides to so-called communism are nowadays irrelevant: it simply must be erased from all memories.

No, they are not irrelevant: "Those who think that communism has been finally defeated are wrong" (*Mondo ex*, 38). Or: "Those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it," wrote Santayana, I think — and to repeat it in variations, I shall add, that become possibly even worse than the original: a tragedy that becomes an even bloodier farce.

* * *

Recycling: a word all ecologists and environmentalists recommend. PM was, by force of circumstance, a master of recycling, and he openly admitted it. Many pages of the book *Prema novom kulturnom stvaralaštvu* can be found — supplemented, translated into French, and supplied with comments in italics — in *Le Monde ex.* In this book one can find his polemic against nationalism(s) in culture. One can also find some ten pages about self-management from which I quoted when discussing the previous book *(Mondo 60–70).* And at the end there is a verdict: "*I still ... to some extent believe in self-management*" (italics by PM). However, *Le Monde ex* is a different book with a different purpose. It very successfully explains to West European readers the political knots and plots of Yugosphere (the former Yugoslav territory): this recycling was necessary and useful. It became part of PM's arsenal.

In order for the reader to understand his work after 1991, quite a lot should be said about the existential difficulties experienced by PM. Life was not easy for him either psychologically or financially. Apart from taking care of his wife and himself, entering old age, he took very seriously all of his relatives, provided for his ailing sister as well as for the daughter from his first marriage who lived in Paris, etc. I am not acquainted with the details, we never touched upon figures in our conversations. But I would dare to suppose that the (probably substantial) royalties from 30 or more editions of *Mediterranean Breviary* as well as the income from numerous lectures in Europe were hardly sufficient to pay for what he felt was a debt of solidarity towards his near relatives and close friends, and sometimes simply towards acquaintances in distress, in this time of religious wars. His textual recycling did not come about because he needed income but because he needed to explain to the Western reader what was really going on in our region, but it also suited the needs of those existential circumstances. I believe this situation also influenced his 1990s idea to write about a topic as internationally popular as *Our Daily Bread* (except where rice

is used instead of bread): to kill two birds with one stone. The move from Rome to Zagreb in 2008, from which I tried vehemently to dissuade him, was mainly dictated by these circumstances. I believe it shortened his life.

* * *

Mediterranean Breviary and *Another Venice* are my favourite books by PM. The latter is, however, by far more lyrical; it was given its final shape (just like *Our Daily Bread)* after the author's 70th birthday. It is a literary work of old age, settled experience, and painful though discreet and often poetic nostalgia: if somebody who did not know his oeuvre asked me where to start in order to decide whether it made sense to read further, I would answer: "start with *Another Venice"* (I cite from the Croatian edition of 2002). It is a book of melancholy. Thematically clearly related to *Mediterranean Breviary*, which was written before the author was 50, it adds shadows, in a minor key, to the sunny abundance and plenitude of the other book. Its objects and subjects are the modest but sturdy "proletariat... of plain and almost nameless leaves of grass and stalks," "herbal orphans" (40, 31, and 37), or their equivalents in the world of statuettes inserted into walls. Those *sculture erratiche* (erratic sculptures) were perhaps originally *eretiche* (heretical, by heretics), in any case they are *arte povera,* street scenes for the poor and the common people, unlike the great palaces and churches decorated with paintings by great masters. They often lacks parts that have fallen off, their transience is sepulchral, much like the Venice Arsenal, now closed but famous far and wide in the old days, so PM does not fail also to mention the graves of seagulls (at sea) and of dogs (on land). All these are clearly externalisations and allegories of the prevailing sentiment: "these modest herbs perhaps cure intolerance as well, but unfortunately not enough of them are to be found" (35). They are the other side of realistic — I would again say imperial — Venice, ruled by "power, superiority, and conquest, riches, trade, and splendour" (54). When I read the book, I remarked to PM that I would expect the son of a people colonised by Venice and often risen in revolt against it (Adriatic pirates from the estuary of his river Neretva were famous centuries ago!) to say a bit more about the Benjaminian price of these luxuries, because of which every monument of civilization is also a monument of barbarism. But this book speaks about something else: the plebeian Venice. (He also attempted a direct justification on page 21, which I find insufficient.)

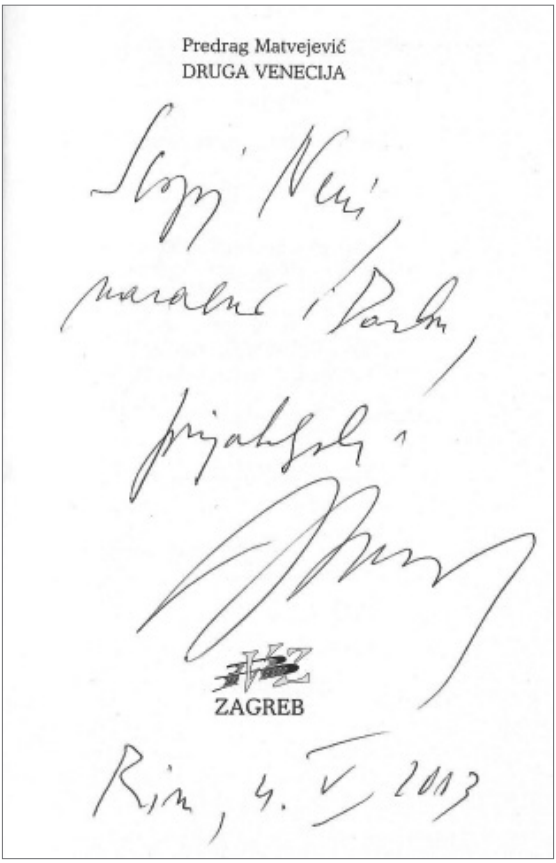
A large part of the book is about twilight falling and shadows growing as the sun sets (differently on the two sides of the Adriatic Sea). The sunset of Venice overhangs the Lagoon. Shadows and specters of the vanished past beckon in that twilight — as was known to the citizens of the Republic of Dubrovnik, where *sjene* meant not shadows, as in modern Croatian, but specters. The setting sun of Venice is a witness to the end of "the fight for the lost cause," which PM immediately identifies as a frequent characteristic of Slavs (78). Melancholy always looks to a better past, when there was so much to hope: "And our century has passed, the generation has exhausted itself," postulates the author right in the beginning, where *naš vijek* can be understood as the 20th Century and also as the time of our life, namely the time of his and my generation (6)... It certainly did not escape a professor who lectured on Proust that, if he was in this book not quite searching for the lost age of the sunny Mediterranean, he certainly testified to it. Here is his conclusion:

> Words disappear, names of things are lost, nobody takes care of the little plants withering on the walls, the "erratic sculptures" crumble on the façades, there are fewer and fewer gardens around the palaces, there is more darkness than water in the wells, less patina than rust on objects, twilights are not what they used to be, and some winds have perhaps vanished or changed direction.... (80)

Five more similar lines follow. Is there a better way to describe the sentiment of an "ex"-world?

Lyrical passages like this one grow into a true post-Baudelairean prose poem in the short third and final part, "Shadows of Cities by the Sea," a kind of generalising swoop that clearly connects this book to *Mediterranean Breviary* and supplements it at the same time. The focus now moves away from Venice in a sort of anti-zoom in order to encompass 14 other Mediterranean cities; each relates to its shadow, far from the sea if need be (like Jerusalem). Here I shall mention only two:

> Athens shone together with its shadow. Twilight lasted long below the Acropolis. Piraeus lost its lighthouse. Travelers arrived and asked whether it was the same city of yore. Where were its old sages? Their admonitions remained in the ruins.



...and the last dedication by Predrag, in Another Venice

> Alexandria was besieged by barbarians on several occasions. They buried one part of its past after another by its walls. After they burned the papers, they scattered the ashes. Shadows of the letters which had been preserved could not be read any longer.

I am not going to analyse anthological examples like these, except to say that here "shadow" can well stand for "spectre" — try it.

The fifteenth unit is a further list of cities, from Palermo to Odessa: "your harbours are witnesses of your shadows, our shipwrecks." The key to the allegory is here, for whoever wishes to find it.

And the sixteenth and final unit establishes a connection to the previous titles of PM, returning to the present: "Europe, do not look for yourself in the shadow of the world. You are the world. Do not forget the sea that rocked your cradle, the Mediterranean."

* * *

In passing, PM characterises his last book, *Kruh naš* (Our Daily Bread*)*, as "a poetics of bread" (34, 108). I doubt that he was thinking much of Aristotle, whose *Poetics* systematically analyses how to make a tragedy. What we have here is a collection of traditions and ways, from *Gilgamesh* to the industrialisation of today, in which bread was made, shared, understood, described, classified, invoked, praised, and philosophised about as the first food, the food *par excellence*, our daily bread. Still, bread is also plebeian food, unlike the meat of the upper classes who had the sole right to hunt animals in feudal times, or queen Marie Antoinette's cake. PM does not insist on it, he is writing an ecumenical and irenic book, he wants to reconcile all traditions — gnostic, Orthodox Christian and Catholic, religious and atheist, ancient, medieval, Arabian, and modern — on condition that they favour "multiplication of bread" (47) and its availability to all, meaning above all that they are not warlike. This is the horizon of Braudel's *longue durée* (long duration), where today's misfortunes or, less commonly, good fortunes, are only part of an uninterrupted chain of practices. I would say that this is PM's version of a history of ideas, which, as we know, insists on continuity, not on severances and breakthroughs (which I find as relevant), so that the social contexts and the driving forces behind these ideas — in this case, related to bread — get pushed into the background of a given epoch. History leads nowhere:

> Give us bread, give us bread! — this is perhaps the only motto not to have misled those that put it forward and advocated it in an effort to combat misery and achieve justice. The rest is history, sometimes a better and more bearable version of it, but most often its worse or worst version (68, ending of the chapter "Faiths").

And, ambiguously, at the very end of the book:

> What can literature do so that one and all shall have bread?
> It can only express worry and unease...

> Humankind came into being without bread, and may cease to be without it (140).

Nonetheless, *Kruh naš* remains focused on the ideas how bread becomes the human body: "bread and body understand one another" (12): this is a transubstantiation in totally materialist terms. In a way, this book was harder to write than the previous two, because both the Mediterranean and Venice, though they have long histories, can still be visited nowadays. To be sure, bread also exists nowadays, yet it is scattered into many shapes, there is no one single exemplar that defines it — like the platinum bar in Paris, the international prototype of the metre to which everyone else has had to conform. Again, we are dealing with an anatomy, of a subject as well as (here perhaps even to a greater extent) of ideas about the subject, considered from the point of view of a Left-wing humanism.

Is humanism sufficient? This is debatable. Also at the end of the book, PM mentions: "At the beginning of the third millennium there are many people in the world dying of hunger, especially... in various regions of Africa and Asia" (140). In an interview given to the only Italian (genuinely) Left-wing daily *Il Manifesto* on Sept.7, 2010 he adds that he was additionally influenced by meeting famished residents of Bosnia during the last war. I maintain that this is the essential context as well as criterion for a proper understanding of this text. In the interview he points out that "there is a sociology and a sociopolitics of bread. Those who oversee the production of bread, those who 'rule' over bread, can influence power, can exercise and preserve power"; at the same time he praises the stimuli that he received from Kropotkin's book *The Conquest of Bread.* He also mentions "bread and roses," the slogan of US working class movement (formulated by Rose Schneiderman, a feminist and a local leader of IWW, the labour union practising direct action, during the famous 1912 strike of textile workers in Lawrence, USA). Nevertheless, in *Our Daily Bread* there is little of that aspect of social schism and struggle: as I mentioned above, PM was well aware of the main currents of Marxism but had, so to speak, switched off the volume on that microphone. I would recommend that every reader of this book read the genuinely classical and exemplary work by Kropotkin (reprinted in English 2015) along with it. In tandem with this work, PM's book would grow in strength and importance — and so would Kropotkin's..

Let me end this section again in the first person singular: when I received this book from Predrag in 2009, I made a list of a dozen passages that I would

have loved to discuss with him, and I told him so during one of our telephone conversations. However, it required talking face to face, and that was not to be. Sharing his intolerance of wars, especially in the Balkans, and remembering the amount of attention Krleža gave to *zeleni kader*, the "Green Cadre" (or "Forest Corps") deserters from the Austro-Hungarian army in 1917–18, I wanted to suggest he could insert a mocking Croatian folk song from those hungry war years into the next edition:

> *Care Karlo i carice Zita / Što ratuješ kada nemaš žita?!*
> Emp'ror Karl and Empress Zita,
> Why wage war when out of corn?

Of course the answer might be that the war is waged precisely out of fear of running out of corn (or its modern strategic equivalents and avatars).

* * *

At the end: these notes do not represent a sufficient evaluation of Predrag Matvejević's polygonal figure. Luckily, the first approximation to one such evaluation does exist, and an excellent one at that — the obituary by Nenad Ivić in *Novosti* and online, Život *je za njega bio skučen*, "Life restricted him," I recommend it warmly.

There is so much of importance that I do not know about PM or cannot convey! It would be important to survey his style, this shoreless parataxis, but that requires a separate study. Perhaps most important, I have not at all mentioned the short articles that he so frequently wrote at least during this last quarter of a century. There are dozens, probably even hundreds of them: no one knows the exact figure. He gave two dozens of them to me and Nena: about Serbs in Croatia, about "national" orthography, about daily historical beastliness and crime. They are fulminant, knowledgeable, implacable. I quote from the lovely memories about Andrić:

> It is fortunate that he did not witness Milošević's and Karadžić's Četniks shelling Sarajevo and Vukovar, shooting thousands in Srebrenica and, in the name of a Great Serbia, "ethnically cleansing" Bosnia of Muslims and Croats; that he was not witness to Ustašas [Croatian fascists, DS] destroying Mostar and the Neretva bridge, thus fulfilling Tuđman's "historical vision of Croatia," mercilessly throwing the population

> of Herzegovina professing heterodox religions into concentration camps and banishing the Krajina Serbs from their ancient hearths.
>
> When it comes to "Yugospheric" history, Matvejević was witness and judge.

But even more than that: if he did not succeed in shaping the poetic justice for his generation — and mine — I am confident he will shape the justice of the future: in large measure, we shall be looking at that epoch through his glasses.

* * *

But still: how should we today, looking backward to the past and forward into the future, evaluate the writer and visionary Matvejević? It is not difficult to understand that his oeuvre originates from the indignation of a conscious citizen *(citoyen)*, suffused with erudition, an extraordinary poetic gift, and a lyrical afflatus. But I would go even further.

Namely, if a classic is a source of creative power whose main works will remain permanently in the minds of future generations — then we must say: *we had a classic (Yugoslav, Croatian, Bosnian, Yugospheric, cosmopolitan) and we were unable to appreciate him*. Neither his deviant commitment nor the scope of the world that he carried within him.

Every government in this region, from the 1970s until now, has failed this culture test. (A passing grade is awarded to Tito, who did not take offence at PM's call for his resignation, and to Stipe Mesić, a politician who understood what an international scandal would have broken out if PM had had to go to Croatian prison for protesting against murderous nationalist hatred.)

How I miss reading Predrag's commentaries these last two years, since he grew unable to work! What would he say, for example, of the events in Croatia, of the extremist militant in a ministerial chair extolling the killing *handžar* — both the long curving knife of Islamic tradition, highly serviceable for slitting throats, and the aptly homonymous SS division composed of Balkan Moslems and German settlers, the *Volksdeutsche* — would he have contributed to the edition of *Gordogan* magazine devoted to clerical fascists (not clerical fascism, he was not given much to theoretical generalisations)?

Therefore I would like — now that I may have found a title for this overview — to end by having a little look to the future:

Matvejević's international influence, judging by his published books as well as by my impression of his fame, is today certainly greater than that of all other writers from "Yugosphere" put together, both politicians and fictioneers — let me resort to categories that do not quite fit him — of today and of the past (the most translated ones are: Krleža, Andrić, Tito, Đilas, Kiš, Ugrešić…).

It would be logical to expect a putative truly democratic public opinion of the society where he most frequently lived, namely the Republic of Croatia, to support and assist such an influence, even if the aforementioned public opinion in its majority disagrees with many judgements and attitudes of this author's: democracy means a broader spectrum of tolerance. This would be particularly appropriate for the nationalists in power, who like to sound off about "a thousand years' old culture" and such: go on and prove it here and now! But it obviously follows from the affair of "our Talibans" for which he was condemned to jail and the shameful reactions and non-reactions during it of the cream on top of our people's milk, that it cares about Matvejević little or not at all, if it does not actively hate him. This, in turn, lends credence to the sharpest reactions of PM the publicist.

At least now, after his death, it should be time for such a sectarian stance to change radically: towards his figure, his widow, and his work. It is true that, when he last returned to Zagreb, he did so unwillingly (*a malincuore*, we are told by an acquaintance in an obituary[5]) and that in the end he had to live like an "internal emigrant," but still, the Zagreb of his — and my — youth had shaped him in many respects. Those who do not know the Zagreb and the Yugoslavia (and later Yugosphere) which his works originated from, will understand them only partially, if at all.

And today: is there such a thing as a bibliography of PM's works? I have not been able to find it. Are university students being taught about him anywhere in Croatia (or his native Bosnia & Herzegovina?), is anyone studying his texts[6]? Will anyone be prompted to start — together with his legal heir — organising the editing of his *Complete Works?* (The list could go on.)

Namely, that is what a nation does when it has a classic.

The motherland/s owe a great debt to the heritage of Predrag Matvejević.

NOTES

1 English translation by Jacques Houis (https://jhouis.com/2016/08/30/the-grave-of-edgar-allen-poe-by-stephane-mallarme)

2 A version of the present essay was written in Croatoserbian after Predrag Matvejević's death in February 2017; it needed to meld personal testimony with critical evaluation, thence its autobiographical note. I acknowledge gratefully the help of Nenad Ivić and Boris Buden. This is its first English publication. Numbers in parentheses refer to the pages of the work cited.

3 *Praxis* was an influential "warm stream" Leftist magazine of philosophy and sociology published by a group of Zagreb and Beograd Marxist professors under the aegis of the Croatian Philosophical Society.

4 See my "Ekonomsko-političke perspektive Borisa Kidriča" ("The Economico-political Prospects of Boris Kidrič") *Zarez*, Apr. 28, 2011, pp. 10–11, now enlarged in my *Splendour* 86–100.

5 Michele Nardelli, "A perdere, caro amico, siamo abituati," www.balcanicaucaso.org/aree/Balcani/A-perdere-caro-amico-siamo-abituati.-In-ricordo-di-Predrag-Matvejevic-177539.

6 Amid general disregard, I wish to underline the pioneering work by two faithful Romanicist successors of his: Nenad Ivić and Sanja Roić eds., *Predrag Matvejević: književnost, kultura, angažman* (Predrag Matvejević: Literature, Culture, Commitment*)*, Zagreb: Prometej, 2003, which I unfortunately did not have to hand when writing this text.

WORKS CITED

As explained above, the publishing filiations of PM's titles are complex, also I used those that I had in whatever language; what follows is not a complete list of PM book titles. The city of publication for the Matvejević Yugoslav or Yugosphere items is Zagreb. The title first adduced is the one I refer to in citations.

Matvejević, Predrag. *Breviario mediterraneo*, 5th enlarged edn. Transl. S. Ferrari. Garzanti, 2004 [first editions Zagreb 1987 and Paris 1992; English as *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*. U of California P, various edns.]

–"–. *Druga Venecija.* V.B.Z., 2002 (*The Other Venice.* Transl. R.S. Valentino. Reaktion Books, 2007).

–"–. *Istočni epistolar* [Eastern Epistolary]. Ceres, 1994 (in part as *Entre asile et exil: épistolaire russe.* Transl. M. Robin and M. Begić. Stock, 1995).

–"–. *Jugoslavenstvo danas* [Yugoslavianism Today]. Globus, 1982.

–"–. *Kruh naš* [Our Daily Bread]. V.B.Z., 2009 *(Pane nostro.* Garzanti, 2009).

–"–. *Mondo ex e tempo del dopo.* Garzanti, 2006. [Translated from *Le Monde ex*, Fayard 1996, but not identical to it.]

–"–. *Prema novom kulturnom stvaralaštvu* [Towards New Cultural Creativity]. Cesarec/INA, 1977.

–"–. *Poésie de circonstance.* Nizet, 1971; much enlarged as *Pour une poétique de l'événement.* UGE, 1979.

–"–. *Razgovori s Krležom* [Dialogues with Krleža], 7th edn. Prometej, 2001. [Reprinted and constantly added to between 1969 and 2011.]

Suvin, Darko. "Ex: Fudô 2000," in http://homeplanetnews.org/AHPNONL4-DarkoSuvin.html

–"–. *Splendour, Misery, and Possibilities: An X-ray of Socialist Yugoslavia*. Brill, 2016, and Haymarket P, 2017.

BOOK REVIEW

Tommaso Di Francesco. *Breviario jugoslavo: Colloqui con Predrag Matvejević*. Manifestolibri, 2018. — 112 pp.

This agile enlightening little book contains 11 dialogues of the author with Matvejevic (henceforth referred to as PM), dated 1998–2014, with a short afterword by Dunja Badnjevic, as well as the interview with PM by Luka Bogdanic about his participation in the *Praxis* group. It was printed in, in my opinion, the only decent Italian daily newspaper *Il Manifesto,* in which PM was often present, and which still points out that it is ‘’communist’’ on its front page. Here I will concentrate only on some more lasting themes, paraphrazing or directly quoting PM wherever I can.

On the destruction of Yugoslavia, on Europe and the USA

The first assessment of the ‘’turnover’’ or outcome of the destruction of Yugoslavia is obviously negative: ‘’It is worse there than before,’’ nowadays (namely in 2010) unemployment is huge, ‘peaking at 40–50% in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 60% in Kosovo, where criminals rule ...Desperate emigration has started again, while mafias, who had wanted and promoted the war, are in power and richer than ever’ (73–74). That is why the problem of liberation, which is consubstantial with all the variations of Yugoslavia, remains on the agenda, ‘’with more caution... because of the price paid in the communist attempt to create a better world’’ (14). PM never concealed the fact that he had attempted, with the group of like-minded leftists formed in the 1970s around the *Praxis* group and the Korcula Summer School, to save federative Yugoslavia: ‘’we wanted socialism with a human face instead of faceless kapitalism’’ (37), and ‘’as for Stalinist and other similar regimes, I have always differentiated between ...communists persecuted all over the world and those who in the name of communism persecute others’’ (15). That is why PM found himself in voluntary exile in France and then in Italy: ‘’and it is nothing compared to the voluntary exile of hundreds of thousands of talented young men who fled misfortune and war, young Serbs who did not want to shoot at their Croatian-Bosnian brothers and vice versa...’(38).

The myth of rescue-offering and protecting Europe, who would democratically embrace at least some of the seceded parts of the former Yugoslavia and

make a better life possible for them, was questionable in PM's view from the very beginning. In contrast, he saw raging nationalisms which promised no good to the peoples of this region. In April 1995, in a long report from Sarajevo for *Il Manifesto,* using the words which, according to Di Francesco, betrayed his, intimately, sharpest pain, he wrote the following: ''In any case Yugoslavia deserved a better fate than the one it has experienced... One of the questions which we used to discusse most vehemently in Yugoslavia was the rights of different nations and national cultures. To negate them would be as absurd today as it was yesterday. But the consequences which we have witnessed force us to reconsider some of our views. Namely, some national cultures are easily transformed into national ideologies. That is how the vicious circle *(circolo vizioso)* is perpetuated, and its price is too high' (11–12).

First of all, what kind of Europe is it that we are talking about, and where are its borders? Every reasonable individual could immedeately see that Europe without the Mediterranean and without Russia — and PM's connections with both these regions were most intimate — is a small and selfish Europe, little Europe, as PM anticipated in his 1997 course of lectures at College de France, which Di Francesko rightly calls an essay in the best tradition of Valéry, Barthes and Foucault, while in Italy it was published as *Il Mediterraneo e l'Europa.* In it PM states that it is about ''Europe of the marketplace *(Europa mercato)* ...which once again deepens painful schisms and secession,'' namely on its southern and eastern borders: ''The Mediterranean is not a part of Europe'' (29–30). In my own words, the only Europe that would make cultural-political and even economic sense would be Europe from Lisbon to Khartoum and Murmansk... The events of the last 20 years, including the completely unnecessary issue of 'migrants' — which are needed by the European economy! — have completely justified this position.

And the government of the USA, records PM, sanctioned (and in fact organized) Tuđman's Operation Storm in 1995, which resulted in the expulsion from Croatia of several hundreds of thousands of Serbs who had lived there for generations. "When I saw these poor peasants of Krajina walking behind their tractors carrying all their possessions in pitiful plastic bags, I almost burst into tears" (85–86).

Responsibility for the breakup of Yugoslavia and after that

PM openly admitted that he hated Tuđman's regime in Croatia, and in 1998 he concluded that it had implemented some "'crazy ' privatisations which devastated the nation", that it had introduced ''unprecedented corruption'', and that it ''pursued an aggressive policy towards Bosnia'' (26). Tuđman's notion of ''reconciliation'' was not the one of Pope Wojtyla, for whom it meant reconciliation of the peoples of the former Yugoslavia, i.e. between members of the two Christian confessions and also involving Bosnian Muslims and Albanians of Kosovo, but it came down to "the idea borrowed from the dictator Franco to bury victims of fascism and the butchers from Jasenovac who cut their throats in the same graves" (26–27).

But the world press, *Manifesto* as well, was more interested in Serbia, for example on the occasion of Milošević's arrest in 2001, when PM wrote a *Necrologue* for him. Already in 1990 he had written an open letter to him, published in *Borba:* "You have isolated Serbia from Yugoslavia and the world. You have made introducing alternative pluralism impossible, you obstructed and postponed free and democratic elections.'' The letter ends with a prophesy: "Today you can save your honour by resignation. Tomorrow it will not be enough and perhaps your ony solution will be suicide" (37). Unfortunately the arrest took place after the NATO bombing of Serbia, after a sort of American blackmail and the promise of a hundred milliard dollars "as if it was a stock exchange transaction'' — and not a result of the development of the country's democracy (39).When asked to predict future events after this arrest, PM, on the one hand, maintained that the depth of Milošević's failure showed in the remaining ''little Serbia, conquered and full of hate, its people impoverished,'' but on the other hand that exposed the extent of the enourmous responsibility of Europe and the USA for their misapprehensions and errors committed because now ''almost all, including those who support the arrest, maintain that Milošević was defending the country from a NATO attack'' (42–43).

Seven years later, when the ruling UCK (Kosovo Liberating Army) declared Kosovo's independence, Di Francesco asked PM about the consequences of ''the 1999 'shameful war', as it was called by Claudio Magris, a war justified by NATO on the grounds of its being humanitarian." PM states in his answer: "I saw mistakes and horrors on both sides. The Serbian response to the NATO

bombing campaign was a tragic [mistake and horror] of banishing hundreds of thousands of residents of Kosovo. I went to meet the desperate refugees, met in Otranto those coming in rubber boats, often robbed by the Albanian as well as by the Serbian mafia... UCK militias [after the takeover of power] turned from victims into oppressors. And the victims were those 10% of Serbs who had chosen to stay in Kosovo... And now, after milliards of dollars of international ''aid'', 60% of the population are unemployed and without any kind of insurance, while a new class of the super-rich with criminal connections has emerged. And they are referring to this as independence." In the end, PM concludes by reminding the reader about the book by the Serbian socialist-communist Dimitrije Tucović *Serbia and Arbania,* "which describes the suffering shared by Serbian and Albanian peasants and soldiers and their solidarity. We need to continue on this path" (57–59).

Also in 2008, after Karadžić's arrest, Di Francesco provocatively asked: "What is emphasised is the responsibility of the Serbian leaders from the 1990s, but when will Europe admit to its responsibility for the demise of Yugoslavia?" In his reply, PM first mentions that European troops in Bosnia did not stop the massacre in Srebrenica, but more generally that Europe, pushed by Germany and the Vatican, accepted secessions ''declared on ethnic grounds''. His thesis was that, after the Cold War, Europe and the USA were seeking a new adversary, and finding it in the Balkans was cheap: "Yugoslavia simply could not be allowed to exist any more... To them, Yugoslavia ... was a nonalligned country, too independent... But while those nonalligned countries were in existence, there was no brutal fundamentalism in the Arab world, nor were there murderous nationalisms in Yugoslavia... Those were countries that aspired to a different kind of socialism, and served to preserve an equilibrium in the world [between the Cold War blocks]" (66–67).

On Matvejević's writings

This is PM's basic attitude: "To me, literature is an inexhaustible laboratory of freedom, in which pure and necessary anarchy is — might and should be — practised: developing awareness of ourselves and the world" (18–19). Many of these interviews were taken after the Italian editions of PM's books came out, as I mentioned above when discussing his *Il Mediterraneo e l'Europa*.

The first book he wrote was his doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne, *Poésie de circonstance* [*Occasional poetry,* Goetheu's term], which he describes as "an essay on engagement, poetry on a given circumstance." Therefore he sees his book *Kruh naš* (*Our Daiy Bread*, published in Italy as *Pane nostro* in 2010) not only as "a worldly prayer", but aso as a particular engagement: "to give bread to all… the only motto I have never betrayed, among all those which disappointed us" (83). It suited his need to find an element that could be acceptable to a diverse audience, and it became an especially topical issue to PM when, at the time of wars after the breakup of Yugoslavia, he "was in Bosia and saw new victims of severe malnutrition, saw general starvation" (78), just as he and his family were starving in Mostar at the time of World War II. I quote Di Francesco's final question regarding this issue:

> Di Fr.: In your work you are on a quest for values which are then laid to waste. *Mediterranean Breviary* talked about the harmony of peace in the Mediterranean world, and then conflicts and wars broke out. Now it is as if *Our Daily Bread* suddenly entered a world which erases common material and spiritual assets in order to save neoliberalism in crisis...
>
> PM: Absolutely. In that sense the symbolic meaning of bread opposes nelibeeralism. Because this unequal world is divided, among other things, between a world with bread and a world without bread. Bread with all its meanings could also be a big symbol, necessary to this epoch which has lost symbols and values, ultimate goals and reasons... Using this poetics of bread throughout history, I wanted to build a platform for symbols needed by mankind" (83–84).

Yugoslavia and Italy: foibe

However, this brave left-wing newspaper — as far as I know, the only Italian daily paper which fights for elucidating the truth about victims killed in Istra and Trst and thrown into the ill-famed karst sinkholes called foibe — also asked Matvejević about "the truth about foibe". According to Di Francesco's introduction, in 2004 the postfascist right, then brought into Berlusconi's government, foisted on the public a yearly celebration of Memory Day (*Giorno della Memoria*), promoting a one-sided picture of Italians as innocent victims of Slovene-Croat communist nationalism, "thus managing as a result of its political battle to negate Italian crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia... " And here also Predrag Matvejević insists ‘'that we remember all memories... Ten years

after this institutuinal change, what is the bottom line?" (89–90). PM responded with a quote from Mussolini's 1920 speech in Pula: "The Adriatic ought to be our bay, in contrast to the lower and barbaric Slav race," and remarked that "this was how racism and ethnic cleansing entered the stage," and then quoted testimony that "fascists were the first to discover foibe as a way for their opponents to disappear" (92–94). To cut the long story of this most unfortunate contest of antagonistic nationalisms short, PM mentions a series of mass murders from 1941 onwards, which were mostly committed by the ''black shirts'' fascist militia, from the Gulf of Kotor and Montenegro to Dalmatia and Kvarner Bay, Istra and Slovenia. Partisans were considered bandits, and, if captured, simply massacred. Then it came to pass that in Istra at the end of the war "enraged survivors, having lost families and houses, brothers and comrades, committed [symmetrical, DS] crimes on their own initiative. In Tito's Yugoslavia that was not to be brought up. But some of us did try" (94–95).

All such anti-nationalist stances adopted by PM are entirely consistent with his — regrettably, unsuccesful — work on the development of culture and democracy within the SFRY. Of course, this little book also has its shortcomings: it was obviously composed in haste, the topics are developed to the extent to which PM was available to be interviewed, Yugoslav names are often misspelt. In one instance PM is reported to have been born of a Croatian father and a Russian mother (72), although on a different occasion the account of his parentage is correct. Still, all in all, the book continues its author's, Di Francesco's, exemplary accounts of 'Yugosphere' — and he is not only a prominent journalist who has reported on Libya, Western Asia, Eastern Europe and China, but also a novel writer and a poet — in *Jugoslavia perchè* (*Why Yugoslavia*, 1995) and *La NATO nei Balcani* (*NATO on the Balkans*, 1999). It is to the credit of the Italian democratic community today, and the same applies to Matvejević and his fellow-fighters in the former Yugoslavia, that they insist on an open debate when it comes to both political crimes and other subjects touched upon (cf. the excellent interview on Stepinac, 21–27), in order to discover the truth and achieve true reconciliation. Perhaps the New Testament saying ''The truth will set you free'' sounds too optimistic in today's hopelessly anti-utopian ife, but that there is no freedom without truth remains the case.

Darko Suvin