

Translating Prose Fiction: Janko Leskovar's Short Stories in English Translation

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TRANSLATING PROSE FICTION:
JANKO LESKOVAR'S SHORT STORIES IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION
MASTER'S THESIS

Rijeka, September 2022

UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA
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MASTER'S THESIS

Master's Degree Programme in Translation Studies

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Rijeka, September 2022

Authorship statement

I hereby declare that I am the author of this Master's thesis and have only used the indicated sources and aids.

Rijeka, _____ Signature _____

Sadržaj

1. Introduction	1
2. Janko Leskovar and Croatian Modernism.....	3
3. Two Reasons for Translating Leskovar into English	5
4. The Translation Context.....	6
5. Theoretical Frameworks.....	10
6. Introduction to the Source Texts	13
7. Source Texts	15
Katastrofa.....	15
Priča o ljubavi.....	28
Kraljica zemlje.....	35
8. Translations	40
Catastrophe	40
A Story Of Love	55
The Queen of Earth.....	63
9. Translation Analysis.....	68
10. Conclusion.....	76
11. Works Cited.....	78

Abstract

Translation of fiction is a rewarding act that encourages creativity, but it is also one where theory is a valuable tool for directing one's energy in the right direction. This thesis will demonstrate the use of theoretical principles in translating prose fiction from Croatian into English. Specifically, three short stories by the Croatian author Janko Leskovar will be translated, namely “Katastrofa”, “Priča o ljubavi”, and “Kraljica zemlje”. Leskovar's life and career, the reasons for translating his work, and an earlier translation of his writing will be discussed to provide the context necessary for translation. The translational framework for this thesis will be presented, as well as the analysis of the translation process. Both the source texts and the translation will be attached within the body of the thesis.

Keywords: literary translation, short story, Janko Leskovar, Croatian modernism, translation theory, Croatian literature

1. Introduction

Translating fiction is an endeavour that requires a careful exploration of language, meaning, culture, and—last but not least—one’s own creativity. While that can be said about any type of translation, the dense networks that connect various elements, both intratextual and extratextual, of a literary work are not found in other types of translation. Form, word order, choice of words, rhythm, tropes, and a dedicated focus on characters and their social environment are only some of the factors that a translator needs to, firstly, consider when approaching translation and, secondly, transpose and adapt for new audiences. Although literary translation dictates deep immersion into the interpretative, linguistic, and cultural nuances of source and target texts, it also brings to the surface the translator’s ability for exploration, empathy, and creative thinking.

In this thesis I discuss and translate three short stories by the Croatian author Janko Leskovar: “Catastrophe”, “A Story of Love”, and “The Queen of Earth”. Leskovar was active at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, when Croatian literature started to look up more to contemporary Western models. Leskovar’s work in particular hinted at the change that was to become only more prominent in the following years. His focus on the internal lives of characters, moving away from social reality as the character’s primary motivation, and the rich employment of poetic devices and techniques earned him an important place in many Croatian literary anthologies.

To bring the source text closer to the reader, the thesis starts with an account of Leskovar’s personal and professional life, providing a context that is crucial for a better understanding of his writing style and thematic interests. The first section thus reviews his childhood spent in the picturesque landscape of Hrvatsko Zagorje, his days as a young adult pursuing a teacher’s education in Zagreb, and his career as a teacher and a writer. More broadly, I discuss the Croatian political and social climate, which ties into Leskovar’s personal life as well as its influence on the artistic and cultural scene of his time. All of that leads to a more complete representation of the literary trends of the period, which are explored with particular regard to the formal techniques Leskovar employed, which made him a precursor of modernism in Croatian literature.

In the section that follows the discussion of Leskovar as an author, I provide reasons to support the translation choices, with arguments ranging from personal reasons, through the

author's style and significance, to the broader importance of translation as a means for intercultural connection and research.

As one of Leskovar's short stories, "A Thought for Eternity", has already been translated into English by Graham McMaster, I analyse and comment on that translation. The idea is to depict briefly the translation context my translations are entering and expanding.

Leading towards the central part of the thesis, I present and discuss the approaches and methods employed during the translation process. Specifically, attention will be drawn to functionalists Hans J. Vermeer's and Katharina Resiss' skopos theory, as well as Reiss' text-analysis method. Moreover, Peter Newmark's operational theory of translation and his four levels of translation will be introduced as valuable guidance in the translation process.

Before presenting the source and target texts, I give a more detailed account of the three short stories chosen for translation. The arguments for their choice are briefly stated, and a summary of each is given. The stories will also be discussed with regard to their position in a literary movement known as Croatian modernism.

I provide the original texts in Croatian, along with information about the sources used. When transcribing, I have only made minor changes, such as removing typographical errors or changing the type of inverted commas. The translation of the source texts is found in the subsequent section.

Following the translation, I examine the final product through an analysis of the challenges that arose during the process. Everything from interpretation, through grammar and lexis is reviewed and illustrated with examples.

The final section summarises the main points of the thesis, but also discusses the translation process in relation to the selected theoretical frameworks.

2. Janko Leskovar and Croatian Modernism

Janko Leskovar was a Croatian teacher and writer celebrated for introducing modernist elements into Croatian prose fiction at a time when the national literary canon was still in its formative phase. He was born in 1861 in the village of Valentinovo, in the Hrvatsko Zagorje region, in northern Croatia. The peaceful, hilly scenery of the region would later often serve as a contrastive background to the turmoil of his characters. After finishing school in the nearby town of Pregrada, Leskovar went on to earn teacher qualifications in the Croatian capital of Zagreb. The choice of such a path was fuelled by his determination to avoid following his father's advice and become a priest, which, at the time, was a way to a good education and a secure future (Leskovar, *Sabrana* 476). However, the main reason for the decision was his love of women, or, to paraphrase his own statement regarding the issue, women were at the centre of his hidden, inner being (ibid.). This centrality of women in Leskovar's inner life is reflected in his writing; according to the literary historian Cvjetko Milanja, the indecisiveness and sensitiveness of Leskovar's protagonists is either a consequence of the domination of the female principle in his male characters or their passivity is a consequence of their relationship to a woman, traditionally perceived as more passive (Milanja, *Predgovor* 10). Perhaps the most famous example of the significant role women played in Leskovar's writing career is Milka Trnina, the world-renowned Croatian opera singer, whom Leskovar met while in Zagreb. They did not develop a romantic relationship, but he believed that they had a special connection, which he treasured throughout his life (Leskovar, *Sabrana* 477). Milanja writes that his connection to Trnina influenced the way he formed his characters; specifically, their obsession with the past, the intensity of their relationships with women, and their sense of morality (Milanja, *Predgovor* 10).

If women played an important role in Leskovar's writing life, the same should be observed of his career as a teacher. Like other Croatian teachers from the same period, he was often moved around the country because of his patriotic, oppositional political beliefs (Šicel, *Povijest* 82-83). During the period of his literary activity, Croatia was under Austro-Hungarian rule. The authorities did not look favourably at those who did not comply with their political doctrines, and Leskovar often spent time with intellectuals and politicians who shared oppositional views and debated the political questions of the day with them (Leskovar, *Sabrana* 477-478). One of the most significant events of the period happened in the year 1895 when the King and Emperor Franz Joseph I visited Croatia to attend the opening of the Croatian National Theatre building (Goldstein 298). In the days of the King and Emperor's stay, the students from

the University of Zagreb burned the Hungarian flag, protesting the pro-Hungarian policies of the ban Khuen-Héderváry (ibid.). Consequently, the students had to flee Croatia and resume their studies in other cities, such as Prague, Vienna, and Paris; their international experience consequently contributed to the transformation of the Croatian artistic and cultural scene, bringing it closer to contemporary European trends (Goldstein 298-299). The event marked the beginning of Croatian Modernism (“hrvatska moderna”), a broad artistic and political movement. Its main principles were the rejection of tradition and old models, as well as freedom of expression, both political and artistic (Goldstein, 298) The name “*moderna*”, derived from the word “modern”, signalled a similarity to movements that were shaping up or were already firmly established in other European countries (ibid.). It is important to observe, especially in Anglophone context, that Croatian Modernism, the movement, is not the same as modernism, the literary period, although they overlap in principles and partly in their span. Hence the difference in spelling (Modernism vs. modernism).

The publication of two Croatian short stories — Janko Leskovar’s “Misao na vječnost” (1891, “A Thought for Eternity”), which was also his debut, and Antun Gustav Matoš’s “Moć Savjesti” (1892, “The Power of the Conscience”), both in the literary magazine *Vienac* – is typically taken as marking the beginning of modernism in the literary field (Milanja, *Predgovor* 9). The period lasted roughly from 1892 to 1914, but it is usually divided into two phases: the first one from 1892 to 1903, and the second one from 1903 to 1914 (Šicel, *Književno* 10-12). It was a time of stylistic pluralism; elements of realism and naturalism were still very present, while the influence of contemporary Western European as well as Russian literature was gradually becoming more prominent (Šicel, *Književno* 6-8). The characteristics of poetic realism, impressionism, symbolism, psychologism, and neoromanticism were slowly but surely steering Croatian literature away from tradition and pushing it in new directions (Šicel, *Književno* 6-12).

Leskovar’s “Misao na vječnost” had a refreshing effect on the literary scene because the main character’s inner perturbation and fixation on the past was presented as the driving force of the narrative; it was a breakthrough from the predominance of realistic techniques, such as complex plots and a focus on social and national themes (Šicel, *Književno* 13). The elements of realism are, unsurprisingly, still present in his short stories – such as the omniscient narrator, the environment reflecting the inner state of the character, or the detailed descriptions – but the new techniques are nevertheless more dominant and noticeable (Šicel, *Zbornik* 16). All of Leskovar’s protagonists are similar in their inability to act and change their circumstances, their

hyper-sensibility, and their feelings of inadequacy and melancholy. Something unknown is in charge of their lives, something their minds cannot uncover, although they persist in attempting to figure it out, thus draining themselves of vital energy in the process (Šicel, *Zbornik* 17). Such characters are victims of their own thoughts and are too weak to prevail in the confrontation with some mysterious force governing their fortune. They are protagonists who in fact act as the main antagonists of their own lives. The narrow focus of the plot and the introduction of the dream technique gave Janko Leskovar the title of the initiator of modernity in Croatian prose fiction.

Considering the significance of Leskovar's literary legacy, it may come as a surprise that he was active as a writer only from 1891 to 1905. The reasons for his retirement from writing can only be guessed at. Šicel provides two suggestions: it may be that the author had exhausted the narrow theme of his writing, which was a detailed exploration of the psychological states of his overly sensitive characters of modern intellectuals (*Povijest* 90). The second possibility is that the general societal atmosphere, alongside his frequent, politically motivated transfers, weighed down on him, leading him to give up his pen (*ibid.*). Whatever it was, Leskovar left as a priceless literary legacy ten short stories, two novels, one travelogue, a few letters, and a short autobiography (Milanja, *Predgovor* 10-11). After Karlovac, he worked mostly in Zagreb and Osijek, finally retiring in 1922. He died in the village he spent his childhood in, Valentinovo, in 1949 (Leskovar, *Izabrana* 21).

3. Two Reasons for Translating Leskovar into English

Several different arguments can be made in support of the decision to translate the works of the forefather of Croatian modernism into English. It is best to divide them into two large categories, the first one being the value of the literary work in itself and the second one being the external value that is gained through translation.

Although Janko Leskovar's literary world was created in the late 19th century, the core of his novels – the characters and their inner struggles – is as relevant as ever, if not even more so. Regardless of the time and place, regardless of the changes in social structure and organisation, people face similar problems and swim through the familiar pool of emotions. The feudal system may be long gone, and the average reader will lead a significantly easier life compared to someone in a rural area over a hundred years ago. Still, there are plenty of parallels that one can draw with that world. A person struggling to provide for themselves or their family, unable to rest under the wheels of capitalism, leaving their physical and mental health to

deteriorate. A person living in a technological dream world, looking for love in the rather fictional world of social networking, too scared of the directness or the possibility of rejection that real-life interactions bring. The fast-changing social and technological environment often creates passivity, leaving people confused, lost in thought, and unable to promptly respond to the changes. Those are just some of the examples of how modern readers could find themselves in sympathy with the characters of Leskovar's stories. Perhaps, then, it is not only the comfort of recognising your struggles in someone else but also the opportunity for change that self-reflection may provide, that make these short stories well worth translating for a broader, modern audience.

But the value of a translated work can also be more general. The Croatian language is small, but its literature is quite rich and exciting, especially considering the influences of other languages, such as Latin, Italian, or German, and even more so, the quality and significance of literature written in Croatian dialects. For these and other reasons, scholars and casual readers may be interested in Croatian literary history. Considering that a language can be demanding to learn, translating literary works can either aid the understanding of the original or provide a rendition that would allow a person to dive into the stories and Croatian culture without necessarily knowing the language. To focus on Janko Leskovar and his role as one of the precursors of a new era in Croatian literature, modernism, is to try and understand through translation how new elements of literary expression and of formal experimentation were accommodated within the changing tradition of national literature. Furthermore, the elements of realism in Leskovar's novels and his short stories can be an additional source of knowledge for historians and anyone interested in how parts of Croatian society operated at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century under Austro-Hungarian rule. Through the characters and their challenges, Leskovar's fiction provides a fascinating and unique insight into the social atmosphere of the time (Šicel, *Povijest* 89-90). Last but certainly not least, translation promotes Croatian literature and culture and opens up new possibilities for both domestic and foreign scholars.

4. The Translation Context

The desire to promote national literature led the celebrated Croatian author Slavko Mihalić to start a journal dedicated to showcasing the works of Croatian writers in translation into major languages. In 1966, he founded *Most/The Bridge*, a journal since published by the Croatian Writers Association (*Most/The Bridge*). As part of *The Bridge Collection* series of *Classical and Contemporary Croatian Writers*, Janko Leskovar's "Misao na vječnost" was

published in translation by Graham McMaster. The translated story is found in a collection titled *Croatian Tales of Fantasy* (1996), which includes the works of seven other authors, including Ksaver Šandor Gjalski, Antun Šoljan, and Nedjeljko Fabrio. It is, as far as I have been able to ascertain, the only English translation of Leskovar's work.

To introduce some problems associated with translating Leskovar's fiction, I will provide a short overview of McMaster's translation. The short story "Misao na vječnost" focuses on the ruminations of the teacher Đuro Martić, a character typical of Leskovar. He is thin and sickly, obsessed with thoughts of the past. One memory haunts him particularly: a girl committed suicide because Martić did not reciprocate her feelings of affection. The story reaches its peak when Martić realises that the images of all events on Earth travel throughout space for eternity. Unable to deal with his conscience and find peace, Martić finally loses his sanity while playing the organ before churchgoers.

I will start the analysis from the very beginning. McMaster rendered the source title "Misao na vječnost" as "A Thought for Eternity". It is a somewhat rocky choice, as the preposition *na* implies that the thought was about or of eternity, rather than everlasting, as implied by the preposition "for". Perhaps the translator wanted to imply that this one particular thought is what would haunt the character for eternity, but the choice deviates too much from the original connotation. In Croatian, a single preposition is an occasion for a complicated discussion. However we choose to translate the preposition, it is impossible to convey in English the slippery potential of the Croatian title when it is actually pronounced. *Misao na vječnost* in spoken Croatian can sound like *Misaona vječnost*, which translates as "A Thoughtful Eternity" or even "An Eternity of Thoughts." The locution may not make much sense at first, but Leskovar's fiction is filled with strange locutions, and this one is at the very centre of his piece, which is about the complex interrelationships of human thought and the question of eternity—that of time as much as that of space.

The work was transposed by McMaster into contemporary English, which seems natural as the language of the source is not very archaic, despite it having been written at the end of the 19th century. The largest deviation of the source from modern Croatian might be the frequent employment of the aorist and the imperfect verb tenses, which are used more sparingly today. However, the past simple and the past continuous serve well as substitutions.

McMaster followed the original syntax, except when, for example, dividing sentences into two helped improve the clarity of the target text. The punctuation of the source text was

mostly preserved, and even when it was adjusted to the norms of modern English, it was well thought out with regard to coherence and rhythm.

The translation does have its weaker points, though. To illustrate this aspect, I will analyse the following example:

Oh, Bože, Bože, ništa ne izgiba, ne propada, sve, sve je vječno. Ah, što me to samo toliko glava boli... Kad umrem, možda će duša poput misli prhati sa zvijezde na zvijezdu. Ah divote, ona će saznati prošlost svih vjekova, (...) (Leskovar, *Sabrana* 29)

Oh, Lord, Lord, nothing decayed, nothing was lost, it was all, all of it, eternal. Oh, why was my head aching so much. When I die, perhaps my spirit, like a thought, will flit from star to star. Oh, how marvellous, he would learn the past of all the ages, (...) (McMaster 69)

As will readily be noticed, only the third sentence of the target text with its use of the future tense and the first-person pronoun “I” anchors the narration in the character’s present. However, putting the whole paragraph in the present tense would be a better decision, since it is indicated through the context that the narration has temporarily shifted to the protagonist. In addition, “nothing decays” in the first sentence would add to the weight and solemnity of the protagonists’ statements. It takes us from the specificity and particularity of one human situation, trapped in the past tense, into the world of universal statements, applicable to all ages. Furthermore, the choice of the pronoun “he” in place of “spirit” appears unsuitable. The spirit, or the soul, is a non-human entity in the story, and, while the use of the third-person feminine pronoun *ona* works in the gendered Croatian language, it seems forced in English, and may even confuse some readers. Gendering the spirit may alter the perception of the word and add religious connotations that are not present in the source text.

McMaster is a faithful translator who keeps to the source text closely, but certain segments would have sounded better had more freedom been taken in translation. For example, “overly strenuous exertion” (*Croatian Tales* 64) in place of *prevelika napora* (Leskovar, *Sabrana* 25) might sound too formal or technical. A more commonplace expression would have sufficed. When the narrator talks about Đuro Martić’s deceased friends, he says that one died *u trećem tečaju* (Leskovar, *Sabrana* 25). One may guess from the context that *tečaj* refers to teacher training courses. However, with additional information about Martić sharing his meals in the soup kitchen with that friend, saying “he had died in the third course” (*Croatian Tales* 65) may lead someone to believe mistakenly that he potentially choked on a piece of food. Such

inadvertent misunderstandings are impossible in Croatian, where meal courses and school courses are denoted by different words (as *slijed* and *tečaj*). A simple, but more specific transposition may be a safer solution, say, “training course”.

Overall, McMaster’s translation is a good rendition of the story. I especially like that he tried to follow the original syntax and punctuation, as it plays a significant role in conveying the atmosphere of uneasiness and the impending unfortunate resolution. It could be improved in some regards, as there are a few instances where it might be clumsy; however, its shortcomings do not significantly impact the readers’ experience or their impression of the narrative. Besides, it holds the honorable position of being the first-ever translation of Janko Leskovar into English and its occasional faults are easily excused.

5. Theoretical Frameworks

The skopos theory, which was introduced in the 1970s by Hans J. Vermeer and later expanded with the contributions of Katharina Reiss (Munday 79), largely influenced my approach to translation. It rests on the assumption that the skopos, i.e. the aim or the purpose of a translation, is what governs the choice of strategies and methods applied in the translation process (Munday 78-79). In their book *Groundwork for a General Theory of Translation* (1984), Reiss and Vermeer laid down some ground rules of the theory. Munday lists the following in order of importance: the skopos of a translation is what leads the translation process towards the finished product; the source text, language, and culture are followed closely in the process, with simultaneous regard to the target language and culture; the target text may deviate from the source text depending on its function in the target culture; both internal coherence and coherence with the source text are required of the target text, or *translatum*, as Vermeer calls it (79). The skopos of my translation is to introduce English-speaking audiences to Croatian literature through an engaging and coherent text that will preserve the culturally significant elements of the source text. I believe that this approach has resulted in a good-quality translation mindful of both the source and the target culture.

Another functionalist, Christiane Nord, adds to the skopos theory by differentiating between documentary and instrumental functions of translation types and processes. While instrumental translation is one where a recipient virtually cannot guess that the text they are presented with is a replica of an existing text in another language, documentary translation preserves various culture-specific elements and thus informs the reader of its nature (Munday 81). The translation of short stories presented in this thesis would belong to the latter category, meaning that the preservation of certain culture-specific elements is required, assuming that they remain intelligible to the target audience. That clearly corresponds to the skopos of my translation, which is offering an experience of foreign literature to target recipients. Furthermore, according to Nord's functional hierarchy of translation problems, it follows that the translations presented in this thesis are source-culture oriented (Munday 83). However, the same could not be said about the process of translation itself, as it is more of a balancing act between the two languages and cultures, with the naturalness of the target text in mind. Nord's further contribution to functionalist theories is her source-text analysis model in which she suggests what features of and around the source text should be taken into account during analysis (Munday 83). Some of these are the theme, the knowledge of the source culture that the recipients may have, specific lexical items, idioms, and other linguistic units, the syntax,

rhythm, and punctuation, among others (ibid.). Such suggestions of critical areas can be incredibly helpful for translators, especially those at the beginning of their careers.

While the above mentioned functionalist approaches provide translators with necessary general direction, Peter Newmark's operational theory of translation offers more targeted, practical advice. In his work *A Textbook of Translation* (1988), Newmark discusses two main possible approaches to starting the translation process (21). One is to translate a paragraph or a few right away, before any preparation, and only then read the entire source text. My method, however, followed the second option he presented. I approached the procedure by reading each individual text a few times, thinking through their meanings, dissecting their structure and specificity of thematic preoccupations, as well as of language and form. I have also marked the potentially challenging expressions and structures, but, naturally, I have discovered new ones during translation.

Newmark further states that a translator should be constantly aware of four levels when progressing forward (19). These are the text level, the referential level, the cohesive level, and the level of naturalness (Newmark 19). The textual level of translation implies transposing grammatical structures and lexis into a target language rather mechanically and literally. Keeping at just this level would result in a dry, and potentially lacking, translation. However, when it is combined with other levels of translation, it contributes to the faithfulness to the original and yields a precise, quality translation (Newmark 22). Interpretation, rooted in the linguistic reality of a text as well as in its context, happens on the referential level (Newmark 22). This level encompasses such elementary units as words, for example, polysemous words, but also more complex units, like passages or even whole texts. Newmark emphasises the importance of operating on both the linguistic and the referential level, without letting oneself succumb to the allure of simplifying the linguistic nuance of the source for the sake of convenience (23).

In contrast to the previous two levels, the cohesive level is made of two segments. Firstly, it includes the flow of the structure of a text achieved through the use of devices such as connectors, punctuation, and the overall organisation of the textual elements (Newmark 23-24). Secondly, it refers to how the mood of the source text carries over into the translation (ibid.). When it comes to mood, it is important to notice the subtle differences in connotation that seemingly synonymous words may carry. In essence, cohesion secures fluency of elements, ideas, and emotions, or maybe the lack thereof, if that is what the source text is inviting.

Finally, Newmark talks about the level of naturalness that is needed for a translation to read organically. He states that most texts should use everyday language and grammar to achieve naturalness; exceptions to this are innovatory texts and those that are purposefully unconventional or odd (24). The latter are usually of expressive type, and it is crucial to preserve their peculiarities in translation, despite them sounding unnatural to the reader (Newmark 25), as they were purposeful interventions into ordinary language by the original author. Similarly, one must be aware that natural does not mean predictable or ordinary; the nuances of register, collocations, or syntax should not be downplayed and replaced with the most common “equivalents” with the excuse of naturalness (Newmark 27).

Peter Newmark’s philosophy of the four levels of translation along with the aspects of functional theories served as the guiding lines during my translation and reviewing process. The skopos theory in particular expanded the usual approach to translation based on linguistic equivalence and pushed the purpose and function of the translation to the forefront. Christiane Nord’s source text-analysis model again emphasised the importance of the source text. When these approaches are considered together, they offer direction that aids on the path to optimal results.

6. Introduction to the Source Texts

I have decided to translate three of Janko Leskovar's short stories, namely: "Katastrofa", "Priča o ljubavi", and "Kraljica zemlje". None of these were previously translated, which was one of the reasons why I chose them, as I wanted to make more of Croatian literature available in English. The other reasons have to do with the author's style and themes. I found his style to be strangely serene considering the turmoil and the dwellings of his characters. His use of punctuation, the incorporation of the environment as a background character, the calm (or rather, passive) nature of his protagonists, as well as the fact that the plot develops from the characters' internal worlds, are what may have contributed to such effect. The inner struggles, the high sense of morality, and the frailty of the characters are further aspects of the stories' appeal; I believe that these issues and such experiences are always relevant, especially in modern times where there is a growing sense of anxiety and disconnection.

I will present a short overview of the three texts. "Katastrofa" and "Priča o ljubavi" are mostly set in the Hrvatsko Zagorje region (Vrtnjakovac, Zabok, Orašje), while "Kraljica zemlje" takes place in a dreamscape. In "Katastrofa", Fran Ljubić is an overworn teacher who, even in the face of sickness, cannot bring himself to confront his superiors or admit his inability to provide for his family – at least not until the vast responsibility completely weighs down on him, ending his life. It is not just a personal struggle, either. His family suffers with him, his marriage takes the blows of the financial hardship and the emotional isolation that is its consequence. Even so, his wife is the one who is maintaining a sense of normality and order in the family, she contrasts Ljubić with her rationality. "Priča o ljubavi" introduces Miroslav Tihanović, a character in love with his friend's wife. Although the feeling is mutual, the love is prevented by her marriage, and he takes no action because of the friendship and the respect towards a married woman. Tihanović takes pleasure in the silent acknowledgment of their love, but that simultaneously blocks any possibility of forming new partnerships that would also bring him greater financial prosperity. In a way, ethical responsibility, as well as simply the inability to move forward from an impossible situation, leave him stagnant throughout the years and bring the story to a tragic end. Finally, the last short story that will be translated in this thesis, "Kraljica zemlje", is a portrait of the hopes and, quite literally, the dreams of a man desperately in search of love. The reader can imagine the protagonist as a man lost in illusions, as a dreamer too sentimental to take deliberate action. On the other hand, the character's fervour and hopefulness may inspire empathy in the readers. Such character types, passive individuals

powerless against the present circumstances and often lost in thoughts of the past, have become known as “leskovarci” in Croatian literary criticism.

7. Source Texts

Katastrofa

I.

Franu Ljubiću nekako nije dobro. Već ga dulje vremena pobolijeva glava, a nešto ga draži na kašalj. - Srieda je, podne još nije minulo, a on je još u školi. Danas ga glava nešto jače boli, ne može pravo da misli, a ne može ni da govori; nešto ga duši u grudima, dah mu je kratak. Zato su djeca najprije nešto risala, onda računala, a sada pišu. U školi je potpuna tišina, samo kadšto koje dijete zakašlje ili se gane, kad zamoči pero. On danas ne prigleda, ne izpravlja.

Djeca opažaju: njemu nije dobro; nešto se približava, ona toga zapravo ne shvaćaju, ali nekakva neizvjestna slutnja ih podilazi, pa mramorkom šute i pogledaju na nj. A on sjedi gore za stolom i ne gleda djece. Rukama je podupr'o čelo. Osjeća, kako mu glava gori, kako mu je u moždanima mračno, a napeto, da sve boli.

U školi je nekako žalostno, tužno. Na prozore pada nekakva siva, maglovita svjetlost. Osam je dana, što ne ima više onih sjajnih, veselih sunčanih zraka, a treća je minula noć, što je pala magla, pa još uvijek mirno leži. I vani je tužno, žalostno. Sve je tiho, niemo kao i oni mrtvi magloviti hlapovi, što niemo lebde u zraku. Kako su se ujutru kokoti izkukuriekali odazivajući se jedan drugome s tavana, opet sve utihnu. Riedko se kada čuje čiji glas i riedko prođe tko izpred škole, pa i tad se samo čuje, kako mu se izpod nogu razprskava blato...

On spusti ruke na stol, pa ih stane promatrati. Bijaše mu neugodno: njegove ruke imaju mrtvačku boju, kao da se iz njih izciedila sva krv, pa ostale samo prazne mrtve žile tamnomodre boje. Ustade i siđe s katedre, djeca pogledaše na nj zabrinuto, no on im ne reče ništa, pa ih i ne pogleda. Njemu je glava klonula i pogled spustio mu se dolje. Osjeća, kao da su mu kosti oko očiju bolestne, pa i oči i oni živci u njima, sve se nekud napinje i boli. Tad očuti kroz moždane neki hladni trak, malo se potrese; to kao da ga malo razbistrilo i počinje razmišljati. - Najprije opazi svoje stare hlače, što su već otraga i pokrpane, no to se valjda i ne vidi, i on malo nategnu krila svoga kaputa, da segnu što niže i to prikriju... Pogleda kroz prozor.

Vani se upravo počela magla dizati, vidjela se jasno blatna cesta i preko puta zapuštena živica, a tamo iza nje stršilo golo granje drveća, samo gdjegdje ostao još pokoji list, pa suh, požutio visi mrtvo na grančici. Vršci stabala još su u magli. On stoji niemo do prozora. Samo da se već jednom digne ta nesretna magla, - misli on - izići će malo na zrak, ta već tri dana nije izlazio; osvježit će ga.

Nije mogao da izčeka podne, pol sata prije pusti djecu kući; ipak pričeka, dok je i posljednje diete izišlo. Tada pođe preko hodnika u sobu; iz kuhinje čuju se glasići njegove djece; uzme stari kaput, komu je već dva puta izmijenjena baršunasta ogrlica, obuče ga, natuče šešir na glavu, pa tiho iziđe.

Pođe cestom prama Zaboku. Židko-smeđe blato zaprska pod njegovim nogama, on se strese osjetivši kroz čizme vlagu i mrzlinu, i prodoše ga grozničavi srsi pomiešani toplim tracicima. Ipak stade laglje disati i kao da je nešto oživio. Lice mu ovijavaše hladan, vlažan zrak, a svakim udisajem oćuti ga i duboko u grlu. S čela njegova kao da se stala koprena dizati, i on je opet mogao da misli. Jedno mu bijaše posve jasno: nešto se približava. Ta siva, maglovita svjetlost nosi nešto, tako je neugodno, tako je žalostno. On ćuti, kako se umornost, koja mu već toliko dana pritište moždane, a misli goni u neku nesviestnu tamu, prelieva dolje u ruke i noge. Ide teže, polaganije, i sve mu je jasnije: nešto je blizu, posvema blizu. Poćinuti, poćinuti, možda je gdje tuj poćinak!

Stade se sjećati prošlosti, no ta je jednostavna, neumoljiva, neutješiva. Čudnovato, zašto li ga neka tajna sila goni, da baš misli na prošlost, pa da se ionako u bolestnu već krv prilije još i neutješivosti i sjete...

Zgurio se, vrat uvukao u se, ruke stisnuo u džepove, gleda na zemlju, onako vuće noge, a pod njima mljaska blato. Najprije mu padoše na um roditelji; on je o njima ćuo samo pripoviedati, nije ih nikad poznavao; i on im se oćuti nekako blizu, posvema blizu. Zatim se stvori pred njim pašnjak na brežuljku. Tu i tamo raste po koja borovica, tu su dvie kravice, on ima na sebi košuljicu, seže mu daleko izpod koljena; na glavi mu poderana domobraska kapa, koja mu pada preko ušiju i oćiju, u ruci mu bić, platnena torbica, a u njoj kukuruzni kruh. Na drugom je brežuljku na paši susjedov Ivica. Pucketaju bićevima, fićukaju, prave od blata prangije. A sve je i pašnjak i borovica i krave i susjedov Ivica i ona dolinica i preko šumica, sve je razsvietljeno sjajno: nebo je jasno, na njem zlatno sunce.

Morao je da stane, napade ga žestoki kašalj. Dolina se oćistila od magle. Vrtnjakovac se vidi u sivkastoj polusvjetlosti, a gore visoko lebdi još mrtva magluština, pa se upire o glavice brežuljka, po kojima se kroz sivkastu koprenu hlapova vidi još samo gdjegdje po koja razdrta kliet, a pod njom gola zemlja, tamna uspomena na vrijeme, kad se onamo gore penjao Zagorac s barilima i ćuturama. Ljubić nije vidio ni doline ni bregova, ni klieti ni magle. Čudnovato, njega nije preplašio ni kašalj, a to je prvi put, što se zakašljao svom žestinom. Ona svietla predoćba izginu, a stvori se mraćan jesenski dan. Kišica škropi, a njegove bose noge skližu po

blatnom putu, preko ramena mu platnena torbica, u njoj knjižica, hranitelj ga vodi u školu. I stvori se pred njim jadna slika suha učitelja, stotine dječjih glava, a poslije i osvjetlane čizme visokih svjetlih sara, i blago, okruglo, puno lice gospodina župnika. Što je dalje sliedilo, više se ne ponavlja vjerno, valjda što je umornost bivala sve jačom, pa stala opet sjedati na čelo, pod kojim se počelo nešto napinjati i boljeti, pa misli stoga zapinju. Predočbe bivaju sve jače izprekidane i provaljuju u sve slabijem, slabijem savezu. Sjeti se najprije župnog dvora; on bijaše najbolji đak i župnik ga uze k sebi; po tom četaka, čizama, ministracija, dvorenja kod stola; - zatim isto to u Zagrebu sada kod ovoga, sad kod onoga kanonika. Prestade i to. Njegov zaštitnik umrije, a on je dogodine sam moljakao po kurijama na Kaptolu. Najednom mu opet zasjaše pred očima marke za pučku kuhinju i njegovi gladni sudruzi. Sudruzi, sudruzi, pa one ideje iz učiteljske škole. Gle, a sada mora i po ono plaćice u občinski ured po deset puta. Dajte, dajte! - a oni daju svaki put nešto, kao milostinju.

Sudruzi, opet sudruzi! Ljetos se sastao s Nikolom, on je blizu Zagreba, pa znade toga mnogo i sve mu je pripoviedao. - Naglič je umro u jednom selu od gladi. Istinu ti kažem, upravo od gladi. Znaš, bio već onda boležljiv, a tko mu je i znao u onom kutu što valjana kuhati. Jeretin, krasan mladić, zaglavio je u razdrtoj, vlažnoj školi, a Demartini, znaš, naš Ante, jesi li čuo? Čitao sam... Dakle, ne znaš! On je htio da se digne, da nešto uradi, pokazao se i na književnom polju, ali se nije dalo. Pomisli, on nije mogao da kupuje ni "Matičinih" knjiga - tri forinte, brate, tri forinte na godinu! Pa što ćeš onda, kuda ćeš! I on se ubio. Šta ubio?! Ta umro je naravnom smrću. Ah, čini se samo, ali ja znam, ubio se, ubio gladom. Nije htio da jede, a pušio je, vječno pušio i pio. Bit ću skoro gotov, brate Nikola, skoro, skoro. A dva mjeseca poslije njega izumre mu ciela obitelj. Ja se ni danas ne mogu dosta da prečudim, kako se to moglo dogoditi. Brate, u dva mjeseca... A za ostalo znadeš; još su nas dvie trećine, pa u devet godina, u devet, brate, devet godina...

Bijaše ovdje ljetos i zemaljski školski nadzornik, - čudnovato, što je to sada njemu došlo na pamet. Nije bio, da pokaže svoje gospodstvo. Dugo razgovaraše s njime kao stariji brat, prijatelj, pa ga neprestano sokolio i reče, da stavlja u nj "velike nade". A na razstanku zaželi mu dobro zdravlje, ah, nije li on video, da je već bolestan? Ali njegovu oku nije umaknulo, kako se zemaljski nadzornik neugodno potresao, kad je primio za "zbogom" njegovu znojnu ruku, a on ju je prije toga otr'o kradom u džepu, samo da ne bude znojna... A gledaj mene! - opet se sjeti druga Nikole - eto na, Nikola nije mogao da hoda, suh, bled došao u kupatilo, - i nije dogovorio, pa nije ni trebalo.

Opet morade stati. Tielom mu se prelievahu čas mrzli, čas vrući traci. Opipa čelo, bijaše vruće, a na njem hladan znoj. On se ćutio posve satrvenim; počinuti, počinuti bijaše mu jedina misao... Počinuti dugo, dugo na sve vieke počivati. On je vidio pred sobom svijet, vidio dolinu, Vrtnjakovac, - već se vraćao; tu se javlja život: iz dimnjaka sukljaju cieli stupovi dima, pa se gore visoko u zraku slievaju u istu boju sa sivkastom maglom; bieli golubovi krstare nad selom, guske gaću, čuju se udarci sjekira, čuju se usklici djece, a čuje se daleko iz sela, gdje se židov s mužekom pogađa za purana.

To sve leži pred njegovim očima, dopire mu do ušiju, ali ga se ne doima ništa: sve je nesviestno; njegov organizam satrven, samo počinuti, počinuti... On zna da ima doma i ženu i djecu, ali to mu se čini negdje daleko, daleko, a samo je počinak blizu. Još se jače zgrbio, još dublje uvukao vrat, stisnuo se u svoj stari kaput, pa ide prema svojoj školi, ide teško, a blato mu mljaska pod nogama...

II.

U isto vrijeme njegova je obitelj u kuhinji, to je žena i četvero djece. - Kuhinja je prostrana, ali siromašna. Za vratima je polica s loncima, šerpenjama i drugim kuhinjskim posuđem, nešto dalje postelja od mekana drveta za služkinju, zatim stolić i klupe, a nad njim vise na zidu tri limene zdjelice, - to su dječje zdjelice i svako diete dobro već poznaje svoju, premda su naoko jednake. Četvrte zdjelice još nema; najmanje diete, Ivica, ne može još da sam jede. On je na onom krevetu, a sjedi u staroj, okrugloj košari, obložen jastukom i ostatkom staroga pokrivača, da se ne prevali. Ne više. Pred sobom na pokrivaču opazio je sićušnu pahuljicu, pa je sada hvata onim malim prstićima. Dakako, uzalud se muči, jer je predmet presitan, a on još ne zna da upotriebi, kako treba, ove prstiće, niti još umije onim malim očima omjeriti prostor. I druga se djeca zabavljaju tiho. Na sriedi kuhinje njihov je stolić s klupama. Najstariji sin Lujča - nije mu još ni pet godina - ima pred sobom pločicu, u ruci mu pisalica, pa šara. Zatim čita: i - u - i - u - o, a pokazuje istom štogod, - on zalazi k otcu u školu, pa je koješta zapamtio - i nutka mlađu sestricu Justu - nisu joj ni tri godine - koja se naslonila i gleda njegovo šaranje: - No, Justa, reci: i - u, reci no... Ali Justa neće danas da sluša. A njena sestra Jelka - u četvrtoj je godini - ima pred sobom lončić, reže krompir, ukrala ga mami, meće u lončić, pa će kuhati (jučer je kuhala grah). Već bijaše izrezala čitav jedan krompir, kad to mama opazi. Ona je danas neobično zamišljena, šuti cijelo jutro. I u kuhinji je žalostno. Maglovita svjetlost prodire samo kroz jedan prozor, pa je u kutovima gotovo mračno. Ona stoji kod štednjaka, pa kao da se zagledala u paru, što se diže iz lonca. Dođe služkinja - bila je pošla u sobu po tanjur - i reče, da gospodin leži. To Ljubičku nije prenerazilo, prestrašilo. - Tako... - reče samo, a ta

riječ nije odavala nikakva iznenađenja. To ne bijaše njoj već ništa novo, osebujno. Ona je kod njega sada petu godinu, pa to obično biva, - služkinja je nova i ne zna za to. On se u školi toliko izmuči, da poslije predavanja mora obično da legne i malo odpočine. Ah, što je takov! Pravo mu reče susjed Ivan Budor: - Što se ubijaš, ne budi lud, evo imaš djecu, ženu. - Mučiš se, da ti bude škola među boljima, a evo kakav si! - Ah, gledaj, brate, mene, kakav sam sada. - Samo mi je još jedno na pameti: deseta godina službe, samo da je doživim, žena, djeca... - On nije doživio te desete godine. Pa ne ubija samo škola. Na blagdane čitav je dan u crkvi: dvie mise, večernja. On je uobće čudnovat, što se za to još i uzrujava. Kad se vrati iz crkve, baca se samo na naslanjač, pa ne može s umornosti i nekakve lude uzrujanosti ni da jede. Pa nije to samo na blagdane!... On je molio, da ga nagrade za orguljanje. Tad ju je pozvao k stolu; ona sjedne do njega i nasloni se lagano na njegovo rame. - Vidiš - reče joj - sad ćemo računati, koliko puta vršim orguljašku službu, pa ću to napisati u molbi. - Imali su "Danicu" i začeli brojiti blagdane; nabrojiše šestdeset i pet. Svakog blagdana po dvie mise i večernja, to je već sto devedeset i pet. K tomu još svečarci, zornice, procesije, i pokaza se, da on vrši orguljašku službu do 325 puta u godini. - Ja ću to sve lijepo razložiti... i nije moguće, da ne bi dali. Pa da dadu za svaki trud petdeset novčića, onda bismo mogli barem živjeti. Šta misliš, hoće li dati? - Ah, toliko ne će! - odgovori brzo sam - poznajem ih dobro. - Da dadu barem trideset novčića, mogli bismo od toga odievati barem nekako djecu i sebe, a od plaće bismo nekako živjeli. - Ali oni ne dadoše ni petdeset, ni trideset, ni deset, ne dadoše ništa. To mu je dužnost, pa neka orgulja. I tako on troši život, tako troši. U zadnje vrijeme nekako je posve propao... Ah da, sad su zornice! Od šest do sedam svaki je dan u crkvi, a ustaje već u pet sati; oh šta se to samo toliko uzrujava! Poslije opet u školi do dvanaeste, a poslije podne do noći, sad su kratki dani, a gdje je onda još opetovnica, zadaćnice i šta ona zna, što još ne. A po večerima mora pisati još i službene listove, izvješća... Oh, draga moja, to su ti uredovni sati za školnika! - reče joj nedavno oko jedanaest sati u noći, kad je pečatio službeni list. - Propao je, jako je propao, no hvala Bogu, već je u tridesetoj godini, izdržat će. Vele, da je do dvadeset i pete godine za pluća najpogibelnije. Ali se tuj sjeti susjeda Budora, njemu je bilo već trideset četiri... Uzdrhta...

Uto zazvoni podne. Mališi digoše glave i stadoše se krstiti mećući ručice amo tamo po prsima, pa izgovaraju samo: "Otca, sina". Lujča još dodaje "svetoga" pa "amen". Majka im danas nije nosila ruku, nije ih učila, danas ona i sama ne moli. Brzo će dogotoviti objed; on se ljuti, ako nije do podne gotovo; za nj kuha već nekoliko dana nešto posebice. Ostalo je još malo od kokoši, bit će juhe za sve, a za nj ima još komadić govedine, to će izpeći, a ona i djeca jesti će krompira. Mora da ga malo bolje hrani. Nekoliko mjeseci jeli su slabo, prazno varivo, a samo

blagdanima mesa, da prištede za odijelo i obuću, - treba svima, a zima je tuj - pa gle, kako je propao! "Valjda će to biti", misli ona. Da, treba ga hraniti bolje, makar odiela i ne bude. Ali on danas nije jeo. Usrkao je samo nekoliko žlica juhe i pojeo dva-tri odrezka mesa; ne govori, ne gleda joj u lice, već obara oči na stol i na pod. Ona ga kradom pogleda, pa joj se pogled sustavlja sad na uvenulim njegovim usnama, sad na upalim očima, a onda se opet spušta po blijedom licu, a ne nutka ga, da jede, on se na to ljuti. Da nije djece, bilo bi ovdje strašno tjeskobno, mrtvo, no bezbrižni glasići dječice razganjaju tjeskobu i izpunjavaju sobu mladim, veselim uzklicima. Stadoše tražiti kruha. - Daj im! - oglasi se on. - Ah, ti samo: daj, daj, ta vidio si, da su već pojeli svoj dio. Otkud da uzmemo! Neka jedu varivo. - On ne reče više ni rieči, samo uzdahne nešto teže, pa ode u drugu sobu i opet legne, a njegova se obitelj pokupi polagano u kuhinju.

III.

A on je i poslijepodne pošao u školu. Njemu je kroz ovo devet godina, što služi, ćućenje dužnosti prodrlo tako duboko u krv, da zaboravlja i sebe. Kad je začuo u sobi korake dječje, već se stao uznemiravati. Gle, tu djeca dolaze po sat daleko; ah, što sat! Nekolika imaju podrug sata, a Koprivnjakova Milica malne dva sata, a ona će sigurno doći, sigurno... A kako da ih pošalje natrag, a da ništa ne nauče; iz tolike daljine da uzalud dođu? Sve više takovih misli navaljivaše na nj, a njegovo sobstveno osjećanje sve se jače gubilo... A kad pogleda na sat i opazi, da bi trebalo da je već prije po sata otišao u školu, gotovo se prepane (oh, kako je on to mogao zadriemati!) i pođe brzo. U hodniku na vratima opazi svoju kćerku Jelkicu. Pogleda ga onim svojim velikim modrim očima, nasmieši mu se, opet okrene glavicu i gleda napolje. Nekoga čeka, a sva je već modra od zime, hladni zrak struji na vrata. Strese se i on, prodoše ga grozničavi srsi. Čuje se, kako vani stružu velike čizme. On se dosjeti: to ide u školu Koprivnjakova Milica u sestrinim čizmama, u majčinoj surki. Nije se prevario, eto Milice na vratima: surka joj dopire dolje preko koljena, a čizme se kriju pod surku. Ide bogče i jedva diže teške čizme. "Kako da ne idem u školu?" pomisli Ljubić. Jelkica joj se nasmieši: - "Došla!" - Htjela je valjda reći: "Ipak, dugo te čekam." I Milica joj se nasmieši, pa umah turi ruku u rogožarčić, te joj pruži jabuku. Mala se razveseli, - otca i ne gleda, primi u jednu ruku jabuku, a drugu turi u rogožarčić: - Još kluha! - Uzmi, uzmi! - veli Milica, a Jelkica izvuče komadić kukuruzna kruha i veselo odtrči u kuhinju... Otca to iznenadi, pred njegovim očima stane pucati, a u srcu buditi se nešto žalostno... Pogladi Milicu, dade joj tri novčića i uđu u školu. Prije nego će moliti, prođe okom po djeci. Sve šuti, miruje, spremno je na molitvu, samo neko prekida taj svečani mir... jede, čuje se, da jede, i sve mljaska ustima. Tko je to? I potraži ga očima. Tamo u trećoj je klupi. Ah, to je njegovo diete, njegov Lujča. Mirno sjedi, u ruci mu komad kukuruzna

kruha i gleda kruh i gleda oca, a njegove modre oči tako milo sjaju. Ljubić se trgne. Najprije mu pade na um županijska naredba, - on je znao i službeni broj - koja spočitava učiteljima, da im nejaka djeca dolaze u školu, a to se zabranjuje poradi stege; no umah zatim provale druge predočbe jake, silne i sve ritnuše na stranu. Pred njim se razodkriva istina, gola istina, istina porazna! Eto, njegovo diete tako željno gleda ovaj krušac, i njemu biva sve jasnije i jasnije. Treba ga ukloniti, ali ne, neka jede, neka, neka jede. Diže ruku i htjede reći: "Pomolimo se..." rieč mu zape, ne može od uzbuđenja (ali djeca razumješe i počеше moliti), a njegova se ramena počеше potresati. Da djeca ne vide, on se okrene. Tu je razpelo, njegovo lice upravo seže do koljena Razpetoga, a on se upre sklopljenim rukama na razpelo, glava mu klone na ruke i tako se razplače. Njemu je jasno, podpuno jasno: on ne može da prehranjuje svoju obitelj. To je on i prije znao, ali dugo potiskivahu tu istinu njemački pedagozi svojim teorijama, onda škola, predstojnici, vrt, ložnjak, pčelinjak, zapisnici, izvješća, a on bi se na jadikovanja ženina samo okosnuo: - Daj mi mira, mira mi daj, ima ih koji još gore žive. - Pa tako dalje bulji u svoje knjige ili bježi u školu, crkvu ili na vrt. Ali je istina napokon probila put, rinula na stranu onu strašnu litaniju pedagoga, rinula je školu i predstojnika i vrt i orgulje... sve, sve je rinula i ona se eto preda nj stavila, sama, gola, gola istina... Kratka je, ali porazna, samo tri rieči: Ne možemo živjeti. Ah da, i to je sve, sve "ne možemo". Nešto teško, jadno, neutješivo poče mu stezati srce, pa se stade opet osjećati nevoljko, i dah mu postaje kratak, i glava počinje boljeti, i noge težčaju.

IV.

Njegova je žena za toga u kuhinji. Sjedi na klupi, u krilu joj dječja oprava, pa krpa, no kao da se pri tom nekud daleko zamišlja. Još je samo Justa s njome, - Ivica spava - a ona u luknji pod štednjakom slaže drva. Dotrči Jelka s jabukom i kruhom. - Daj, daj! - viče Justa, a sestra ide k njoj: - Dam, dam... na... to - i razdieli. Majka vidi, ona zna, otkud to Jelkici, no nije zato uzrujana; to se vuče izpred nje kao i ona sjena, što se izpred nas po zemlji provlači, a mi, zabavljeni poslom, i ne ogledamo se na onaj oblak nad nama, što ga vjetar goni zrakom. Ona vidi kroz prozor i onu dolinu, one brežuljke, i oblačine nad njima, nekako ćuti i onu neugodnu polutamu, ali sve je to za nju nesviestno, pred njom se stvara druga slika. Daleko, daleko dolje stoji dvorac na obali tihe Karašice. Veličanstvena večer pada na onu golemu ravninu, iz koje tamo daleko u Mađarskoj strši šiljasti Haršanj. Čuje se pastirski rog, najprije izdaleka, pa sve bliže i bliže, jače i jače. Selo se uznemirilo: eto stada. Kapije se otvaraju, krave muču, telići bleje. Opet se sve stišava, smrkava se, a trska onamo dolje počinje šušiti tajinstveno. Oh, to je tako divno, zamamno, a njoj se ovdje u Zagorju ne mili. Jest, liepo je, ali nema za nju čara,

dolje, dolje... Ona sama ne zna, zašto, no onamo je zovu glasi iz djetinjstva, prvi glasi, prvi dojmovi. Pa onda ona zima! Eto im u dvorište do dvadeset užirenih svinja. Otac odabira, koje će prvo; podivljalo u šumi, pa će ga iz puške. A u noći eno i vukova u dvorište; ona je jednom pucala kroz prozor na njih. Grozno zavijaju, kao da se ljute, što su staje dobro zatvorene. No ona ih je samo riedko čula, zimu su sprovođili u Osieku. A tamo za njom po pločniku stružu gospodičići, nakašljuju se, pa i sabljice zvekeću. Pa i na prozore znadu drzko gledati. No ona se ne ogleda, ne dolazi k prozoru, ne mari za njih, njene misli vraćaju se u njeno selo na obalu tihe Karašice, tamo je mladi učitelj, što je došao gore iz Hrvatske. Dođe kasno jedne subote. Drugo jutro bijaše ona u crkvi, a njegov se glas nje neobično dojmi. Prodiraše joj duboko u grudi, do samoga srдца, pa se prelieva otud u krv, ona ćuti. Po misi sretoše se baš na crkvenim vratima. Bijaše stiska i ljudi ih pristisnuše jedno k drugome. Ona osjeti njegovo tielo na svojem bedru, na svojem boku. On se olako naslonio na njezino rame, a jedan lakat kao da dira njenu sisu. Sva uzdrhta... On se izpriča i poviče na ljude: - Ta nemojte!... - Ona ćuti njegov dah na ćelu, skrene malo glavu, a pogledi im se sretnu, i još jaće uzdrhta... On je riedko dolazio k njima. - Zavuko se u svoju školu - reče baka Janja - kao puž u svoju kućicu, a ona bi ga bila rada vidjela, imala uza se. Podveće znala bi sama lutati uz obalu Karašice, a izpred nje dizahu se preplašene divlje patke i padahu tamo dalje u močvarama. Ali se jednom sretoše na polju. Bijaše podveće, sunce još sjalo a traci mu milo osvjetljivahu zelenu travu. Nešto ju usmjelilo, - ona ne zna što - zagleda mu se ravno u oći i zapita ga: - A gdje ste vi? Koliko puta gledam na vašu školu, vas nigdje! - On se trgne, zaviri joj u oći, a ona izdrža njegov pogled. Oh, kako mili, dragi bijahu poslije toga oni sunćani traci, ona zelena trava, ah sve, sve! Ne rekoše si doduše o tom više ni rieći, no bijaše riešeno - među njima. Kako joj sladko bijaše poslije ono lutanje obalom Karašice, kako zamamno, uspavljujuće šuštanje trstike, a kako veselo ono polietanje preplašenih pataka. Prije nego opet odoše u Osiek, - bijaše već zima - dođe on k njima svećano obućen, no vratio se pognute glave. Nešto se dogodilo... Nje nije bilo kod kuće, saznala je to istom kasnije. Što bi to bilo, pa i on se nekako drugaćije drži. Što je, što? I ona upita otca, (bili su već u Osieku), što se zbilo? - Umolio je za tvoju ruku. - A, ti, ti... ti si ga odbio! - Naravski.

Njoj je na tu rijeć ponestalo daha i svietla, pa se sruši.

Dva mjeseca kasnije bješe dovezao njihov kočijaš u Osiek živeža, pa je pripoviedao, da mladi učitelj odlazi od njih. Kamo? Natrag gore u Hrvatsku. Tako!... Izgubljeno je sve, on odlazi već danas ili sutra. Pošla je preko gornjeg grada u Retfalu, - njezin će kočijaš sad na kući, a možda će ona sjesti k njemu, rada bi ga još vidjeti. Ide žalostno... Jedna se kola primiću pošljunćenom cestom silnim štropotom. Digne glavu, a to je on, za njegovim leđima velik

kovčeg. Gle, on ju je opazio; kola stanu, on siđe, ide k njoj. Veli joj zadnji “zbogom”, on ide daleko onamo gore u Hrvatsku i sigurno se ne će nikada više vidjeti. Nikad, nikad! Jadno joj je moralo biti negdje lice, i sva je morala biti bijedna, jer se on prestrašio i pitao dršćući: - A što da uradimo, otac ne da?

- Idimo zajedno k njemu. Idimo, ajde, hodi! - i ona ga primi čvrsto za ruku.

I dođoše preda nj, a otac ih je nekako čudnovato gledao, oni nijesu znali protumačiti toga pogleda, ali ga razumješe dva dana kasnije: on se bacio s mosta u Dravu. On ga nije odbio, ali reče, ako hoće sirotu, neka je uzme, on da ne ima ništa, ništa. A kako bijaše sada njoj teško, i oboljela je i - začudo nije više htjela, da pođe za Ljubića; no on je više nije pustio, nije htio nikud...

- Mama, ti moja... - Došla je mala Jelka k njoj, položila joj obje ruke u krilo i pogledala je milo onim velikim modrim očima.

Ljubićka se prenu.

- Ti moja? - ponovi mala.

- Jesi, moja, jesi! - pogladi je.

- Ni tvoja, moja... - oglasi se mala Justa ljutito iz luknje pod štednjakom, gdje slagaaše drva.

- Justa veli, mama ni moja! - plačnim će glasom Jelka i ponese ručice k očima.

- Ni tvoja, moja mama! - poviče mala još žešće i izturi svadljivu glavicu napolje, a nosić joj bijaše na vršku zaprljan, a i lica, pa joj još življe sjahu male okrugle oči. I nije ih mogla prije umiriti, dok ne posadi jednu sebi s lijeve strane, a drugu s desne. Zatim opet uze u ruke opravicu, pa će krpiti. Vidi se slabo, mračno je... Ona radi, a pri tom joj se pogled zaustavlja na njezinim rukama. To bijahu prije krasne ruke: punane, bijele, gladke, prsti zaobljeni, prema kraju sve tanji, a nokti s blazinicama divno modelovani; - a sad su joj upravo ružne. Podbija ih tamnocrvena rumen, oštri lug izgrizao ih, - ona sama luži, a od sapunjanja ogulila se na više mjesta koža - baš je jučer imala pranje. Ona je više puta znala stati, dići ruku i gledati je dugo, a onda drugu, šutjela je, ali kao da bi htjela reći: “Gdje su one moje ruke?” A on bi uhvatio te izmučene, izobličene ruke, pa bi ih iz zahvalnosti izljubio. No začudo ona nije pri tom ćutjela one dražesti kao negda, kad bi se on dotaknuo njezina tiela. Bijaše joj, kao da nije to topla put njezina muža, već nešto bez života, nešto tuđe. Ona je uobće nekako druga, ohladila je, pa bi

mu znala iskreno reći: - Ne znam, što mi je, ne mogu si pomoći, ali ja te više ne ljubim. Ah, gdje je ona ljubav!

- Valjda nijesi zamilovala Mitića?

- Oh, nemoj, nemoj! Ti si jedini, ti...

I ona bi se k njemu privinula, a on bi je privukao na svoje grudi. Ali to ne bijaše više zagrljaj muža i žene, u kojima buktu život, to bijaše zagrljaj dvoje izmučenih ljudi, bijaše tihi zagrljaj samlosti. Zabavljeni borbom, brigom, nijesu ni opazili, kako ih je siromaštvo ubilo: oborilo ljubav, otrovalo život. Pred njima leži sada samo gotov čin: mrtvo, sve je mrtvo.

- Ah, mi smo već stari! - veli on privijajući je k sebi

- Stari smo, stari, - nasmiješi se ona kroz suze.

A njoj su bile istom dvadeset četiri godine, a njemu dvadeset i devet...

- Mama, ja bil školi... - Otvore se vrata, a široki mali Lujča uniđe s pločicom u ruci

- Aha, ja bil školi - pokima mali glavom prama sestricama - aha... ja pisal...

Iz hodnika dopire štopot, djeca idu kući.

V.

A sada se stane primicati noć tajna, podmukla. I što to samo jest. - Sve nekud žuri, kao da u zraku leži nešto teško, nepoznato. Ljubička neobično brzo radi, žurnije smiruje djecu, živad, brzo ide, gotovo trči u staju, - imaju jednu kravicu, a noć je međutim već nad njima. Ona ne bi bila još došla, ali je dotjeraše one mrke oblačine, te se podmuklo spušta na zemlju. Sad stane moliti *Zdravo Marijo* i čudnovato, obično zvonu dugo, pa se metalni zvuci velikog zvona razliežu otegnuto po dolinicama, a danas je to samo nakratko... A on je sam u sobi, djeca su još u kuhinji, nije mu bolje, nego još gore, ali stoji, stoji kao da nešto iščekuje...

*

U ponoćno doba prodre iz škole strašan krik u tamnu noć, a dva se prozora brzo na to razsvietliše... Opet nešto zapljuska po podu, ženski krik se ponovi, i to u najvišem glasu, što ga može dati ljudsko grlo, a uz taj krik čuje se drugi duboki glas, koji odaje samo kratke, izprekidane, zagušene: - Ah... ah... ah...

U sobi stoji ona u bijeloj košulji do njegova uzglavlja. Gornjim telom visi on iz kreveta, ona ga desnom rukom prihvatila otraga ispod pazuha, a lijevom mu podržava čelo. Na podu je mlaka krvi, zgrušane tamnocrvene krvi. Njezina bijela košulja i bijele noge sve je zaprskano krvlju. Na ormariću gori nemirno svieća, pa drhtućim svjetlom obasjava cijeli prizor, i njegovo obnemoglo, mrtvo lice, i njene prestrašene crne oči i onu mlaku krvi i poprskanu košulju i noge...

- Soli, soli... - izgovori Ljubić prve riječi iza onih zagušenih "ah... ah..." I sol zaustavi krv...

Onaj krik probudi i djecu, - samo mali Ivica kraj materine postelje te noći začudo mirno spava - pa se izvukoše iz svojih posteljica. Lujča u bijeloj košuljici stoji pred mlakom krvi, protire oči i začuđeno gleda; do njega stoji Jelkica u kratkoj košuljici, ručicama si ju zategla na križe i široko otvorenih očiju gleda sad otca, sad majku, pa onda krv. Mala Justa ne može sama iz posteljice i viče iz druge sobice: - Mama, dolje, dolje, mama... - No mama nije čula, odoše brat i sestra, pa joj pomažu iz kreveta.

Otčeva glava međutim leži bespomoćno na jastucima, oči su mu zatvorene, samo naglo dizanje grudi odaje, da još žive. Ona niemo sjedi kraj njegova uzglavlja.

U prvi je mah bilo oboje bez shvaćanja, bez misli. On bješe satrven, a ona obezumljena. Kad je prestala krv, počеше se razbuđivati. On osjeti nekakvu zimu najprije u nogama, u tabanima. Međutim se počеше javljati i misli. I začudo, prve misli, što su se sad rodile, nijesu se vrtjele oko tog strašnog događaja, nego oko službe, dužnosti. Tu se vidjelo: on je u toj službi zaboravio već misliti za se i za svoje; njemu su se vječno mele po glavi teorije pedagoga, školski paragrafi, vrt, pčelinjak, ložnjak, zapisnici, izvješća i ono spajanje registara na orguljama počevši od najsitnijih do onog najkrupnijeg od trideset i dvie stope, pa njihovo prelievanje u najrazličitijim bojama. Sada bijaše to velika sreća, jer su im se time u tom strašnom času misli odvrćale od teške istine.

On otvori oči i makne malo glavom.

- Sjutra je četvrtak?... - kao da pita slabim glasom.

- Jest! - odgovori ona.

- Nije škole... ah,... (mala stanka), - a htio sam... (stanka) da režemo sjutra... (stanka) američku lozu u reznike... ispraviti zadaće...

I ona kao da je na to malo oživjela. Njezine misli otkinuše se s krvi.

- Ah, miruj samo! - briše mu s čela znoj. - Što se tim mučiš!

- Koliko je sati? - pita opet tiho.

- Jedanaest i pol...

- Kod župnika već spavaju...

- Što želiš? Zašto - ona se prenerazila - možda izpovijed...

- Morala bi poručiti... (stanka) da sutra ne ću orguljati... kod zornice...

- Ah, miruj samo, to ćemo već ujutro! - opet mu briše znoj sa čela.

On uzdahnu...

Međutim dođoše djeca u košuljicama i stadoše pred posteljom.

- To klv... - poče prvi Lujča pokazujući rukom na pod...

- To klv... - ponavlja Jelkica i prigrabljuje glavu, da bolje vidi.

- To kv?... - pita Justa gledajući brata i sestru. I sve troje gleda u krv i ponavlja: - klv, kv, aha klv...

- To klv? - stadoše sada pitati roditelje, i oni se trgoše, a misao im zastade sada na krvi.

Bili su pretriezni, preoštra vida, a da bi se sada obsjenjivali, zavaravali. Obadvjema bijaše jasno, podpuno jasno: nije daleko, blizu je, sasma blizu, no nijesu se usudili zamisliti dublje u tu strašnu rieč, nijesu se usudili izgovoriti je; ali ipak sve misli njihove, sve boli kupile su se oko te jedne rieči, koja se izgovara "s m r t", a iza riječi "smrt" pomalja se crna misao: djeca, djeca... On zatvori oči, a malo zatim stadoše mu teći suze niz bleda, mrtvačko lice. Ona onako, kako je bila u košulji krvlju zaškrapanoj, legne k njemu, pritisne se uza nj, uhvati njegove ruke i stade ih snažno stiskati, a suze su joj samo navirale na oči. Zatim se povuče malo više gore k uzglavlju, uhvati objema rukama njegovu glavu, pa od suza mokro lice pritisnu k njegovome...

A njihova djeca stoje kod kreveta, dršću od zime i gledaju, gledaju, ali ne razumiju, ne shvaćaju ništa. Ona i ne znaju, što se dogodilo.

Ona dva prozora na školi ostadoše razsvietljena cielu noć. Dolazili i susjedi, a nekako prama jutru opet se čulo pred školu, kako u sobi nekakva zgrušana tekućina pada na pod sad u većim sad opet u manjim mlazovima i svaki pad poprati nemoćni, zagušeni i duboki: ah... ah... A nad tima “ah” i pljuskom krvi izvija se potresujući ženski glas u dugi, žalosni: “j-o-j!”

(Leskovar, *Izabrana* 37-50)

Priča o ljubavi

Cesta, što iz Krapinskih toplica vodi prema V**, presieca uzku jednu dolinicu. Ogleda li se ovdje putnik na sjever, opazit će pri dnu te dolinice staru, drvenu kuriju, sagrađenu na kat, kako sa svojim prozorima gleda k njemu. Među vočkama posakrile se gospodarske zgrade, te samo gdjegdje iz njih proviruju.

Na brežuljku u zaleđu porasla bukova šuma. Kad čovjek zimi iznenada ugleda tamo u dnu puste dolinice tu staru kuriju s njenim pocrnjelim stienama, nevelikim prozorima, s onim visokim krovom, sniegom pokrivenim, s onom šumom u zaleđu, razbudi ona u njemu nekako neobičan dojam i on je gleda, a u duši mu je kao da se je dotakla carstva starih priča.

To je stari šljivarski dom Tihanovića. Dugo je tu gospodovala kajkavska rieč stare zagorske gospode, no ima desetak godina, što je ona i pod tim starim krovom zamrla. Tada je umro zadnji Tihanović, koji bi s vama govorio nagovarajući vas sa “oni”, “naj dostoju, dragi amice”, “kaj su rekli...” Sin njegov Miroslav bio je tada u državnoj službi. I on je čeznuo za životom na selu, pa napusti službu i povuče se u Orašje.

No Miroslav Tihanović nije se u sretan čas primio gospodarstva.

U to se doba bila pojavila i u njegovu kraju filoksera i vinogradi mu propadoše. Jedna nesreća riedko dolazi sama, eto i druge. Umre mu šurjak činovnik i na Tihanoviću ostane sada da podpomaže sestru, koja je radi djece živjela u gradu. Gospodarstvo je odbacivalo vrlo mali prihod. Često nije bilo novaca u kući. Životarilo se. Pokušao je Tihanović, da se ženitbom izvuče iz tih briga. Bio je čovjek ugodne vanjštine, otmjen, imao poznanstva u boljim krugovima - no uza sve to nije mogao da se oženi. Nije to bilo stoga, što on ne bi bio sretan kod žena, dapače on se gotovo već i zaručio, dvaput zaručio - a onda se na čudo svojih znanaca povukao u svoju kuriju. Prijatelji se njegovi snebivahu, stavljahu na nj stotinu upita, prekoraвахu ga, a on je na sve to imao tek jedan odgovor: “ne ide...” A nitko nije ni slutio, kakova se tajna krije pod tim zagonetnim odgovorom. Tek jedna osoba znala je tu tajnu, znala ju je njegova susjeda, mlada žena vlastelina Tvrtkovića. Njoj je odao tu tajnu, kad se ono prvi put povukao i ona ga upitala - zašto je to učinio. Odkad je vidio gospođu jednoga svoga prijatelja - reče joj on – misli, da više nema žene, koja bi njega mogla usrećiti.

A mlada je gospođa znala, da je ona ta žena, no o tom se nije dalje govorilo ni onda, a ni kasnije, premda Tihanović nije prestao zalaziti k svome susjedu. Prijateljski odnosi nijesu se među njima ni u čem promienili. I razvio se život, koji za Tihanovića bio pun čara.

U svom starom domu, koji je u svojim odajama čuvao pokućstvo iz starih vremena, portraite pređa u pocrnjelim okvirima, stare knjige i oružje - odavao se uspomenama, da ga uzbuđuju svojim bezkonačnim pričama, što kao da su samo izvirale iz sjena kutova starih odaja, a kad bi mu duša bila umorna s misli i osjećaja, tad bi sjeo k pianu staroga Bösendorfera i izvabio bi iz starih žica zamiruće akorde, pa do kraja razžalošćen u toj samoći starih odaja dao bi upreći, da se odveze k susjedu Tvrtkoviću. Tu bi proboravio mnogu večer.

A kakove večeri to bijahu za nj! Znao je, da ga mlada gospođa ljubi. Ona mu to doduše nikad nije priznala, no odala se ipak. Kad je Tihanović i po drugi put napustio misao na ženidbu i iza toga došao prvi put u Klenovac, primi ga ona s takvim drhtanjem oko usana, s takvim pogledom, da je morao vidjeti, koliko ga ljubi.

I u tome, što su oboje znali, kako se ljube, a njihova usta o tome šute - bilo je neobičnog čara za Tihanovića. On je neki osobiti, pun sreće i boli užitak nalazio u tome, što je mogao tako boraviti u njenoj blizini, na odlazku za zbogom primiti njenu nježnu ručicu, za koju je znao, da bi ga rado milovala, a on se isti mah čuvao, da i jednim samo intimnim stiskom povriedi njenu čast žene i gostoprimstvo prijatelja.

Njegovo čuvstvo spram mlade gospođe posve se gubilo u obožavanju. Nalazio je u nje toliku harmoniju ljepote ženskih oblika, milinja duše i dobrote srдца, da je u njenoj blizini uvijek našao onaj mir, što ga je uzalud drugdje tražio.

Nekako blažen vraćao se iza večeri sprovedenih u Klenovcu u svoje Orašje. A ipak se nije za tih večeri ništa važno događalo. Prolazile su u razgovoru, tako običnom razgovoru. Znali bi sjedjeti za dugim stolom, ona bi radila kakav ručni posao, njih dvojica bi pušili, a razgovor je mirno tekao cielu večer. Tek kadkad znala bi ona odigrati što novo, znamenito na glasoviru. Kako običan život, a ipak Tihanović ne bi htio da se dulje zadrži kod sestre u Zagrebu. Jednom nije mario ni da čuje Saru Bernhardtovu samo da se može vratit svojim tihim večerima.

Pa kad bi se iza večeri ovako sprovedenih našao u svojoj staroj kuriji, često ne bi mogao dugo usnuti. Mnogo je mislio o svojim susjedima i znao bi se pitati, da li bi njegova Tugomila (on ju je u duši nazivao "svojom"), da njega i ne pozna, mogla ljubiti svojega muža. Ta, njezin muž kao da i ne vidi, koji se čari kriju u njegovoj ženi, što njena duša traži, za čim čezne. Tvrtković mu se čini tako običnim čovjekom. Umije mesarima dobro prodati vola i kravu i tele, na sajmu se razumije s trgovcima i mešetarima, konju pogađa po zubima godine, razumije se u gospodarstvo, raspoznaje kvalitetu vina, no ne poznaje dušu žene. Čini mu se barbarom u čuvstvu nježnih osjećaja. Ova se poredba sviđaše osobito Tihanoviću. Da, barbar snažne šije,

jakih usnica, širokih ramena, golemih grudi, iz kojih izlazi silan glas. Njegov je otac tamo dolje u Slavoniji natjerao u strah iste zvjerokradice. Nešto te barbarske energije ima i u sina. Nitko se ne usuđuje, da mu što ukrade, jer taj gospodin ne zna šale.

A ipak je Tihanović volio svoga prijatelja.

I godine su prolazile. Tihanović je živio podjedno istim životom. A njegovo je gospodarstvo međutim neprestano nazadovalo. Bilo je duga već i od prije, zadužio se on, a da bude neprilika čitava, zatražila i njegova sestra, da joj izplati njen dio, udavala je kćer. - Tihanović nije mogao dobiti tolikog zajma - jedino što je mogao početi - bilo je, da sve proda, pa izplati sestru i namiri dugove - a njemu će ostati malo ili ništa.

Tu se sada umieša njegov susjed Tvrtković - i on ga podsjeti, da mu drugdje spasa nema nego u ženitbi. Tihanović se dugo skanjivao, no njegov je prijatelj svojim praktičnim pogledima na život napokon kao da je održao pobjedu i on ga upozori na ljepušnu i dosta imućnu neku gospođicu u nedalekom trgovištu. I sve je gladko odpočelo - pokazalo se, da je Tvrtković već pripremio putove. I dan zaruka već urekoše. Istog urečenog dana imao je Tvrtković posla kod suda, pa je otišao onamo već rano, no dan prije toga reče Tihanoviću: - Čuj, čovječe, ne dođeš li do jedanaest sati, tako mi Boga, znaj ja ću sam pojuriti po tebe i strpati te u saone...

No kad je osvanuo taj dan, te se već primaknuo jedanaesti sat, Tihanović ni da bi izašao iz svoje kurije. On nije na to ni pomišljao.

Već izjutra ponoviše se u njegovoj duši stari njegovi pogledi na moralnu stranu takove ženitbe i on je nije mogao no trgovačkom spekulacijom da okrsti. Zaludu mu dolazila na um fraza "preživjeli idealizam", zaludu si dozivao u pomoć tolike svoje znance, koji se na isti način oženiše, pa opet nađoše sreću u braku - sve to njemu nije bilo od koristi.

Međutim počeo se zapredati u dražesne niti, što mu ih prošlost naprela za nezaboravnih večeri u Klenovcu. On je tamo polagano doznao za sve važnije momente iz života mlade gospođe - i bijaše dosta, da se samo sjeti ove ili one zgone, pa da sve drugo zaboravi i tek o njoj da misli.

Njezin otac bio je ljekarnik u nekom gradiću. Dan i noć boravio je u svojem laboratoriju i napokon izišao na glas sa svojih balzama. Kad mu je žena umrla i ostavila jedinicu kćerku - istom se uzstrajnošću dao na proučavanje uzgojnih djela; Fenelona je dapače u nekim poglavljima znao naizust. - Bio je gotovo čudak. Kad mu je kćerka svršila elementarne škole, nije pustio, da ide u višu djevojačku školu - samo da je mladići i kojekakve bitange na ulici ne

slijede i ne smućuju. Stari jedan gimnazijalni profesor dolazio je k njima u kuću, da je podučava. A za školskih praznika slao ju je na selo: tamo je u samotnom dvorcu živjela njezina baka.

Taj zasebni način uzgoja imao je neku draž za Tihanovića i on je ljubio toga otca čudaka, starca profesora i babu njenu, koja bi nedjeljom i blagdanima čitav sat daleko u crkvu vozila svoju unuku u staroj kočiji, što se njihala na remenju.

Ovim se je ljudima Tihanović u duši svojoj bavio u čas, kad je trebalo poći na zaruke. I čisto je sretan smiešak titrao na njegovu licu - i dugo je tako stajao do prozora.

A sunce toga dana bijaše zakrito oblacima, a dolinica i brežuljci bili pokriveni sniegom.

A onda se povukao u sobu, u kojoj je bilo malo svietla. A kad je stara ura odbijala jedanaesti sat, sjetio se Tihanović susjeda Tvrtkovića. “A on će doći, sigurno će doći”, šaptao si u duši i čudno... obazreo se na stienу, gdje su visjele puške i handžari, a onda se polagano spustio na kožnati kanape i neobično se snuždio, te spustio glavu u dlanove.

Sve bijaše tiho, tek se čula šetalica na uri i praskanje vatre u staroj baroknoj peći.

Tihanović nije prestao misliti na Tugomilu. Ona se ovih posljednjih dana bila silno promienila i propala u licu.

I njena se slika stala javljati u duši njegovoj, javljati onako, kako ju je zadnjih dana vidio, s crtom one boli oko usana, što ju je ona u dubinama svoje duše ugušivala.

A itiha se vani oglasili praporci. Zvek njihov dopirao je najprije s daleka, pa sve bliže i bliže. “Uistinu dolazi Tvrtković”, pomisli Tihanović, ali se nije maknuo sa svoga mjesta. Ne bijaše u njega ni snage ni volje za to. “Neka, neka, braco, uzalud ti sve”, šaptao si rezignacijom i mislio dalje na Tugomilu.

Ali kad su se otvorila vrata, nije se na njima ukazao susjed Tvrtković, nego neka gospođa u velikoj, smeđoj rotondi, u crnom šeširu širokih oboda, a lica sakrivena koprenom. I ona je opazivši Tihanovića na kanapeu bila nekako iznenađena, ispustila kvaku i ostala neodlučno na pragu, a vrata se sama širom raztvorila.

A Tihanović se trgnuo iz snatrenja, ustao i zagledao se u došljakinju, i njegovo je srdce silno zakucalo. U toj gospođi vidio je Tugomilu: isti njezin nježni struk izbijao iz rotonde, ista mило složena glava na onim skladnim ramenima. I bilo mu je, te bi razširio ruke i potrčao k njoj, no nije mu dalo neko tupo nepoimanje. Tako mu se čudnim činio taj dolazak. Gdje bi ona došla k njemu ovako sama! Ona, koja mu za šest godina njihove ljubavi nije ni jednim potajnim

stiskom ruke odala svoje strasti. Ta ona je bila u njegovim očima tako visoko: uzvišena vladarica svojih osjećaja. I on nije mogao vjerovati svojim očima i sumnjajući pitaše, je li to ona, je li ona! Neka se oglasi, da joj čuje glas. A ona ne mičući se s praga, prošapta nato – Ja sam...

- Ah, kako je to moguće, kako! - pružao je on ruke prema njoj...

A ona stajala nepomično, nepristupačno...

I njemu su opet ruke klonule... Istom je sada opazio, da je ona iznenađena, što je njega tu našla.

- Nijesam mislila, da ću ovdje koga zateći - javila se sada tihim glasom...

A u duši njegovoj nato nestane onoga nepoimanja i on je upita: “Zar je mislila da je on otišao tamo k onoj...”

Ona kimnu glavom.

I pred duševnim se okom Tihanovićevim otkrila taj čas sva ona ogromna bol, što ju je ta žena sakrivajući pretrpjela i tada ga zahvatila silna žalost, a opet ga u isti mah uznosila velika ljubav ove žene. I on ju u tom zanosu ponio na svojim rukama u sobu i samo klicao:

- Ah, kako si, kako si to mogla misliti! Ta ja ne mogu bez tebe živjeti.

A kad ju je spustio s ruku na pod, skinuo je s nje rotondu i htio je da joj s lica odvine koprenu, da se nagleda toga lica, tih očiju... A ona je tada sama dignula s lica koprenu i skinula šešir... A u tom licu ležala silna bol i kroz nju se javljao osmieh sreće.

- Samo zamalo - osmjehnula se ona turobno, kad je odlagala šešir.

- Ne govori, ne govori to! - molio ju Tihanović bolnim glasom. - Ne mislimo na život.

A ona tužno prošapne kao tajnu: - Ja odlazim.

I Tihanović je gledao u nju s nerazumievanjem, a ona mu istim tihim, žalostnim glasom pripoviedala, da se je ovamo navratila samo na prolazku, pa se - opazivši s ceste njegov dom - nije mogle svladati, da ne skrene ovamo, da zadnji put još u dušu upije ta mjesta, gdje on boravi...

I izpoviedajući tako svoju veliku ljubav bila je nekako smetena. Ona ide sada k svojoj babi, tamo ju nešto vuče, tamo će naći mir, onaj dugi, dugi mir..

- Smrt!... - zavapio je Tihanović zamirućim glasom.

A ona ga prihvatila za ruku.

- Čuj me!... - progovori bolnim glasom. - Mi nijesmo nikada govorili o onome, u čem smo živjeli toliko godina. A nije ni nužno, - doda potiše, a tad se opet javila onim prijašnjim glasom: - No jedno ti moram reći...

I sada mu je povjerala, da je nju, kad je još bila djevojkom i slušala onoga staroga profesora pričati o svijetu, znalo obuzeti neko čudno osjećanje, kao da će u tom svijetu umrijeti sa same ljubavi.

I dok mu je ona to šapćući pripoviedala, ne bijaše u njenom glasu ništa, što bi odavalo, da ju podilazi kakova bojazan s takove smrti. Nikakova straha nije bilo u njenoj duši, a ipak i njeno držanje i izražaj lica i drhtaj glasa odavahu, kako ona osjeća, da je došlo to vrijeme, da umre.

I nastala je čudna šutnja, za koje kao da se samo misao o smrti širila u velikoj sobi...

Uto je dopr'o iz doline zvuk zvonaca.

Njih se dvoje pogleda i Tihanović namršti obrve. - To je on - progovori muklo, a ona ga razumjela.

Dolazio je njen muž.

Tihanović je mislio, da će ju ipak moći spasiti i htio je, da se požuri preda nj, da samo vani sjedne k njemu u saone, te mu slaže, da je bio prisiljen na nj čekati, jer da mu se konji nijesu s puta vratili.

No to je bilo sasvim nemoguće. Ona ga podsjetila, da su njene saone pred kurijom i da će ih Tvrtković sdaleka prepoznati. - Ne, ne, ne idi nikud! - moljaše ga, no u njenom glasu nije bilo straha. Ali Tihanović je strepio za njen život. "On će ju ugušiti, on će ju ubiti", malo da nije stao vikati i s tom mišlju dohvatio je sa stiene handžar i povukao ga iz korica. Ali ga ona stala grliti strasno i moliti, da joj prepusti handžar. A kad ga je dobila u svoju ruku, odbacila ga svom snagom, te se handžar zabo u pod, a tada se okrenula k njemu i ovila mu liepe ruke oko vrata.

I sada se počelo vršiti ono, što je ona kroz cijeli život nosila u sebi.

Nije sada više mislila, da je žena Pavla Tvrtkovića. Zatajivanje srca, muke svladavanja nestalo je. Daleko, daleko u bezkrajnoj daljini ostao je negdje život, a njome ovladalo samo jedno - ljubav, onakva ljubav, za koju se umire, kakova joj se tajanstveno javljala još u mladosti njenoj, kad je odijeljena od svijeta o svijetu slušala priče. I ona razkoš osjećaja, koju je duša njena tada tek naslućivala, sada joj poput morskih talasa zaplavljivala dušu.

Ona je osjećala, da će umrijeti, a taj osjećaj budio je u njoj samo razkošnu zanesenost. I kao kroz san grlila je onoga, kojega je ljubila, i privijala svoje krasno mlado tielo k njemu. - Ostaj uza me - šaptala je zaneseno, a onda bi kao u blaženu snu uzdahnula: - Ah, ljubi me, ljubi... - Kud to vrijeme leti...

A ta je zanesenost prešla i na Tihanovića. Vidio je, kako je sva sretna uz njega, vidio je u svakom potezu njezina lica svu razkoš nutarnje blaženosti. I privijajući je na grudi nije više mario za ono što se približavalo. Neki ga umor stao svladavati; kao da je dane i noći probdio, te izmučio i dušu i tielo i sada hoće, da ga svlada san i sladko mu je, prelestno, što s njome tone u taj san i ne sjeća se već ničesa, tek ćuti, kako mu silno udara u sljepočicama.

I tako se dogodilo, te je on kao kroz driem video, kako je u sobu unišao Pavao Tvrtković, širok, jak... I tek kad je opazio, gdje je taj čovjek pograbio handžar, što je bio u pod zaboden - skočio je on golim rukama protiv njega i nije shvaćao, kako se to njemu nije ništa dogodilo.

Kad se je s bodežem, što ga je skinuo sa stiene - okrenuo za Pavlom Tvrtkovićem, taj je čovjek već pao uz svoju ženu, koja je sva u krvi ležala na podu.

Tad je bacio Tihanović bodež u kut i hvatao se za glavu vičući: - Što si počinio, što si počinio... luđače!

(Leskovar, *Izabrana* 107-114)

Kraljica zemlje

I on se promijenio. Nestalo vesela osmijeha; diže se s njegovih usana kao bezbrižan lepir. U očima njegovim nema više nestašnosti, otkinu se poput vesele ptice, što je odletjela u daleke strane, a iza sebe ostavi čežnju, što luta po zamirućim šumama za žalobitih, vlažnih jesenskih dnevi.

Nešto će doći. Dolazi, samo od sebe dolazi. On postaje i prisluškuje duši svojoj. Nema još nikoga, ali doći će. Tišina je, sve je nejasno. No sijevak već drhtnu u tajanstvenim daljinama, nad uspavanim gromadnim planinama, što zadiru u nebo. On pritvori oči, ali ono, što ima doći, već dirnu cjelovom njegovu dušu i sakri se u njezinim dubinama kao šapat plaha vjetrića, koji poljupcem probudi sanen listić u tamnoj šumi.

I u tim dubinama sada već nema smirenja. Sve nešto podrhtava, sve se šaptaj do šaptaja budi kao list za listom u prašumi prije no dune prvi navjesnik oluje. Svi šaptaji, svi drhtaji hoće da se slože u jedan vapaj, pred kojim će da drhtne čitavo tajno, duboko biće.

I maglica, satkana od sanjive pređe, zatalasa se pred njegovim očima, odajući jedno žensko biće, što je iza nje. A on ispruži ruke, ali sanjiva maglica otplovi u daljinu kao bijele jesenske paučine, što ih vjetrić nosi, na umirućim sunčanim tracima, koji još za zadnji put cjelivaju zemlju.

I u tome kraju nema za nj više ni sreće. Negdje daleko iza brda i ravnina čeka ga radost, šapće mu srce.

Tamo će da se smiri.

I jednoga jutra, kad su se bijele kao mlijeko magle iz doline digle na put, ustade i on, te pođe u svijet.

Prolažашe selima i gradovima. Dani pred njegovim očima skretahu u tamna konačišta; sanene noći dizahu se sa dremovnih dušeka, a on putovaše i putovaše. Tada jednom dođe samotni putnik u gradić neki. Srce mu drhtnu, kad ga ugleda izdaleka među dvije rijeke...

Sunce silazilo s neba; nad planinama čekahu ga oblaci, da ga ogrnu u tamne plaštove...

Samotni putnik ude u čaroban grad. Djevice u laganim odijelima dolažahu mu ususret, lijepe, milovidne sa nasmijanim ustancima, sa umilnim pogledima.

Ovdje, među ovim ružama, naći će onu, koju traži, šaptaše mu srce. I pođe dalje. Tad se odjednom nađe u hladovini. Perivojem kruže staze. S drveća kapaju mirisi, padaju cvijeci. Iza

busena velikih crvenih ruža čuju se lagani koraci, šuškanje haljina, a pred njim se opet zaleluja ona čarobno satkana zavjesa talasajući se zavodljivo.

Oh, ukaži, ukaži se - ispruži ruke umorni putnik. Još nije ni dorekao, kad se - pritisnuv rukom srce zagleda - i dugi "ah" ote mu se iz nabreknutih grudi.

Ona stajaše pred njim.

-Umirem za tobom - govore njegove oči utapajući se u njezinim zjenicama.

-Dragi - šapuće sanjivi smiješak na njenim usnama.

Noć je. On ide na ročište. Gondola tiho plovi niz rijeku. Nad njim je grimizni baldakin, a naokolo njišu se zelene svjetiljčice i čarobno svjetlucaju prigušenim zelenim svjetlom. Gondola je sva posuta cvijećem.

Ona ga čeka niže dolje, gdje se visoke sjene jablana dižu k nebu. Rijeka se pružila u nedogled, gubeći se u tamnim sjenama. On pozire u tamu, što se uhvatila oko visokih jablana. Visoke se njihove sjene sve bliže primiču, već su upored s njegovom gondolom, i sad se izmota iz tame bjelkasta pruga... To su mramorne stepenice, što se spuštaju k rijeci.

Ona se ukaza gore na prvoj stubi.

Sada otpoče čarobna noć. Nejasno je, duboki mrak. Davno već ugasnu večernje rumenilo na oblacima; svi se zaodjenuše u tamu, samo jedan oblačić zadržava nešto svjetla. I čudo se zbiva pred njegovim očima. Ona se gore na stepenicama zaogrnu tim oblačićem i tako se spušta k rijeci s kraljevskom povlakom, na kojoj još dršće večernje rumenilo. On se samo divi... Na zadnjoj stepenici stade ona.

Gledajući je sav je zanesen pružao k njoj ruke: "Dođi, ah dođi..."

A lahor se sanjivo prenu, oblačić zaplovi i ona se spusti k njemu.

A sada već dogarahu zelena svjetla na gondoli, gasi se jedno za drugim, a mjesec zasja, zvijezde zatrepere i sva se rijeka napuni tihe mjesečine. I pobljedi sada na mjesečevim tracima rumenilo njezine povlake, oblačić se rasplinu, a divno tijelo zasja u nagosti svojoj. No to ne potraja, što bi munja sijevnula; ona zastidiv se tek maknu rukom, da se ogrne, a okrajak mliječne staze, što je opasala nebo, pokri je i osu zvjezdicama.

A on se baca na koljena pred njom i diže k njoj ruke.

-Tko si, tko si ti, za kim ja izgaram, umirem od čežnje, da budeš moja, a tvoj su plašt oblaci, tvoja košulja mliječni put, a biserje zvijezde sjajne? Tko si? Tko si? Utješi srce moje!

-Kraljica...

-Kraljica, - zavapi on. - Kraljica neba si ti...

-Ne, ne, - prošapta ona toplim glasom - kraljica zemlje.

-Kraljica zemlje... ponovi on za njom i uzdahnu. - Ah, onda mi reci svoje ime, kraljice čudna!

-Ljubav - šapnu ona.

-Ti si ljubav - uskliknu on. - Oh ljubavi! Daj da ispijam dušu tvoju sa zjenica očiju tvojih!

-I došla sam zato k tebi - odgovori ona zatravljeno, spuštajući se na ćilime, makovim cvijecima posute. A taj čas zaplovila je gondola niz rijeku. Veslo mu ispade iz ruku i potonu, kad je ona ušla k njemu - a on ga se sada više ne sjeti.

Plovili su, kud ih valovi nošahu.

A rijeka se razmaknula. Daleko već otploviše. Oглеda se jednom, a to oni čudno plove. Sa zemlje se podigoše. Duboko pod njima sjaji mjesec, trepere zvijezde. Kakva tišina u tim visinama! On čuje tek kucaj svoga srca. Slatko mu je u duši.

-Oh, šapće on, ja sam sretan! Mi ostavimo zemlju. Gledaj pod nama brodi mjesec, sjaju zvijezde, niču oblaci, a tu je s nama vječnost. Vijekom ću te imati uza se i ovako te gledati. Ja sam sretan!

-Oh, kako ti ljubiš! - šapnu ona drhtavim glasom.

-Ljubim - uzdahne on...

-A ja sam kraljica zemlje - prozbori ona slatko...

Nasta tišina i začu se, kako pljuskaju valovi široke rijeke.

-Zar to bijaše opsjena? - prenu se on. - Mi smo zar na zemlji? Život je varka. Ah, reci, nijesi li i ti pusta obmana

-Ne, ne, ja ljubim tebe...

-Ljubiš?

-Ljubim silno, sve me srce boli.

-Srce boli...

-Da, jer se moram naskoro s tobom rastati. Jutro je blizu...

On uzdahnu i potraži njenu ruku. A kako je se dotače, mliječna se maglica raspori sve do ramena i zabijeli se njena put. On zadrhta. Još nikad nije tako uzdrhta.

-Što je tebi, dragi?...

-Ah, umrijet ću...

-Mili moj...

Draga, šapće on i primiče se k njoj.

-Ne, još ne, brani se ona. - Ovako je lijepo... Gledam u tvoje oči. Daj da gledam dugo.

Ušute. Samo im duše šapću čarobnu pjesmu nikad neizgovorenih riječi, nikad neslušana sklada. Pogledima se spajaju, srčuci s očiju slasti, što se kriju u neviđenim dubinama duše. I na te oči navali najednom san zaboravi. Njena ustanca stala mirisati mirisom cvijetaka, a on se primače, da srkne s njih meda. I ona blaženim osmijehom zaklopi oči i sve se na to pretvori u san. S njena tijela runi se nebeska maglica, kaplju zvijezde, a vrana se kosa zacrnila na bijelim grudima. Sve zamirisa. Ona mu primače ustanca. Sve se uzbiba, zavrti se nebo i zemlja, kad on osjeti dodir njenih usana...

A velika rijeka silno zabuči i vrtoglavo zabrza. Ali on ne mari. Opojen nikad nepoćućenim slastima, pritišćući cjelov na njene usne, privine je strasno k sebi. I opet zadrhta, - kao da se gromovi pod njim krše, zabuči rijeka i sve se oko njega zapjeni. Ali on grleći nju nit se ne trgnu sa strašnog buka, već dršće sa slatkih poljubaca, a oko njega sve se iskri, sve vri...

Odjednom osjeti, kako mu nje nestaje ispod ruku. Otvara oči i vidi, ona se ne utapa, ne tone, ona se uzdiže, izmiče mu, rastapa se i raspršta u milijun pjenušavih iskrica i pretvara se u srebrenu pjenu.

Kad se ukaza sunce na istoku, samotni putnik bijaše odmaknuo od slapa velike rijeke. Do njega dopiraše šum i buk. Bez prestanka rušila se rijeka u dubine bučeći i izbacujući

pjenušavu maglicu, koja se bacala visoko sve prelijevajući se na sunčanim zrakama. On se sjeti prosnivane noći i uzdahnu. U duši mu je toplo. Na usnama mu se smiješi poljubac minule noći, a u srcu buji velika, neugasiva čežnja...

Kraljica zemlje...

(Leskovar, *Sabrana* 465-472)

8. Translations

Catastrophe

Fran Ljubić is not quite well. His head has been aching for some time now and his throat tickles. It is Wednesday, the afternoon has not yet passed, and he is still in school. His headache is worse today, he cannot think straight, he cannot even speak. He feels a pressure in his chest, his breath is short. Hence the children have first been drawing, then calculating, and are now writing. The school is completely silent except for the occasional child's cough and the sound of their awe at dipping quill in ink. Today, he is not paying any attention to them or correcting them.

The children have noticed: he is not well; something is happening, they cannot quite understand what; a sense of foreboding seizes them and they sit in absolute silence, glancing occasionally at him. But he is at his desk, not returning their glances. He is resting his forehead against his palms. He can feel that his head is burning and that darkness presses hard in his nerves, making everything ache.

The school feels somehow melancholy and doleful. A grey, foggy light is falling on the windows. Those glistening, gleeful sunbeams disappeared eight days ago, and the third night has passed since the fog had come and is still peacefully settled. The same dolefulness and melancholy are outside. Everything is silent, noiseless like those dead foggy clouds flowing noiselessly through the air. When the roosters finished their morning crowing in the attics, everything fell silent. Rarely is there a sound of someone's voice, and rarely does someone pass by the school; even then, only mud splattering under their feet makes a noise...

He put his hands down on the table and began to observe them. He felt embarrassed: his hands were deathlike as if all blood had been drained out of them, leaving only dead, livid veins. He stood up and stepped off the dais. The children glanced at him in worry, but he did not return their looks as he had nothing to say. His head was drooping and he was looking down. He felt sickness in the bones around his eyes, even his eyeballs and the nerves in them were somehow tense and aching. Suddenly, he felt a cold flash in his head; it shook him up a bit, providing some clarity, so he started to think. – He first notices his old pants, already torn and patched at the back, but that is probably not that apparent, so he just pulls his coat lower to cover it up... He looks out the window.

The fog had just started to lift. The muddy road and the neglected hedge across became clearly visible; the bare tree branches poked out behind the hedge, with a few dry leaves still

hanging onto them, dead and yellow. The treetops were still covered in fog. He was silently standing by the window. Just for that damned fog to finally lift – he thinks – he will go outside for some fresh air, he has not been outside for three days; it will do him good.

He could not wait for noon; he dismissed the class half an hour early; still, he waited until the last child was out of the building. Then he crossed the hallway to the room; his own children's voices were coming from the kitchen; he took his old coat whose velvet collar had already been changed twice, put it on, put on a hat, and quietly exited.

He made his way along the road leading to Zabok. The grainy brown mud splattered beneath his feet; he shuddered as he felt the dampness and the chill seeping through his boots. Feverish cold shivers, intermingled with warm tingles, ran through his body. Still, his breathing became easier and it seemed as if he got some of his spirits back. A cold, moist air wrapped his face, and with each breath he felt it deep in his throat. As if some heavy veil lifted from his forehead, he was able to think again. One thing was perfectly clear to him: something is approaching. That grey, foggy light carries something, something so unpleasant, so sorrowful. He can sense how the fatigue, which has been weighing on his brain for so many days, dragging his thoughts into darkness far from reason, is now overflowing into his arms and legs. He moves with greater difficulty, more slowly, and he grows more certain: something is near, very near. Rest, rest, perhaps a place to rest is near!

He started recalling his past, but it is simple, inexorable, disconsolate. Strange, why is something urging him to think of the past when only disconsolation and melancholy will pour into his already sick blood...

He huddled into his coat, drawing his chin to his neck, pushing his fists into pockets, looking down, dragging his feet through the squelching mud. He thought of his parents first. He never got to know them, he only heard stories. Now he felt strangely close to them, very close. A pasture on a hill appears before him. There are a few juniper shrubs and two smaller cows grazing; he is dressed in a shirt reaching below his knees; a torn military cap is slipping down over his ears and eyes; he is carrying a whip and a canvas bag with cornbread in it. Ivica, the neighbour's son, is grazing cattle on another hill. They are cracking their whips, whistling, making mud slingshots. And everything – the pasture, the junipers, Ivica, that valley and the woods across it – everything is brightly illuminated: the sky is clear, the sun is golden.

A sudden coughing fit forced him to stop. The fog lifted from the valley. Vrtnjakovac is emerging in the greyish half-light. The dead haze still hovers above it, clinging to the hilltops

where, through the greyish veil, one can glimpse a few scattered, dilapidated vineyard huts, beneath which lie bare earth, a dark memory of the time when Zagorje men would climb up there with barrels and flasks. Ljubić did not see the valleys or hills, nor the huts or fog. Strangely, the cough did not frighten him, despite it being the first time he coughed with such intensity. That bright vision vanished, replaced by a gloomy autumn day. It is drizzling, and his bare feet are sliding along the muddy path, a canvas bag is hanging over his shoulder, carrying a booklet, his guardian is guiding him to school. A pitiful image of a worn-out teacher appears before him, then hundreds of children's heads, and later, illuminated boots with tall, bright uppers, as well as the gentle, round, full face of the parish priest. He can not faithfully remember what followed – it could be the weariness growing stronger, pressing on his forehead once again, causing tension and pain, obstructing his thinking. The visions are becoming more fragmented and increasingly less connected. First, he remembers the parish clergy house; he was the best student and the parish priest took him under his wing; then the brushes, boots, serving at the altar, waiting at the tables; then the same thing in Zagreb, one day under one canon, another day under a different one. That also ended. His patron died, and the following year he pleaded alone at Kaptol's manors. Suddenly, he remembered the soup kitchen stamps and his hungry companions. Companions, companions. Then those ideas from the teacher's school. And now look, he has to go to the municipal office ten times over, asking for that miserable salary. Give, give! – and each time they give a little as if they are giving alms.

Companions, again companions! Last summer he met up with Nikola who, living near Zagreb, is well informed and has a lot to share. – Naglić died of starvation in some village. I'm telling you the truth, he really starved to death. You know, he was already sickly, and who could have possibly cooked proper meals for him there in the backwoods. Jeretin, a wonderful fellow, is stuck in a tumbledown, damp building, and Demartini, you know, our Ante, have you heard? I read... So you don't know! He wanted to push forward, to do something, he even tried his luck on the literary scene, but it was too hard. Just imagine, he couldn't even afford to buy any new publications! Three forints, brother, three forints per year! What could you do with that, where could you turn? So he killed himself. Suicide?! He died of natural causes. Oh, that's just how it appears, but I know, he killed himself, he starved himself to death. He didn't want to eat, and he smoked, he was always smoking and drinking. My time will come soon, Nikola, my brother, soon, soon. His whole family passed just two months after his death. I still can't believe how that could have happened! In just two months, brother... And you know about the rest; two-thirds of us remain, and then in nine years, nine, brother, nine years...

The national school superintendent visited Vrtnjakovac last year, too – it was odd how it came to his mind now. He did not come to show off his status. He talked to him for a long time, like an older brother or a friend, constantly encouraging him and saying he had great hopes for him. And at the parting, he wished him good health; ah, could he not tell he was already sick? But it did not escape his eye when the national superintendent shuddered in discomfort at the touch of his sweaty hand shaking goodbye, even though he tried to surreptitiously wipe the sweat off before the handshake. And look at me! – he remembered comrade Nikola once again – there you had it, he could not walk, thin, pale, he came into the bathroom – he did not finish, alas, there was no need.

He had to pause again. Waves of coldness and heat swept over him in turns. He felt his forehead, it was hot but covered in cold sweat. He felt completely exhausted; to rest, to rest, that was his only thought... A long, long rest, a rest for all eternity... He saw a world before him, a valley. Vrtnjakovac -- it was already closer; that's where life was starting: entire columns of smoke billowing out of the chimneys, blending up in the sky with the greyish fog; white pigeons gliding over the village, geese honking, axes thudding, children screaming, and a Jew and a farmer haggling over a turkey further in the village.

All of that is lying before his eyes, travelling to his ears, but none of it affects him: he is numb to all of it; his body is exhausted, only to rest, to rest... He knows that he has a wife and children at home, but that seems so far away – only rest is near. He hunched even more, drew his chin deeper into the collar, huddled into his old coat, and continued towards his school, continued arduously, with mud splashing under his feet...

II.

At that same time, his family is in the kitchen, wife and four children. – The kitchen is spacious, but poor. A shelf with pots, pans, and other kinds of dishes is next to the door, a housemaid's bed made of soft wood a little further, then a small table with benches, and, above the table, three tin bowls are hanging – those are children's bowls, and every child can easily recognise their own, although they may appear identical. The fourth bowl is not yet there; the youngest child, Ivica, cannot feed himself yet. He is on that bed, sitting in an old, round basket, supported with a pillow and the remains of an old duvet so he would not roll over. He is not crying. He noticed a tiny snowflake on the duvet in front of him, so he is trying to catch it with his little fingers. Of course, his effort is in vain as the object is too tiny, and he does not yet know how to properly use those little fingers, nor can his little eyes yet estimate the distance

between objects. The other children are enjoying themselves quietly, too. A small table with benches is in the middle of the kitchen. The eldest son, Lujča – he is not yet five – has a slate lying before him, a chalk in his hand, and he is scribbling. Then he reads: i-u-i-u-o, pointing at whatever – he visits his father in school so he memorised all sorts of things – and nudges his younger sister Justa, who is not yet three. She leaned to look at his scribbles: - Come on, Justa, say: i-u, say, come on... But Justa does not want to play along today. Her sister Jelka – she is four – has a small pot in front of her. She is cutting potatoes that she took from her mother and then putting them in a pot. She will cook (she cooked beans yesterday). She already cut a whole potato when her mother, who was unusually pensive and quiet that morning, noticed. The kitchen is filled with sadness as well. The foggy light is breaking in through only one window so the corners are almost completely dark. She is standing by the stove and it looks like she is staring at the steam rising from the pot. The servant walks in – she was previously in the room to collect a plate – and says that the master is taking a rest. That did not shock or scare Mrs Ljubić. – Is it so... - she says, the words not conveying any surprise. That was not anything new or peculiar to her. She has been with him for the fifth year now, it is an ordinary occurrence – the servant is new and unfamiliar with it. He wears himself out so much in school that after the lectures he usually has to lie down and rest a little. Oh, why is he that way! The neighbour Ivan Budor told him well: - Why are you running yourself into the ground, don't be mad, you have a wife and children. You wear yourself out trying to get your school to be among the better ones, and look at the state you're in! Look, brother, at me, how I am now. The only thing that is now on my mind: the tenth year of service, just to live long enough to reach it, a wife, children... -- He did not get to see that tenth year. It is not only the school that kills! During the holidays, he spends entire days in church: two masses during the day, plus the evening one. He is indeed funny for still getting agitated with it. When he comes back from the church, he throws himself onto the armchair, unable, because of some silly agitation, to eat. It is not like it only happens on holidays! He begged to be rewarded for playing the organ. That was when he called her to come to the table; she sat next to him and gently leaned on his shoulder. – You see, -- he said – now we'll count how many times I play the organ in the church and I'll put it in my request. They had the "Danica" almanac and used it to count the holidays; they counted sixty-five. Two masses and one evening mass every holiday, that is already a hundred and ninety-five. Add celebrations, Rorate Masses, and processions to it, it turned out he played the organ up to three hundred and twenty times a year. - I will explain all of it politely... and it's impossible they wouldn't pay me. If they were to give only fifty coins for my every effort, we could at least afford to live. What do you say, will they give it? – Oh, that much they won't! –

he answered quickly himself, -- I know them well. If they were to give at least thirty coins, we could somehow dress the children and ourselves with it, and we would make ends meet with my pay. But they did not give fifty nor thirty nor ten, they did not give anything. That was his duty, so let him play. And that is how he is wasting his life, just like that. Lately, he has been completely downcast... Oh, right, it is the time of Rorate Masses! Every day, from six to seven, he is in church, and he gets up at five already; oh, why does he get so upset! Then later, again school until twelve, and during the afternoon classes until night, the days have become short, and what with remedial classes, essays, and she can not even remember what else. And in the night, he has to write official papers, reports... Oh, my dear, that's how office hours are for a teacher! – he told her recently at about eleven at night while he was stamping an official document. – He is sapped, very sapped, but thank God, he's already thirty, he'll make it. They say that our lungs are at the highest risk before the age of twenty-five. But then she remembered their neighbour Budor, he was already thirty-four... She shuddered...

The church bell suddenly rang noon. The little ones raised their heads and started crossing themselves, moving their little arms left and right across their chest, uttering just: “of the Father, and of the Son”. Lujča added “holy” then “Amen”. Their mother did not move her arm today, she did not teach them how to cross, she herself did not pray today. She will soon finish preparing the lunch; he gets angry when it is not ready by noon; she has been cooking something specially for him for several days. There is some leftover chicken, there is enough soup for everyone, and there is a small piece of beef for him; she will roast it, and she and the children will eat potatoes. She needs to feed him a little better. For several months they have been eating poor, plain stew, and meat only on holidays, to save money for clothes and shoes, which everyone needed, and the winter is here – and see how miserably he looks! That must be it, -- she thought. Yes, she has to feed him better, even if it means no new clothes. But he has not eaten today. He slurped down only a few spoonfuls of soup and ate two or three slices of meat. He does not speak, does not look at her face; he lowers his gaze to the table and to the floor. She secretly glances at him, her gaze lingering on his withered lips, then on his sunken eyes, and then descending again across his pale face; she is not urging him to eat, it angers him. If it were not for the children, it would be terribly distressing and lifeless here, but the carefree voices of the little ones dispel the gloom and fill the room with youthful, joyful exclamations. They start to ask for bread. -- Give it to them! -- he exclaims. Ah, you are always saying ‘give, give,’ but you saw that they have already eaten their portion. Where are we supposed to get more from? Let them eat the stew. -- He does not say another word, instead, he lets out a heavy

sigh, goes into the other room and lays down again, while his family slowly withdrew into the kitchen.

III.

He went to school again in the afternoon. Over the nine years he has been working as a teacher, a sense of duty has penetrated so deeply into his blood that he forgets to think about himself. When he heard children's footsteps in the room, he quickly tensed up. See, those children travel to school for an hour; ah, if only! A few have an hour and a half, and Mr Koprivnjak's daughter Milica has almost two hours, and she will surely come, surely... And how can he send them back without teaching them anything, after coming from such a distance? More and more such thoughts crowded his mind, and his own feelings were getting increasingly neglected... And when he looked at the clock and realised he should have gone to school an hour ago, he was almost startled (oh, how could he have dozed off like that!) and hurriedly left. In the hallway, he notices his daughter Jelkica at the door. She looks at him with her big blue eyes, smiles at him, then turns her little head and looks outside. She is waiting for someone, even though she is already blue from the cold, with the freezing air blowing at the door. He shook too, fevered shudders swept through his body. The rubbing of boots is heard coming from the outside. He remembers: that is Mr Koprivnjak's daughter Milica coming to school in her sister's boots, in her mother's coat. He is not mistaken, there is Milica at the door: her coat is reaching below her knees, her boots are hiding under the coat. The poor thing approaches, dragging the heavy boots. – How could I not turn up at school? – Ljubić thinks. Jelkica smiles at her: “She's here!” It could be that she wanted to say: At last, I've been waiting for you. Milica smiles back at her, instantly putting her hand in the cattail basket from which she hands her an apple. The little one lit up – without even glancing at her father, she grabs the apple with one hand, pushing the other into the basket. – More bread! – Take it, take it! – says Milica, and Jelkica pulls out a piece of cornbread and runs to the kitchen merrily... The father was taken aback, something broke in him at that moment, and something sorrowful awakened in his heart. He pats Milica, gives her three coins, and they enter the school. Before the prayer, he looks at those present. Everyone is calm, silent, and ready for prayer, but someone is interrupting that solemn silence... They are eating, there is the sound of them eating and munching loudly. Who is it? He looks for the person. There they are at the third desk. Ah, that is his child, his Lujča. He is sitting quietly, a piece of cornbread in his hand, he looks at the bread and he looks at his father, his blue eyes shining so endearingly. Ljubić is shaken. First, he remembered the county ordinance – he even knew the official number – which forbids teachers to bring feeble children

to school, and that was due to disciplinary rules; but a burst of realisations followed the next moment, heavy, powerful, pushing any other thoughts aside. The truth reveals itself before him, the bare truth, the agonising truth! Yes, his child is looking at that bread so voraciously, and everything is becoming clearer and clearer to him. He should be removed from class, but no, no, let him eat, let him, let him eat. He raises his hand wanting to say “Let’s say a prayer...”, but the words got stuck in his throat, the excitement blocking his speech (the children realised what was happening and started to pray), his shoulders shuddering. To hide from the children’s view, he turns around. There was the crucifix, his face reaching right to the knees of the Crucified. He clasps his hands, propping himself against the crucifix, his head falls onto his hands and he bursts into tears. It is clear to him, completely clear: he can not feed his family. He already knew that, but the truth was long suppressed by the theories of German education scholars, then school, superior officials, the organ, the garden, the fireplace, the apiary, the school records, the reports, and he would simply brush off his wife’s lamentations: - Leave me in peace, in peace I say, some people have it much worse. – And so he kept staring at his books or running away to school, the church, or the garden. But the truth finally found its way forth, pushing aside the terrible tyranny of scholars, pushing aside the school, the superior officials, the garden, and the organ. Everything, everything was pushed aside and the truth revealed itself to him, the bare, bare truth... It is short, but devastating, only four words: We cannot support ourselves. Ah yes, and that goes for everything, “we can’t” for everything. Something heavy, miserable, inconsolable made his heart sink, and he started to become agitated again, his breath becoming shorter, his head starting to ache, his legs to falter.

IV.

During that time, his wife is in the kitchen. She is sitting on a chair, a child’s outfit in her lap. She is mending it, but she seems lost in thought. Justa is the only one still with her, she is stacking the log box, Ivica is sleeping. Jelka runs in with an apple and bread. – Give, give! – yells Justa, her sister walking towards her: - Here, here... take it...that’s it, share it. The mother sees it, she knows where Jelkica got it from, but that is not why she is upset; it drags before her like the shadow that drags before us, but we are busy with work and do not pay attention to that cloud above, carried through the air by the wind. Through the window, she sees the valley, the hills, the giant clouds above them; in a way, she is sensing that uncomfortable darkness, too, but all of it is happening subconsciously; before her, a different image is emerging. Far, far ahead stands a castle on the bank of the quiet Karašica river. A majestic night is falling on that vast, far-away Hungarian plain from which the pointy Haršanj sticks out. The sound of a

shepherd's horn is first coming from afar, then it is getting nearer and nearer, louder and louder. The village stirs up: the herd is coming. The gates are opening, the cows are mooing, the calves are bleating. Then again everything falls silent, it gets darker, and the reed down there starts rustling mysteriously. Oh, that is so wonderful, enchanting – but Zagorje is not close to her heart. Yes, it is nice, but she is not finding any magic in Zagorje, but there, there... She herself cannot explain why, but the voices of her childhood are calling her back, the first voices, the first experiences. And that winter! About twenty porkers enter their yard. Her father chooses the ones he will get first; they became wild in the forest, so he will get them with a rifle. During the night, even the wolves would come into the yard; once she was shooting at them through a window with a rifle. They howl terribly, as if they are angry because the sties are so well shut. But she only heard them a few times, they used to spend their winters in Osijek. There, young men strut behind her, cough loudly, sometimes their small sabres rattle. Sometimes they even cheekily peek through her window. But she is not returning any looks, she does not come to a window, she does not care about them, her thoughts are flying back to her village, to the bank of the quiet Karašica, the place where a young teacher arrived from Croatia. He arrived late one Sunday. The following morning she was at the church and his voice left a distinct impression on her. She felt it resonating deep in her chest and reaching her very heart from where it poured into her blood. At the mass, they came across one another right at the door. It was crowded and people pushed them into each other. She felt his body on her thigh, on her hip. He gently leaned on her shoulder, and one of his elbows brushed her breast. She shivered all over... He apologised and shouted to the people: - Stop with this!... – She felt his breath on her forehead, moved her head a little and their eyes met, making her shiver more intensely... He rarely came to visit. – He crawled into that school – old Janja would say – like a snail into its shell, while she so wanted to see him, to keep him close. In the evenings, she would occasionally wander alone by the banks of the Karašica. Frightened wild ducks would fly off before her and land further ahead, in the swamps. But one time, they met in a field. It was evening, the sun was still shining, its rays gently illuminated the green grass. Something gave her courage – she did not know what – so she looked straight into his eyes and asked him: -- And where have you been? How many times did I look towards your school, but you're nowhere to be found! – He moved in surprise, glanced into her eyes, and she resisted his gaze. Oh, how lovely, how sweet did those sunrays become, that grass, ah, everything, everything! Though they did not mention it ever again, it was settled – between the two of them. How sweetly did she enjoy wandering about the bank of the Karašica afterwards, how enticing, soothing the rattling of reed, and how joyful the taking off of those frightened ducks. Before they left for Osijek again – it was already

winter – he visited them in formal attire, but he left with his head down. Something happened... She was not at home at the time, she found out about it later. What could have happened, his bearing had also changed in a way. What was it, what? So she asked her father (they were already in Osijek) what had happened. – He asked for your hand. – And, you, you... you turned him down! - Naturally.

Upon hearing that word, she lost her breath and vision, collapsing.

Two months later, their coachman brought provisions to Osijek and said that the young teacher was to leave their school. Where to? Back up to Croatia. So!... Everything is lost, he is leaving today or tomorrow already. She went through the Upper Town to Retfala – her coachman is about to ride home, and maybe she will join him, she would like to see the teacher one more time. She walks dejectedly... A carriage is approaching on the gravelled road accompanied by a loud rattling noise. She raises her head, and it is him, a large suitcase hiding behind his back. Look, he noticed her; the carriage stops and he steps out, heading to her. He tells her the last “goodbye”, he is going all the way to Croatia and they will certainly never see each other again. Never, never! Her expression must have been sorrowful, and she must have felt miserable because he got frightened and asked, shuddering: Your father is opposed, what can we do?

Let’s go to him together. Let’s go, come on, go! – and she grabs him by the hand firmly.

And they came before him, but the father looked at them somewhat strangely, they could not interpret that look, but they understood it two days later: he threw himself off a bridge over the river Drava. He did not refuse his request, but he did say: if he wanted the poor girl, he could have her, but he had nothing to give him, nothing, nothing. And since it had become very hard for her, and she fell ill – surprisingly, she did not want to marry Ljubić any longer; but he did not let her go, he did not want to go anywhere...

- Mum, you mine...? – Little Jelka came to her, put her hands on her lap, and looked at her with those big blue eyes.

Mrs Ljubić started at the question.

- You mine? – the little one repeated.

- Yes, you are mine! – she brushed her gently.

- She's not yours, she's mine... - little Justa spoke up angrily from the compartment under the cooker, where she was stacking wood.
- Justa says, mum is not mine! – Jelka uttered through a cry, bringing her little hands to her eyes.
- Not yours, my mum! – shouted the little girl fiercely, with her head poked out, the tip of her nose smudged, her face too, the little round eyes shining even brighter.

And there was nothing she could do to calm them down but to sit one to her left and the other to her right. She then took the outfit back to her hands to continue with the mending. It was hard to see, the light was low. As she is working, her eyes pause on her hands. Those were once beautiful hands: full, fair, soft, fingers rounded, leaner towards the tips, with beautifully filed nails; -- yet now she finds them downright ugly. They are breaking out in deep redness, the potent lye burned them – she washes the clothes herself, and her skin started to peel off in a few places from all the washing – she has just done it yesterday. She would often stop, move her hand closer and observe it for a long time, and then the other one; she kept quiet, but it was as if she wanted to say: “Where are those hands of mine?” And he would grab those exhausted, contorted hands and kiss them out of gratefulness. But, oddly, that would not provoke all the sweet sensations that she once felt when he would touch her body. It seemed to her as if it was not the warm skin of her husband, but rather something lifeless, something foreign. She was generally somehow changed, she had cooled off, so she would sometimes honestly say to him: -- I don't know what it is, I can't help myself, but I don't love you anymore. Ah, where is the love that was once there!

- You didn't take a liking to Mitić, right?
- Oh, stop it, stop it! You're the only one, you...

And she would embrace him, and he would pull her close to his chest. But that was not an embrace of a husband and a wife any more, that was an embrace of two worn-out people, it was the quiet embrace of pity. Concentrated on survival and worry, they did not even notice how poverty killed them: overthrew their love, poisoned their life. Only a done deed now lies before them: dead, everything is dead.

- Ah, we are already old! – he says, pulling her close.
- We're old, we're old – she smiles through the tears.

And she is just twenty-four and he is twenty-nine...

- Mum, I've been to school... - The doors open, and chubby little Lujča walks in with a slate in his hand.
- That's right, I was at school – he nods his head in the direction of his sisters – that's right... I've been writing...

Clatter is heard coming from the hallway, the children are going home.

V.

The night now started to approach, unknown, insidious. And what could it be. – Everything is tumultuous as if there is something heavy, unfamiliar in the air. Mrs Ljubić is working with inordinate speed, hurriedly calming the children, the cattle, she is moving fast, she is almost running to the barn – they have one cow, and the night is already there. It would not have come so fast, but those dark clouds hastened it and it is now furtively descending upon the ground. It began to ring “Hail Mary” and strangely, usually it rings for a long time, the metal sound of the big bell slowly spreading across the small valleys, but today, it only rang for a short time... And he is alone in his room, the children are still in the kitchen, he is not better, but rather, even worse, but he is standing, standing as if he is expecting something...

*

Around midnight, a dreadful scream pierced the dark night, and two school windows were lit up soon after... Once again, something splattered onto the floor and a woman screamed, this time in the highest voice a human could reach, accompanied by another, deep voice that was letting out only short, broken, muffled: - Ah... ah... ah...

She is standing in the room next to his pillow, wearing a white shirt. His upper body is hanging from the bed, she held him under the armpit with her right arm, supporting his forehead with her left. A puddle of blood is on the floor, congealed crimson blood. Her white shirt and pale legs – everything is splattered with blood. A candle is burning unsteadily on the nightstand, illuminating the whole scene with flickering light, and his feeble, lifeless face, and her frightened, deep dark eyes, and that puddle of blood, and the shirt and the legs...

- Salt, salt... - Ljubić utters the first words after those muffled “ah... ah...” And salt stops the bleeding...

That scream woke up the children, too – only little Ivica, by some miracle, sleeps peacefully by his mother’s bed that night - so they crawled out of their beds. Lujča is standing in his little white shirt in front of the puddle of blood, looking at the scene in astonishment; Jelkica is standing next to him in a short shirt, pulling it down over her back with her little hands, gazing with her eyes wide open at her mother, then at her father, and finally at the blood. Little Justa can not climb down alone from her bed so she is shouting from the other room: - Mum, down, down, mum... - but mum could not hear her, so her brother and sister went to help her out of bed.

The father’s head, however, rests feebly on the pillow, his eyes are closed, and only the sudden rising of his chest gives away that he is still alive. She is sitting by his pillow without uttering a word.

At first, both of them could not comprehend what was happening, could not think. He was exhausted and she was in shock. When the blood stopped, they started to recoup. He felt a coldness firstly in his legs, then in his feet. – But the thoughts started coming as well. And strangely, the first thought that occurred to him was not about that terrible event but about his position, his employment. Then it became clear; he forgot to think of himself and his own because of that employment; his head was constantly buzzing with thoughts of scholarly theories, school paragraphs, the garden, the apiary, the fireplace, the records, the reports, and the combining of registers while playing the organ, starting from the tiniest ones to the largest one of thirty-two stops, the tones flowing in a great variety of timbres. It was actually incredible luck at that terrible moment because it took their minds off the heavy truth.

He opened his eyes and moved his head a little.

- Tomorrow is Thursday?... – he uttered in his frail voice.
- It is! – she answered.
- There’s no school... ah,... (a short pause) – and I wanted to... (pause) to cut the... (pause) American vines into grafts... check the homeworks...

And it seemed as if that got her some of the spirit back. Her thoughts drifted away from blood.

- Ah, just be calm! – she was wiping the sweat off his forehead. – Don’t trouble yourself with that!

- What time is it? – he asked again, quietly.
- Half past eleven...
- They're already sleeping at the parish...
- What do you need? Why – she panicked – maybe a confession...
- You should let them know... (pause) that I won't play the organ tomorrow... at the Rorate Mass...
- Ah, be still, that can wait until tomorrow! – she wiped the sweat off his forehead again.

He let out a sigh...

But the children came in their shirts and stood before the bed.

- That bwod... - Lujča started first, pointing his hand to the floor...
- That bwod... - Jelkica repeated, bowing her head for a closer look.
- Is that bwod?... – Justa asked, looking at her siblings. And all three of them looked at the blood and repeated: -bwod, bwod, yes, bwod...
- Is that bwod? – they now turned to their parents who snapped out of their state, their thoughts now focusing on the blood.

They were too clear-headed, too sharp-sighted to tell themselves lies, to deceive themselves. It was clear to both of them, perfectly clear: it is not far, it is close, really close, but they did not dare to contemplate that dreadful word deeper, they did not dare to utter it; still, all of their thoughts, all of their suffering centred around that one thought which is pronounced “d e a t h”, and after the word “death”, a dark thought is arising: children, children... He closed his eyes, and a few moments later tears started flowing down the ghastly, deathlike face. She lay down next to him right as she was, in a blood-splattered shirt, pulled herself close, took his hands in hers, and grasped them tightly, tears just welling up in her eyes. Then she pushed herself closer to the pillow and cradled his head in her arms, pressing her face, wet with tears, against his...

Meanwhile, their children are standing by the bed, shivering from the cold and watching, watching, but they do not understand, they do not comprehend anything. They do not even know what has happened.

Those two school windows stayed lit up throughout the night. The neighbours would come too, and sometime at dawn it was again heard outside the school how some coagulated liquid is dripping to the floor of the room, now in strong gushes, then again in weak gushes, and each drop is accompanied by a powerless, muffled, and deep: “ah... ah...” And over the “ah” and the splashing of blood, a shattering voice of a woman is stretching into a long, sorrowful: “o-h n-o!”

A Story Of Love

The road that leads from Krapinske Toplice to V** crosses a narrow valley. If a traveller was to look south from the road, he would notice an old, wooden, one-story manor at the end of the valley, its windows facing him. Its farm buildings hid between the fruit trees, peeking through here and there.

A beech forest has grown on a hill at its back. When someone unexpectedly sees that manor in winter, there at the end of the valley, with its blackened walls, small windows, with that high roof covered in snow, and that forest in the back, it leaves a particular imprint on them, and they savour it, making their soul feel as if it was introduced to the realm of old tales.

That is the old Tihanović residence, surrounded by a plum orchard. It was long ruled by the Kajkavian word of the gentlemen from the Zagorje region, but about ten years have now passed since it died out under that roof, too. That was when the last Tihanović, who would talk to people by coaxing them with “*oni*”, “*naj dostoju, dragi amice*”, “*kaj su rekli*”,¹ died. His son, Miroslav, worked in the civil service at the time. He, too, longed for a life in the countryside, so he left his service and retreated to Orašje.

But Miroslav Tihanović did not choose the right time to start working on the property.

It was a period when phylloxera appeared in his region and his vineyards failed. But misfortune rarely comes alone; another came following. His brother-in-law, a clerk, died, so Tihanović had to start helping his sister out. She lived in the city because of her children. The income from the property was meagre. There was often not any money in the house. Living was just getting by. Tihanović tried to get himself out of those troubles with marriage. He was a man of pleasant appearance, gallant, had acquaintances in better ranks – but despite all of that, he could not marry. It was not about his lack of luck with women, quite on the contrary, he had almost gotten engaged, twice – but then, to the surprise of those who knew him, he instead retreated to his manor. His friends were astounded, asking him a million questions, chiding him, and he had just one answer to all of it: “Nothing’s working out...” And no one could have imagined the secret that was hidden by that enigmatic reply. Only one person knew the secret - his neighbour, the wife of the squire Tvrtković. He revealed that secret to her back when he first retired and she asked him - why he had done it. Since he had lain eyes on the lady of one

¹ Kajkavian dialect: “you”, “the most respected, dear friend”, “what did they say”

of his friends – he told her – he thought that there was no other woman that could make him happy.

And the young lady knew that she was that woman, but they did not mention it then or ever after, even though Tihanović did not stop visiting his neighbour. Their friendship remained unchanged. For Tihanović, life developed into something full of magic.

In his old home, whose chambers stored furniture from the olden times, portraits of ancestors in darkened frames, old books and arms – he would let his memory excite him with countless anecdotes, which seemed to be simply emerging from the dark corners of the old chambers. And when his soul would tire out from the musings and feelings, he would sit at the old Bösendorfer piano and wheedle out dying chords from those strings, and then, devastated completely in the loneliness of the old chambers, harness the horses to ride to neighbour Tvrtković. He used to spend many a night there.

And were those evenings special to him! He knew that the young lady loved him. She never admitted it to him, though, but she still gave herself away. When Tihanović gave up on the thoughts of marriage for the second time and returned to Klenovac for the first time after the event, her lips quivered intensely when she welcomed him, and her eyes had such a look that he could clearly see how much she loved him.

And in them both knowing they loved each other, but keeping their lips tight – Tihanović found particular charm. He found certain pleasure, filled with joy and suffering, in being able to be in her presence, in touching her gentle hand for goodbye, knowing that it would have gladly caressed him, while at the same time taking great care not to offend her feminine honour or his friend's hospitality. His sentiment towards her was getting completely lost in adoration. The beauty of her feminine form, the sweetness of her soul and the kindness of her heart created such harmony that her close presence would always bring him that peace for which he would vainly search elsewhere.

He would return kind of blissful from the evenings spent in Klenovac to his Orašje, despite nothing particularly important happening during those evenings. They passed in conversation, such ordinary conversation. They would usually sit at a long table, the two of them would smoke and the conversation would flow peacefully throughout the whole evening. Just occasionally, she would play something new and remarkable on the piano. Such ordinary life, but still Tihanović did not like staying longer than needed at his sister's in Zagreb. He did not even bother to hear Sara Bernhardt once, just so he could return to his quiet evenings.

And when he would return to his manor after evenings spent in such a way, he would often have a hard time falling asleep. He would think a lot about his neighbours and wonder could his Tugomila (he called her “his” in his soul), had she not even met him, loved her husband. After all, it seems as if her husband cannot even see the magic that is hiding in his wife or the needs of her soul and its longings. He finds Tvrtković to be such an ordinary man. He knows how to sell an ox, a cow, and a calf to the butchers; he can easily find a common tongue with the traders and the brokers; he can judge a horse’s age by its teeth; he is well-versed in the economy; he can judge wine quality; but he does not know a woman’s soul. He seems to him a barbarian overcome with tender feelings. Tihanović liked that comparison particularly. Yes, a barbarian with a strong neck, thick lips, wide shoulders, and a huge chest from which a powerful voice came out. His father, down there in Slavonija, struck fear into those same poachers. Some of that barbarian energy can be found in his son, too. No one would dare to steal something from him, because there is no playing with that gent.

But still, Tihanović cared for his friend.

So the years passed by. Tihanović led the same life. But his property, however, was incessantly regressing. There was already some old, accumulated debt, and to make matters worse, his sister also asked for her part of the money, as her daughter was about to marry. – Tihanović could not get that big of a loan – the only thing that he could do – was to sell everything in order to pay his sister and settle his debts – and he would be left with little or nothing.

That is when his neighbour Tvrtković interfered – and reminded him that marriage was the only way out. Tihanović hesitated for long, but it seemed that his friend finally took the victory with his practical life advice, warning him of some winsome and quite wealthy miss at a nearby market. And everything started off smoothly – it turned out that Tvrtković had already set the stage. They even set the date of the engagement. On the same date, Tvrtković had some business at the court so he was to be there early, but the day prior he told Tihanović: “Listen, man, if you don’t show up by eleven, best believe I’ll come rushing for you and put you in the sleigh myself”...

But when the day dawned and it got close to eleven o’clock, Tihanović was very much still in his manor. He did not even consider leaving.

Already in the morning, his old views on the morality of such marriage resurfaced in his soul and he could not call it anything else but an economic calculation. In vain did the phrase

“survived idealism” come to his mind, in vain did he recall numerous acquaintances who married the same way and still found happiness in their marriages – all of it was of no use to him.

But he started getting tangled up in the sweet threads that the past had woven for him during those unforgettable nights in Klenovac. Those allowed him to gradually find out about all of the more important moments in the young lady’s life – and simply recalling this or that anecdote was enough for him to forget about all else and to think only of her.

Her father was a small-town pharmacist. He spent days and nights in his laboratory until he finally became known for his balms. When his wife died, leaving him with an only child – he dedicated himself to studying works on parenting with equal passion; he even knew some of the Fenelon’s chapters by heart. He was quite an eccentric. When his daughter had finished primary school he did not let her enrol in a girls’ secondary school – just so that young men and rascals of all sorts would not follow her on the streets and bother her. One older grammar school professor used to come to their house to give her lessons. And on school holidays, he would send her to the village: her grandma lived there in a secluded castle.

That special kind of upbringing had a particular lure for Tihanović; he loved that eccentric father, that old professor, and her grandma who would coach her to a church an hour away on Sundays and holidays, the coach swaying on the straps.

Those were the people Tihanović’s soul contemplated in the moments when he should have been gone to the engagement. And a smile of pure happiness flickered on his face – and he stood like that by the window for a long time.

The sun was shrouded by the clouds on that day, and the valley and the hills were covered in snow.

He then moved to a room with some light. And when the old clock struck eleven, Tihanović thought of his neighbour Tvrtković. He will come, he will surely come, he whispered to himself and strangely... he looked at the rack where rifles and khanjars were hung up and sat down on the leather sofa. He cradled his head in his hands, strangely downcast.

Everything was quiet, only the pendulum of the clock and the crackling of fire in the old baroque fireplace were heard.

Tihanović did not stop thinking of Tugomila. Over the last few days, her face changed a lot and became sunken.

And her image conjured in his soul, conjured just like he had seen her in recent days, a line around her lips from the pain that she was drowning in the depths of her soul.

Outside, sleigh bells stealthily started to ring out. Their sound was distant at first, but it was becoming closer and closer. “Tvrtković is really coming,” Tihanović thought but did not move from the spot. He had no strength nor the will for it. “Nevermind, nevermind brother, all your effort is in vain,” he whispered to himself with resignation and continued thinking of Tugomila.

But when the door opened, it was not neighbour Tvrtković that appeared, but rather some lady in a big, brown coat and a black, wide-brimmed hat, her face covered with a veil. And upon noticing Tihanović on the sofa, she was somehow surprised. She let go of the nob and stood indecisively at the threshold, the door opening wide on its own.

Tihanović snapped out of reverie, stood up and gazed into the newcomer, his heart beating strongly. He was seeing Tugomila in that woman: the same tender waist, the same lovely lineaments above those graceful shoulders. And he would have run to her with arms wide open, but some silly disbelief did not let him do it. There was something so strange about her arrival. As if she would come to his place all on her own! She, who in six years of their love had not admitted her feelings with at least a secret clasping of a hand. He held her in such high regard: a dignified ruler of her own feelings. He simply could not believe his eyes so he doubtfully asked if it was her, if it was her! He wanted her to say something so he could hear her voice. And she, still on the threshold, whispered – “It’s me”...

- Ah, how is that possible, how! – he stretched out his hands towards her...

She just stood there motionless, unapproachable...

His hands have sagged again... He then realised how surprised she was about finding him there.

- I did not think I would find someone here – she spoke in a low voice...

That dispelled his soul’s disbelief and he asked her if she thought he had gone to that woman...

She nodded her head.

The magnitude of the pain that she had been enduring in silence was revealed before the eye of Tihanović’s soul, causing him a vast feeling of sadness, while at the same time lifting

him to great heights. And in that fervour he picked her up in his arms and carried her into the room, exclaiming:

- Ah, how, how could you think that! I can't live without you.

And when he set her down from his arms onto the floor, he took off her coat and just as he wanted to move the veil to soak up the beauty of that face, of those eyes... she lifted the veil by herself and took the hat off... And that face was hiding an intense pain, protruded by a joyous smile.

- Nearly almost – she smiled dismally while putting her hat aside.

- Don't, don't say that! - Tihanović begged her with pain in his voice. – Let's not think about life.

She then sadly whispered, as if telling a secret: - I'm leaving.

Tihanović gazed at her in confusion. She told him with that same, sorrowful voice that she had just made a quick stop there as she was passing by, unable to resist turning to his house, to let her soul feel the places where he resided, one last time...

And after confessing her great love, she was somehow distracted. She was to go now to her grandma, something was pulling her there, she would find peace there, that everlasting, everlasting peace...

- Death!... –Tihanović cried, his voice trailing off.

She clasped his hand.

-Listen!... – she started, with pain in her voice. – We have never talked about what we have been experiencing for so many years. Nor is it necessary – she added in a hushed voice: - But I have to tell you this...

She then admitted that when she was still a young girl, listening to that old professor talking about the world, she used to get a strange feeling that love would be the thing that killed her in that same world.

While she whispered to him about it, there was nothing in her voice that would imply that she feared such a death. Although there was no fear in her soul, her posture, the expression on her face, and her quivering voice still gave away that she felt that her time of death had come.

And a strange silence ensued, leaving only the thoughts of death spreading throughout the room...

The silence was interrupted by a sudden sound of sleigh bells coming from the valley.

The two of them looked at each other and Tihanović furrowed his eyebrows. "It's him," he said in a subdued voice, and she knew what it meant.

Her husband was coming.

Tihanović thought that he could still save her. He wanted to rush to him, just sit in his sleigh and tell him that he had no other choice but to wait for him as his horses had still not returned from the trip.

But that was completely impossible. She reminded him that her sleigh was in front of the manor and that Tvrtković would recognize it from afar. – No, no, don't go anywhere! – she pleaded with no fear in her voice. But Tihanović feared for her life. "He'll choke her, he'll kill her," he almost started shouting it aloud, and with that thought he grabbed the khanjar off the wall and unsheathed it. But she started throwing herself at him and begging him to give her the khanjar. And when she felt it in her hand, she threw it away with all her might and the khanjar stuck into the floor. She then turned to face him and wrapped her beautiful arms around his neck.

And then, what she had known through all of her life was to happen, began to play out.

She was not thinking about being Pavle Tvrtković's wife now. Hushing the voice of one's heart, the struggle to control oneself, it all disappeared. She left her life somewhere in the far, far distance, and she was ruled by only one thing – love, that kind of love for which one would die, the kind of love that would mysteriously appear back in her youth when she listened to the stories of the world that she was divided from. The abundance of emotions that her soul could only imagine back then now flooded her soul like the waves of the sea.

She could sense that death was near, the feeling that only aroused profuse rapture in her. And as if in a dream, she embraced the one she loved, pulling her beautiful young body towards his. – Stay with me – she whispered, rapturously, and then as in a blissful dream she exasperated: - Ah, kiss me, kiss me... - Where does the time go...

The rapture spilt over to Tihanović. He saw how happy she was with him, he saw all the profuse blissfulness in every inch of her face. And pressing her onto his chest, he did not care

about what was coming. Some tiredness started coming over him; as if he had not slept for days and nights, torturing his soul and body, and now he wished for the sleep to overcome him, and it was sweet, delightful, that she was there to fall asleep with him; he remembered nothing, he only felt the strong pulse of his temples.

That is how it was, and he saw, as if through a dream, Pavao Tvrtković walking into the room, wide, strong... And only when he noticed that the man grabbed the khanjar that was stuck into the floor – he attacked him with his bare hands, wondering how could it be that nothing had happened to him.

When he turned around, holding the dagger that he took off the rack, Tvrtković had already fallen beside his wife who was lying on the floor, drenched in blood.

Tihanović threw the dagger into a corner and clasped his head between his arms, yelling:
- What have you done, what have you done... you madman!

The Queen of Earth

He has changed too. The gleeful smile disappeared; it parted from his lips with the ease of a butterfly. There is no more mischief in his eyes. It broke away like a mirthful bird flying into distant lands, leaving behind a yearning that wanders through the dying forests during mournful and damp autumn days.

Something will come. It is coming, it is coming of its own will. He is still, allowing his soul to observe. No one is there yet, but there will be. It is quiet, all is dim. At once lightning flashes in the mysterious distances, above the slumbering majestic mountains piercing the sky. He closes his eyes, but that which is to come has already pressed its lips upon his soul; it hid in its depths like a whisper of a timid breeze in a dark forest, awaking the dreaming leaf with a kiss.

And those depths are now restless. Everything quivers, one whisper awakens another, like leaves in a rainforest before the first herald of a storm blows. All the whispers, all the quivers wish to unite into a cry from which the entire secret, deep being would tremble.

Even the mist, woven from dreamlike yarn, undulates before his eyes, revealing a feminine being behind it. He outstretches his arms, but the dreamlike mist sails away into the distance like white autumn cobwebs carried by the breeze on dying sunbeams, kissing the earth one last time.

He can find no more joy among those hills. Somewhere far away from the hills and the plains, happiness is waiting for him, his heart whispers.

He will find a safe harbour there.

So one morning, when the fog as white as milk rose from the valley and onto the path, he rose too and headed for the world.

He passed through towns and villages. Before his eyes, days were turning into dimly lit inns; drowsy nights were leaving the mattresses drenched with sleep; he still travelled further and further away. One day the lone traveller arrived in some town. His heart quivered when it first emerged in the distance, lying between two rivers.

The sun was coming down from the sky and the clouds on tops of the mountains were waiting to dress it in a dark cloak...

The lone traveller entered the enchanting town. Dainty maidens in flowy fabrics were coming to meet him, fair, comely, their thin lips revealing a charming smile, their eyes radiating sweetness.

Here, among these roses, he will find the one he is looking for, his heart whispered. He carried on. Suddenly, he finds himself in the shade. Gravel paths are meandering through the park. The trees are oozing with scent, the blossoms are shedding their petals. The sound of light steps and rustling dresses is coming from behind the rose bush, and that enchantingly woven curtain sways before him again, ruffling alluringly.

Oh, show, show yourself – the tired traveller held out his hands. He had not yet finished his plea when he pressed his hand onto his heart in captivation, and a long “ahh” escaped his breast, swelled with amazement.

She was standing before him.

- I'm dying for you – his eyes are saying, drowning in her irises.
- My dear – whispers the dreamy smile on her lips.

It is nighttime. He is going to a tryst. A gondola silently sails down the river. Above him, a baldachin of crimson red, around him, little green lanterns swaying and glimmering enchantingly with a muted green light. Flowers are strewn all across the gondola.

She is waiting for him down the river stream, where the long silhouettes of poplar trees reach towards the sky. The river is unending, disappearing in the dark shadows. He sails into the darkness caught between the tall poplar trees. Their long silhouettes are drawing closer, they are already parallel to his gondola, and all of a sudden a whitish line disentangles from the darkness... That is the marble stairway, descending towards the river.

She appeared up above, on the first step.

The magical night has now begun. It is dim, a deep darkness. Much time has passed since the evening rouge was doused from the clouds; they are all covered in darkness, just one little cloud retained some light. And a miracle unfurls in front of his eyes. Upon the steps, she cloaks herself with that cloud, descending towards the river. She gracefully trails a veil, adorned with the lingering evening rouge. He is besotted... She stops on the last step.

While looking at her in complete enthrallment, he held out his hands: “Come to me, oh, come...”

And the wind roused itself dreamily, the little cloud started drifting, and she descended to him.

And now the green gondola lights were burning out steadily, one by one. But the moon started to shine brightly, the stars to flicker, and the whole river filled with still moonlight. The moon’s rays faded out the rouge of her veil, the little cloud dissipated, and her beautiful body shone in all its nudity. But it did not last for a flash of lightning; embarrassed, she quickly moved her hand to cover up, and the edge of the milky way, which had encircled the sky, draped her and covered her in stars.

He falls to his knees before her and holds out his hands.

- Who, who are you, for whom I’m burning, dying from desire to make you mine; the clouds are your cloak, the milky way your shirt, and the shining stars your pearls? Who? Who? Ease my mind!
- The queen...
- The queen, - he sighs, - The queen of skies...
- No, no, - she says in a low, warm tone – the queen of earth.
- The queen of earth... he repeats her words and sighs. – Oh, tell me your name then, curious queen!
- Love – she whispers.
- You are love – he exclaims. – Oh, love! Let me drink from your soul through the apples of your eyes!
- That’s why I have come to you – she answers, beguiled, descending onto a kilim covered with scattered poppies. Right at that moment, the gondola started sailing down the river. As she joined him, the paddle slipped from his hands and sank down – he was not bothered.

They sailed wherever the waves were taking them.

The river was now further away. They have sailed a long way. He looks around – something is strange. They lifted off the earth. Far below them, the moon is shining, the stars

are flickering. What silence in those heights! He only hears his beating heart. Sweetness fills his soul.

- Oh, he whispers, I am happy! We have left the earth. Look at the sailing moon below us, the shining stars, the newborn clouds! And eternity is our companion. I'll have you by my side forever, looking at you just like I am looking now. I am happy!

- Oh, the way you love! – she whispers with a trembling voice.

- I love you – he sighs...

- And I am the queen of the earth – she utters sweetly...

A silence ensues. Only the splashing waves of the wide river can be heard.

- Was it an illusion? – he said with a start. – Are we still on earth? Life is but a ruse. Oh, tell me, are you not a mere illusion, too?

- No, no, I love you...

- You love me?

- I love you so, it makes my heart ache.

- It makes your heart ache...

- Yes, because soon we'll have to part. The morning is near...

- He sighs and looks for her hand. But as he touches it, the milky fog stretches all do way to her shoulders, making her skin fairer. He quivers. He has never quivered as intensely.

- What is it, my dear?

- Oh, I'm dying...

- Sweetness...

- My dear, he whispers, moving closer to her.

- No, not yet, she pleads. – It is lovely as it is... I'm looking into your eyes. Let me keep looking.

Silence. Only their souls are whispering the magical song of the words never spoken, of the harmony never heard. They are connecting through their eyes, feeding on the sweetness hidden in the depths of their souls. And the dream of oblivion comes over those eyes. Her thin lips

become enrobed in a flowery scent, and he draws closer to taste their honey. She closes her eyes with a blissful smile and everything suddenly turns into a dream. Her body's heavenly mist furls, the stars are dripping, and the ebony hair is black against her white breasts. The scent is pervading. She moves her thin lips towards him. Everything starts trembling, the sky and earth start spinning, when he feels the touch of her lips...

The great river starts flowing rapidly, making a loud noise. But he does not care. Drunk on the pleasures he has never tasted before, pressing a kiss onto her lips, he pulls her passionately to him. And he shudders anew – as if thunderbolts were clashing beneath him, the river rushes loudly, turning everything around him into foam. But the loud noise does not shake him - he shudders from the sweet kisses, the burning passion, the sparks flying...

Suddenly, he feels her disappearing from his arms. He opens his eyes and realises that she is not drowning nor sinking, she is rising, moving further away, dissipating and dispersing into a million bubbly sparks, creating a silver foam.

When the sun rose in the east, the lone traveller was already far from the waterfall of the great river. He could still hear the burbling and the splashing. The river was crashing down into the depths, thundering and dispersing a bubbly mist that flew high up, showcasing a spectrum of colours melting into each other. He thought of the prior night and sighed. Warmth filled his soul. The last night's kiss brought a smile to his lips, and a great, unquenchable longing to his heart...

The queen of earth...

9. Translation Analysis

The three stories have a great deal in common. Perhaps the most interesting uniting characteristic is his use of focalisation and how it affects the tenses. Leskovar switches between the past and the present very quickly, and in doing so, he changes the focaliser, usually going from the omniscient narrator to one of the characters:

Majka im danas nije nosila ruku, nije ih učila, danas ona i sama ne moli. Brzo će dogotoviti objed; on se ljuti, ako nije do podne gotovo; za nj kuha već nekoliko dana nešto posebice. (Leskovar, *Izabrana* 42)

Their mother did not move her arm today, she did not teach them how to cross, she herself did not pray today. She will soon finish preparing the lunch; he gets angry when it is not ready by noon; she has been cooking something specially for him for several days.

In this short example, one can notice how the perspective is neutral in the first part of the first sentence; the narrator provides context for the rest of the passage, when Ljubić's wife becomes the focaliser. That change of the focaliser is indicated by switching the tense from the past to the present, and it enables the reader to follow the character's thoughts directly, connecting the reader closer to the character. The next excerpt will illustrate the role of tenses when portraying a memory:

Najprije mu padoše na um roditelji; on je o njima čuo samo pripoviedati, nije ih nikad poznao; i on im se oćuti nekako blizu, posvema blizu. Zatim se stvori pred njim pašnjak na brežuljku. Tu i tamo raste po koja borovica, tu su dvie kravice, on ima na sebi košuljicu, seže mu daleko izpod koljena; na glavi mu poderana domobranska kapa, koja mu pada preko ušiju i očiju, u ruci mu bič, platnena torbica, a u njoj kukuruzni kruh. (Leskovar, *Izabrana* 38)

He thought of his parents first. He never got to know them, he only heard stories. Now he felt strangely close to them, very close. A pasture on a hill appears before him. There are a few juniper shrubs and two smaller cows grazing; he is dressed in a shirt reaching below his knees; a torn military cap is slipping down over his ears and eyes; he is carrying a whip and a canvas bag with cornbread in it.

Here, the observation of the character's thoughts and feelings seems to be more external than internal, as if someone else has access to his mind, but then the narration takes the reader

in the past together with the protagonist through a detailed, immersive description. The change of the tense significantly impacts the vividness of the memories, and through that vividness the reader gains an understanding of the importance of those memories for the character. Considering the essential role of tenses in these short stories, it was key to understand their use and preserve them in the translations. That does not mean that it was always clear-cut; Leskovar uses a wealth of verbs in the present and the aorist tense. Since it is not rare for the third person form of both tenses to match, and considering the quick alternations between the tenses, in some instances it was challenging to judge whether the narration refers to the present or the past, as in this sentence: “A lahor se sanljivo *prenu*, oblačić zaplovi i ona se spusti k njemu” (Leskovar, *Sabrana* 469). Although one may guess that *prenu* is an aorist since the present tense would be *prene*, instances like that could still lead to second-guessing because of the other two verbs and the mixed tenses surrounding the sentence. However, if one takes into account that this particular sentence is describing a series of actions and that the past tense was used for the same purpose in the surrounding sentences, it becomes easier to recognise the answer. In this case, it was the past tense: “And the wind roused itself dreamily, the little cloud started drifting, and she descended to him.”

Another specific aspect of Leskovar’s writing is his use of punctuation in achieving rhythm. Whilst his syntax does not stand out much from the norm, the rhythm creates interest and uniqueness, serving as a tool for conveying moods and dynamics:

Nije mogao da iščeka podne, pol sata prije pusti djecu kući; ipak pričeka dok je i posljednje dijete izišlo. Tada pođe preko hodnika u sobu; iz kuhinje čuju se glasići njegove djece; uzme stari kaput komu je već dva puta izmijenjena baršunasta ogrlica, obuče ga, natuče šešir na glavu, pa tiho iziđe. (Leskovar, *Izabrana* 38)

He could not wait for noon; he dismissed the class half an hour early; still, he waited until the last child was out of the building. Then he followed the hallway to the room; his children’s voices were coming from the kitchen; he took his old coat whose velvet collar was already changed twice, put it on, put on a hat, and quietly exited.

In the above passage, Leskovar opts for longer sentences separated into short clauses by commas and semi-colons. In that way, he significantly adds to the atmosphere of uncertainty and tumult that is already indicated through the content of the narrative. For that reason, I have aimed at transposing the original punctuation as much as the English language allowed.

To add to the topic of syntax, Leskovar frequently starts sentences with conjunctions, especially with *i* or *a*. While that is not typical of ordinary Croatian language, in Leskovar's work it creates a feeling of immediacy and interconnectedness of the events. The following sentences taken from "The Queen of Earth" will demonstrate the stated: "A lahor se sanjivo prenu, oblačić zaplovi i ona se spusti k njemu. / A sada već dogarahu zelena svjetla na gondoli, gasi se jedno za drugim (...)" (Leskovar, *Sabrana* 469). In my English translation of the quoted sentences, I have kept both conjunctions because I thought their placement was natural enough not to obstruct the flow of the text, but also strange enough to draw attention to the text and the author. The translation is as follows: "And the wind roused itself dreamily, the little cloud started drifting, and she descended to him." / And now the green gondola lights were burning out steadily, one by one. "There were, however, some instances where I excluded them. It was mainly because "and" has a different, sturdier diction than short Croatian conjunctions *i* or *a*. Thus, If I felt that the conjunction "and" noticeably affected the rhythm of the sentence or a paragraph, I left it out.

The lexis of the source texts does not deviate much from the contemporary Croatian language. The language is often expressive and plenty of epithets and other figures of speech are used to express the sensations and the atmospheres. The best examples of this are probably found in "The Queen of Earth", which is brimming with poetic devices. Just to provide one such passage:

Ušute. Samo im duše šapću čarobnu pjesmu nikad neizgovorenih riječi, nikad neslušana sklada. Pogledima se spajaju, srčuci s očiju slasti, što se kriju u neviđenim dubinama duše. I na te oči navali najednom san zaboravi. Njena ustanca stala mirisati mirisom cvijetaka, a on se primače, da srkne s njih meda. I ona blaženim osmijehom zaklopi oči i sve se na to pretvori u san. S njena tijela runi se nebeska maglica, kaplju zvijezde, a vrana se kosa zacrnila na bijelim grudima. Sve zamirisa. (Leskovar, *Sabrana* 471)

Silence. Only their souls are whispering the magical song of the words never spoken, of the harmony never heard. They are connecting through their eyes, feeding on the sweetness hidden in the depths of their souls. And the dream of oblivion comes over those eyes. Her thin lips become enrobed in a flowery scent, and he draws closer to taste their honey. She closes her eyes with a blissful smile and everything suddenly turns into a dream. Her body's heavenly mist furls, the stars are dripping, and the ebony hair is black against her white breasts. The scent is pervading.

This passage contains metaphors such as “feeding on the sweetness hidden in the depths of their souls” and “the dream of oblivion”, it contrasts the sound of a song with complete silence, the black hair with the white skin, and it presents us with various kinds of poetic imagery. Paragraphs like this are not only a joy to translate, but they can also inspire creativity and various interpretations. More such instances will be discussed below in relation to “The Queen of Earth.”

Every literary translation project confronts very specific challenges, and the stories I have chosen are no exception. Several examples from each story will illustrate well this difficulty. In “Catastrophe,” for instance, there were some problems with interpretation. Specifically, I could not really understand what was meant by the following paragraph:

Sjeti se najprije župnog dvora; on bijaše najbolji đak i župnik ga uze k sebi; po tom četaka, čizama, ministracija, dvorenja kod stola; -- zatim isto to u Zagrebu, sada kod ovoga, sad kod onoga kanonika. (Leskovar, *Izabrana* 39)

First, he remembered the parish clergy house; he was the best student and the parish priest took him under his wing; then the brushes, the boots, serving at the altar, waiting at the tables; then the same thing in Zagreb, one day under one canon, another day under a different one.

Četaka and *čizama* seemed out of context, but as every element in a literary text has its purpose, I had to think more broadly about the possible meanings of those words. Since there was no other feasible meaning for *četaka* and *čizama* other than, literally, “brushes” and “boots”, I went for the literal solution as it led me to believe that it likely referred to him having to do the basic cleaning for the clergy, which might have included shoe-shining. I also had to adjust my translation upon reviewing it, which I did a couple of times. For example, when Ljubić is recalling the words of his friend Nikola, Nikola describes a remote place with the words *u onom dalekom kutu*. At first, I opted for “in that far-flung corner”. Upon reviewing it, I realised that it would be unnatural for that character to use it in a casual conversation. My second choice was “backwoods” because it was simpler and clear. However, after some time it occurred to me that *u onom dalekom kutu* is not the most casual expression either, so I finally settled for “in that faraway corner”, which I find to be a middle ground.

In the same short story, especially in the passages that feature the protagonist's children, Leskovar uses diminutives for body parts quite a few times to express endearment: *okice*, *ručice*, *prstići*. In English, there are no straightforward expressions that would cover the

meaning. I have decided to add the adjective “little” before the noun to modify the meaning, as “little” carries a connotation of tenderness, while “small”, for example, would put the focus on the physical size.

When it comes to syntax, I have almost always followed the source text, as it influences the rhythm and the emphasis, which in turn help produce a particular atmosphere. For instance:

Djeca opažaju: njemu nije dobro; nešto se približava, ona toga zapravo ne shvaćaju, ali nekakva neizvjesna slutnja ih podilazi pa mramorkom šute i pogledaju na nj. (Leskovar, *Izabrana* 37)

The children have noticed: he is not well; something is happening, they cannot quite understand what; a sense of foreboding seizes them and they sit in absolute silence, glancing occasionally at him.

Even though a full stop could be put in place of a semicolon, the semicolon adds to the sense of urgency and uncertainty that is depicted.

Finally, at the end of the story, the protagonist’s wife expresses sorrow at her husband’s death by exclaiming *j-o-j*. I tried to find a proper solution that would be strong, but still simple and ordinary enough to work as a replacement. “O-h” would perhaps be too inexplicit, so I decided on “o-h no” as it is short enough, but more precise in capturing the desperation.

In “A Story of Love” I was a bit indecisive about whether to choose the preposition “about” or “of” for the title. While “about” is a straightforward literal translation of “Priča o ljubavi,” “of” rolls off the tongue easier and creates a similar effect to that of the source. However, as “of” is usually used to indicate possession, I consulted the Oxford dictionary (Hornby, “story”) to see if it would suit the context. The dictionary entry for “story” states that the word can be followed by “about” as well as “of”, so I opted for the latter.

The thing that one may notice when looking at the text on the page are the two asterisks following the letter V in what seems to be a name of a place. I have consulted several editions of Leskovar’s works, and all of them contain the asterisks instead of the full name, which is why I have kept it in. This was a common strategy in works of narrative fiction not just in Croatia but in the other language traditions too.

“Priča o ljubavi” contains a few words of the Kajkavian dialect: *oni, naj dostoju, dragi amice, kaj su rekli*. I have considered several possibilities before deciding on the translation strategy. For example, one possibility was to translate the expressions into modern English.

However, that would homogenise the text, and the dialect would not stand out at all. I wanted to produce a translation that would have a similar effect on the target readers as it has on the source readers. Since the dialect stands out even to the source readers, I needed to find another way to fulfil that intention. That other solution was to translate the words into a certain dialect of English. While this is certainly a solid option when translating texts written in dialect, I think that choosing a target dialect for such a small number of words would bring up more questions than it would answer. Since those few words would be the only dialectal elements, it would seem unrelated to the rest of the text. Finally, I have decided to leave the original in the text and provide a translation into standard English in the footnotes. In that way, the Kajkavian dialect is represented, while the meaning is made understandable by the footnote.

Leskovar likes to blend direct speech, or, to be more precise, the exact thoughts of the characters, into his principal, third-person narration. Sometimes it is done without any punctuation, and the writer deftly moves the reader directly into the character's mind. Usually, it does not present a translational issue as there is no explicit mention of a personal pronoun. At other times, however, the translator can be left wondering whether to use inverted commas, remove them altogether, or change the pronouns to preserve clarity; otherwise, the sentence might appear as simply a lapse in translation. This was the case in the following instance: "A u duši njegovoj nato nestane onoga nepoimanja i on je upita: "zar je mislila, da je on otišao tamo k onoj... Ona kimnu glavom" (Leskovar, *Izabrana* 111), which I translated to "That dispelled his soul's disbelief and he asked her if she thought he had gone to that woman... She nodded her head"

One can observe from the example that I have decided to preserve only the markings of indirect speech, shifting the tense and using third-person pronouns. In the Croatian example, it is sort of a combination of direct speech, indicated by the inverted commas and the particle *zar* (rather than *li*), and indirect speech, indicated by the auxiliary verb "to be" in its third-person short form, *je*. My worry was that it would probably seem like an unintentional mistake to the target reader if I had translated faithfully, which is why I have decided to make the adjustment that, in my opinion, does not change anything of consequence, despite generally trying to follow the original style.

Finally, "The Queen of Earth" was the shortest of the stories, yet it was the most poetic and posed various dilemmas regarding grammar and meaning. One significant challenge were the tenses. More than in other stories, there is a mix of the past, the present, and the future, sometimes in the same sentence or paragraph. If the story is divided by asterisks into three parts,

then one can observe in the source text how the tenses fluctuate throughout each one. To briefly illustrate, I will comment on the end of the first part:

Ona stajaše pred njim.

-Umirem za tobom – govore njegove oči utapajući se u njezinim zjenicama.

-Dragi – šapuće sanjivi smiješak na njenim usnama. (Leskovar, *Sabrana* 468)

She was standing before him.

- I'm dying for you – his eyes are saying, drowning in her irises.

- My dear – whispers the dreamy smile on her lips.

It ends with the present tense, although it was preceded by both the aorist past tense and the present tense. The present works like a close-up shot, it pulls the reader into the moment. However, changes like this are sometimes very short-lasting, and when translated into English, they seem too random and bring attention to the grammar rather than the moment. For this particular instance, though, I have chosen to start with the past and put the middle part and the end to the present. The argument for the present in the second part is that it is described like a dream, it is an illusion, and the change of tense stimulates that intense immersion in the narrative that is such an important part of Leskovar's design.

Leskovar uses a wealth of literary devices such as epithets, similes, personifications, and metaphors. To give an example:

Dani pred njegovim očima skretahu u tamna konačišta; sanene noći dizahu se sa dremovnih dušeka, a on putovaše i putovaše. (Leskovar, *Sabrana* 468)

Before his eyes, days were turning into dimly lit inns; drowsy nights were leaving the mattresses drenched with sleep; he still travelled further and further away.

Besides beautiful metaphors, this excerpt offers a good point for discussion. I wondered whether the days in the first part of the sentence are personified as entities that go into dark inns, symbolizing his own day ending in those inns, or whether the metaphor is actually centred on the word *skretahu* and one could use the word “transform” to produce the same effect. I suppose that the point in the end is the same, but the question is nevertheless worth asking. I have chosen the phrasal verb “turn into” by which I think I covered both possibilities.

Here is another instance: I translated “Ti si ljubav – uskliknu on. – Oh ljubavi! Daj da ispijam dušu tvoju sa zjenica očiju tvojih!” (Leskovar, *Sabrana* 470) as “You are love – he exclaims. – Oh, love! Let me drink from your soul through the apples of your eyes!” Had I translated it more literally, it would sound rather cannibalistic, for example, if *zjenica* was translated as “the pupils”. “Apples” are a well-known metaphor for the pupils in the English language; thus, I believe that the choice brings out the poetic style, while still remaining connotatively transparent.

10. Conclusion

The aim of this project was to produce a translation that could captivate target language readers' attention, regardless of their reading motivation. This process brought up questions of translation relevance, translation techniques, and the role of translation theory.

As an author whose work had an important role in leading the Croatian literary tradition towards modernism, Janko Leskovar definitely merits being included in the international canon of Croatian literature. That is not to say that his innovative prose style is the only, or even the primary, argument for new renditions of his work. Another important argument lies in the fact that Leskovar recorded many universal human challenges, insecurities, and weaknesses in his short stories and novels. Through the narrow focus on characters of feeble intellectuals, Leskovar not only explores the extremes to which various kinds of obsession can lead but does it with uttermost sympathy expressed through rhythm, form, symbolic elements, and a variety of literary techniques.

Approaching the translation process for such a piece of literature involves consideration of various factors related to language, culture, and translation skills. Among many theories that offer advice and commentary on translation, both regarding the process and the result, a translator must search for those that are most relevant to the work he or she is translating, as well as to his or her own principles built on their reading and translating experience as well as on their observation of the cultural environment(s). The idea of a good literary translation that I explored in this essay is that which searches for similarities between two languages in order to find space for the introduction of foreign elements or the preservation of those components of writing that are specific to a certain author or culture. A successful literary translation should read naturally, but it should not appear generic. On the path to achieving these goals, I have found valuable input in the works of Hans J. Vermeer, Katharina Reiss, Christiane Nord, and Peter Newmark. Vermeer and Reiss' theory of *skopos* inspired me to think outside the text itself and to consider the function of the translation in the target culture, which in turn helped me decide which elements of the source text I wanted to keep in the translation. Nord's distinction between documentary and instrumental translation grounded me in my decision to transpose those aspects that make a text special in such a way that they are still noticeable in their target form. Finally, Newmark's directions based on his four levels of translation served as guides in moments of indecision and during the reviewing process. The focused process of translating these three short stories has been a valuable learning experience. Some of the takeaways relate to the importance of having a vision for the final translation and the patience that is required in

the continuous assessment of the translation progress. Others are more connected to particular expressions or linguistic specificities. Upon reading the final versions of the translations, I find myself proud of the work that I have done, while simultaneously rethinking the solutions I rejected. Then I remember that any work is always available for new interpretations and I therefore hope that the choices I stand for will resonate with the readers.

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