

Arts Publications

Gospodar uspomena

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The background to all the stories is the historical fact that the Serbs had to leave their traditional homesteads and their ancient lands and flee to Serbia under pressure from the Albanians, threatened by death and torture and forced to abandon their farms, cattle, houses, and belongings. In their memories, Stojanovic's protagonists imagine that if they had not been compelled to go "up" to Serbia, they would now be more satisfied and happy, that their lives and those of their families would be more fulfilled. The hero of the title story, a paterfamilias, tries each day to "see" his former home and native region on a torn old map. He is haunted by recollections from his childhood and youth, and he travels home at every opportunity to see what changes have occurred there, carefully introducing them in his map.

The protagonist of "The Mason of the Down Vilayet," a skilled bricklayer, is entirely unsatisfied with his present work. The block of buildings on which he has been working for years is going nowhere. More and more, he thinks about his old country, "down" where entire monasteries used to be completed in a few years. He is convinced that a sacrifice must be made before construction on a house can be started, and so he offers up himself, jumping from the top of the tallest unfinished building; that same year the work on the block of houses is completed.

Even the children find it hard to adjust to their new surroundings. The narrator's younger brother in the story "Sweet Cherry Tree at Rakos" cannot forget his home, his tomcat, and the cherry tree in the yard; he withers away longing for them. One night the narrator sees him in the old yard climbing his beloved cherry tree and disappearing in its branches and foliage. The morning brings the sad news that his brother has been found dead, fallen from the tree.

The longest of the eight stories is "Pejca Pejcinovic." After twenty years of self-exile the protagonist comes back to his native village to avenge his late girlfriend. A mason by profession, he had had to move about frequently in order to earn a living; his beloved, Ruza (Rose), the most beautiful girl in the village, waited for him, rejecting several proposals from a rich suitor. Her death remains an unsolved case of murder, but Pejca Pejcinovic returns and deals a fatal blow to her former suitor.

Longing supported by ideal images of the past haunts a civil engineer after the failure of his unhappy marriage in "No Repose." He goes into rapture over the memories of his village, its green fields, clear wells, pure air, healthy and modest country girls; he hopes finally to find happiness in a second marriage with one of his former female acquaintances, all of whom he remembers as beautiful, dutiful, and shy. His illusions of village life are drastically shattered once he returns to his home district: one of the

remembered girls has had a child out of wedlock and now lives a free life; the other has already been married twice.

One reviewer of this collection wrote: "In Stojanovic's stories the hero's path leads downward, toward death and nonexistence, and therefore it is logical that each of his heroes wants to show once again, through the tale, what he had and what he has lost. . . . The resulting picture is one of a world which has shifted into memories." The author's deep love for southern Serbia, particularly Kosovo and Metohija (he himself lives and works there as a manager of the National Theater), his grief at seeing so many Serbs forced to abandon everything they own in order to save themselves and their families from possible destruction, his awareness of the fact that the once fully Serbian villages are at present inhabited only by Albanians, that Orthodox churches have been ruined or turned into mosques, that Serbian cemeteries have been dug up and tombstones broken - all this subtly permeates every single page of Stojanovic's interesting book of stories.

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