

Kraj sveta

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Radosav Stojanovic's collection of fourteen short stories *Kraj sveta* (The End of the World) is like a huge canvas on which the southern part of Yugoslavia, Kosovo and Metohija, is painted with bright, warm colors. This canvas is contemplated through the eyes of a schoolboy, Ivan, the main narrator. Predominant throughout the tales are the author's own family and neighbors, as well as petty characters, musicians, artisans, and references to the vast frontier, to which men throughout history have journeyed in search of security and a livelihood while leaving their wives and children behind to tend their homesteads.

With a warm heart and a keen eye, Ivan observes things and events around him, all of which are imbued with folkloric and mythological elements. The most striking figure is Ca Dragomir (Uncle Dragomir), who appears in the story of the same name and in several others as well. This natural, joyful, life-loving, indulgent man is as wild as the stallions he buys, tames, rides, and eventually sells. He spends a great deal of time looking for horses and womanizing, and with every return to his homestead there is revelry, music, drinking, and dancing. Throughout, his loving and faithful wife Petrija awaits him at home, weaving beautiful carpets which become a source of pride for the entire village and the cause for celebration twice a year for both adults and children alike when she displays her handicrafts in the open air. Once she learns that her husband is a womanizer, she abandons him, only to return to him again, resume her marital life, and bear children before finally leaving him for good following his undeserved imprisonment. Released after serving three years of his ten-year sentence, Dragomir remains his old self; he returns to the village, to his abandoned house, empty stables, and untilled lands, finding solace in music while enjoying the famous folk song "The Lost Lamb" (which serves as the title for one of the stories).

Another interesting character is the young female protagonist Djurdjica in the short story of the same name. Into the patriarchal, old-fashioned milieu of a southern village, with its well-established manners and standards of conduct, comes a strange young man, a painter. He amuses and surprises others with his peculiar views, truthful speech, unusual dress, and general behavior. He falls in love with Djurdjica, a development which leads to his eventual death.

Stojanovic creates many other expressive characters, such as the grandfather who prepares himself years in advance for his impending "final day," his own death, by making his coffin, rehearsing his funeral, and attending to other such morbid details; one day, however, he goes into a forest and never returns, thereby obviating all plans for the burial he had envisioned. Another character is a tinsmith who visits the village once a year, going from house to house repairing pots and other utensils. There is also an accordion player, Ivan's uncle, a womanizer and a reveler. Most important of all, however, are the children, the young students who walk in all kinds of weather and distances up to twenty kilometers just

to go to school and who, while at play, become witnesses to the goings-on of the adult inhabitants of the village.

Radosav Stojanovic (b. 1950) is a journalist, short-story writer, poet, and essayist. His verse collections include *Inoslovlje* (1979), *Djavalja skola* (Devil's School; 1988), and *Povratak na kolac* (Return to the Stake; 1990); among his short-story collections are *Aritonova smrt* (The Death of Ariton; 1984), *Mrtva straža* (Guarding with One's Life; 1988), and *Apokrifne price* (Apocryphal Stories; 1988). His most recent publications are the verse collection *Sidro* (The Anchor; 1992) and a volume of journalistic texts entitled *Ziveti s genocidom: Hronika kosovskog bescasca 1981-1989* (To Live with Genocide: A Chronicle of Kosovo's Dishonor 1981-1989). Stojanovic's work has been anthologized and is much acclaimed. He lives and works in Prishtina.

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